

A Study on Ethical Consideration in International Marketing Communication of Decathlon

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Abstract: *This research delves into the ethical challenges in international marketing, using Decathlon as a case study to explore how a global brand can balance business success with doing what's right. As Decathlon expands across diverse markets, it faces the complex task of ensuring its marketing strategies align with ethical values, such as transparency, cultural respect, and sustainability. The study examines how Decathlon tailors its marketing to local cultures, embraces sustainability in its practices, and relies on minimal traditional advertising—opting instead for genuine customer engagement. By focusing on social media and inclusivity, particularly in reaching diverse consumer segments, Decathlon demonstrates that ethical marketing can be both effective and responsible. Drawing insights from Decathlon's managers and employees, the research provides a closer look at how multinational companies can meet ethical standards while navigating global markets. The findings offer valuable recommendations for businesses striving to create strong, ethical, and culturally sensitive global brands.*

Keywords: Ethical marketing, Decathlon, transparency, International Business, Marketing Strategy, Marketing Challenges

I. INTRODUCTION

The world is becoming a global economy, and companies that sell products and services in different countries often face many challenges when dealing with people from different cultures, laws, and customs. One of the most important issues when it comes to the international business is ensuring that the business is ethical and respects these differences. The study "Ethical decision making in international business and international business communication" is significant in that it explores how Decathlon, a major player in the international goods market, leads international trade. As Decathlon expands its operations in different sectors, it faces different cultural, legal and social expectations. This study aims to uncover how the company addresses these issues to ensure that its business practices are not only efficient but also ethical and fair trade.

As businesses operate around the world, they face unique challenges such as different laws and cultures. This study will provide a comprehensive analysis of Decathlon's international business strategies that combine ethics and will provide important lessons to other multinational companies on balancing business success with ethical responsibility. strategic planning. Business loyalty is important for building and maintaining customer trust, which directly affects business loyalty and overall company reputation.

This study will analyze how Decathlon's business is doing in different regions, revealing best practices that can improve customer relationships and enhance the department's international image for the company. Understanding these practices can help Decathlon better adapt its marketing to different target audiences while maintaining its core values.

Understanding consumers' understanding of Decathlon's code of ethics can provide the company with recommendations to improve business communication and strengthen its brand. Understanding how much customers value the business can help Decathlon adjust its marketing plans to meet these expectations and better connect with its customers. contributing to education.

Hypothesis of the study

A hypothesis is a statement or assumption that can be tested through research or experimentation. It is a prediction about the relationship between two or more variables, which researchers aim to either prove or disprove.

The **null hypothesis** is a statement that there is no effect, no difference, or no relationship between variables. It serves as the default or baseline assumption that the researcher aims to test against. The null hypothesis is typically what you try to disprove or reject in your study.

The **alternative hypothesis** is a statement that there is an effect, a difference, or a relationship between variables. It represents the outcome that the researcher expects or wants to prove.

Null Hypothesis H0: The internal organization of Decathlon generally view the company's global marketing strategies are not ethically responsible.

Alternative Hypothesis H1: The internal organization of Decathlon generally view the company's global marketing strategies as ethically responsible

II. METHODS AND SOURCE OF DATA COLLECTION

Sources of Data Collection in Ethical Marketing Research

Primary Data Collection

Primary data collection involves gathering new, original data directly from respondents through various methods. For this study, primary data will be collected through the following methods:

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with Decathlon managers and employees. The interview questions will be aligned with the study's objectives, focusing on understanding the ethical perspectives in global marketing, identifying ethical challenges in advertising, examining online marketing practices, evaluating the impact on the company's global reputation, exploring how Decathlon promotes sustainability, and understanding the internal perceptions of ethical marketing practices.

Questionnaires

A survey will be distributed to Decathlon managers and employees using online platforms. The questionnaire will include a combination of close-ended and open-ended questions to capture a broad range of opinions on Decathlon's ethical marketing practices. This method allows for the collection of both quantitative data and qualitative insights, providing a more comprehensive view of the respondents' perspectives.

Secondary Data Collection

Secondary data collection involves the analysis of existing data that has been collected by other researchers or organizations. For this study, secondary data will be collected through the following methods:

Literature Review

A thorough review of academic journals, books, and credible online sources will be conducted to understand existing theories and practices related to ethical marketing in international contexts. The literature review will help frame the research within the broader academic context, providing a foundation for the study's hypotheses and research questions. Company Reports: Decathlon's annual reports, sustainability reports, and other relevant documents will be analyzed to gain insights into the company's marketing strategies and ethical practices. These reports provide valuable data on how Decathlon positions itself in the market and the ethical considerations it takes into account in its global operations.

Tools and Techniques for Data Analysis

Data analysis refers to the techniques and methods used to analyze the data collected during the study. The following tools and techniques will be employed:

Quantitative Data Analysis

The survey data will be analyzed using statistical methods such as frequency distribution, cross-tabulation, and correlation analysis. Software tools **Excel** will be used to process the data and identify trends and patterns in the perceptions of Decathlon's management and employees regarding ethical marketing. This analysis will help in understanding the extent to which ethical considerations influence the company's marketing strategies and decision-making processes.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data from the interviews will be analyzed. This method allows for a deeper understanding of the respondents' experiences and perceptions, providing rich insights that complement the quantitative findings. It will be showcased in findings section.

Ethical Considerations in Conducting the Research

Throughout this study, the highest ethical standards will be upheld to ensure the integrity and credibility of the research. All participants will be fully informed about the nature and purpose of the research and will provide their consent willingly. The confidentiality and privacy of all respondents will be maintained, with all personal information being anonymized and securely stored. The data collected will be used exclusively for this study, and all findings will be reported truthfully and without any distortion or bias.

Limitations of the Study and Potential Challenges

Like any research, this study is subject to certain limitations and challenges. One potential limitation is the difficulty in accessing detailed internal data from Decathlon, which could limit the depth of understanding of the company's internal practices. Additionally, the reliance on convenience sampling for selecting participants may introduce some bias, as the sample may not fully represent the entire population of Decathlon's management and employees. These limitations will be acknowledged in the study, and efforts will be made to address them in the analysis and interpretation of the findings.

III. FINDINGS

Decathlon has seen significant success, earning INR 2936 crore in FY2022, outpacing competitors like Adidas, Nike, and Reebok, which earned INR 1551 crore, INR 814 crore, and INR 417 crore respectively. Remarkably, Decathlon achieved this without high-budget marketing or relying on world influencers, instead using simple yet effective marketing principles. Its growth in India has been substantial, operating 105 stores across 20 states, with plans to expand further, aiming for over 100 stores nationwide. The average annual sales per store were around INR 28 crore in FY22. Decathlon's focus on sustainability is evident, with the goal of producing 85% of its products locally by 2026. In line with experiential marketing, Decathlon offers open spaces outside stores for customer engagement, such as parking and practice sessions. This interactive approach enhances the customer experience and fosters brand loyalty.

Cultural sensitivity is central to Decathlon's marketing strategies, as seen in its use of local models, taglines, and languages to cater to the preferences of diverse markets. However, Decathlon has faced ethical challenges, such as stereotyping in international advertising. For example, running ads often featured people from Africa, Sudan, and Jamaica, influenced by Usain Bolt's fame as the fastest man on earth, while cycling ads predominantly featured Europeans due to the sport's popularity there. To address such issues, Decathlon primarily employs localized marketing strategies, favored by 66% of respondents, as opposed to applying global ethical guidelines (14%) or collaborating with local ethical organizations (12%). When faced with ethical dilemmas in international advertising, 72% of respondents believe adapting campaigns to local standards is the most effective method.

Decathlon also faces ethical challenges in developing countries, with economic disparities being the most pressing, cited by 48% of respondents. Labor practices (24%), environmental impact (16%), and health and safety standards (12%) are other significant concerns. To maintain transparency in its supply chain, Decathlon relies on open reports, direct communication, and third-party audits, supported by 82% of respondents. To ensure marketing messages are not

misleading, Decathlon collaborates with legal teams, a strategy favored by 64% of respondents, more effective than fact-checking content (20%) or using clear language (10%).

Transparency is a key aspect of Decathlon's ethical commitments, with 62% of respondents citing transparency reports as the most effective communication method. Social media campaigns (18%) and in-store promotions (14%) are also utilized. Regular workshops and training sessions are the primary methods for training marketing teams to handle ethical issues. Ethical marketing is central to Decathlon's overall business strategy, according to 52% of respondents, with another 30% viewing it as important but secondary.

To address ethical differences between its global headquarters and local markets, Decathlon adapts global guidelines to local contexts, a strategy supported by 40% of respondents. Managing customer concerns about sustainability is primarily done through a dedicated sustainability website section, preferred by 78% of respondents. Local cultural sensitivities are also emphasized, with 66% of respondents considering them extremely important in marketing campaigns. Decathlon continues to face ethical challenges such as economic disparities, labor practices, and environmental concerns in developing markets but strives to overcome these through transparency and a strong environmental commitment, including sustainable practices like using disposable hangers in stores.

Localized marketing is at the heart of Decathlon's strategy, ensuring cultural sensitivity and relevance in diverse markets. It also employs experiential marketing and word-of-mouth to build authentic relationships with customers, aligning with its ethical marketing principles of reducing manipulative tactics. This approach, combined with its emphasis on environmental sustainability, underscores Decathlon's dedication to ethical business practices in the global market.

IV. RESEARCH DISCUSSION

In this study, we explored the ethical considerations in international marketing and communication using Decathlon as a case study, highlighting how the brand's approach integrates key principles such as transparency, cultural sensitivity, sustainability, and inclusivity. Decathlon's reliance on experience marketing and word-of-mouth over traditional advertising aligns with ethical marketing by fostering authentic connections with customers and avoiding manipulative tactics. This approach builds trust but may limit the brand's visibility in highly competitive markets where traditional advertising is more dominant. Additionally, Decathlon's commitment to environmental sustainability, reflected in its use of eco-friendly materials and local sourcing, strengthens its ethical standing and resonates with environmentally conscious consumers. However, scaling these practices across different markets with varying environmental regulations remains a challenge.

The company's localized marketing strategies demonstrate its respect for cultural diversity, adapting campaigns to local preferences, which has contributed to its success in regions like China and India. Despite this, managing these localized efforts while maintaining consistent global messaging is a complex task. Inclusivity has also become a central theme in Decathlon's marketing, with the brand successfully targeting diverse consumer segments, especially women and young families, through platforms like RED (Xiaohongshu). While this expands their customer base, Decathlon faces the challenge of balancing inclusivity with avoiding cultural stereotypes in different regions.

Furthermore, Decathlon's minimal advertising spend and focus on transparent pricing and product quality offer an ethical alternative to brands that heavily invest in aggressive marketing strategies. This reinforces their commitment to honesty but raises concerns about whether they can effectively compete in markets dominated by competitors with larger advertising budgets. Overall, the study finds that Decathlon's ethical marketing strategies have strengthened its global presence and brand loyalty, though ongoing challenges in balancing ethics with competitive growth persist. Future research could explore how Decathlon's ethical approach continues to evolve in response to new markets and rising consumer demands for corporate responsibility.

V. SUGGESTIONS

The research suggests that Decathlon can enhance its supply chain transparency by providing detailed information about the origins of materials and conducting regular audits to ensure that suppliers meet ethical standards. Sharing the results of these audits can help build consumer trust. Additionally, expanding eco-friendly product ranges and adopting

sustainable packaging are recommended to strengthen Decathlon's commitment to sustainability. Clear communication of the environmental benefits of these initiatives will further bolster consumer confidence.

In global marketing, respecting cultural differences is key. The study advises Decathlon to adapt marketing strategies to local norms and provide cultural competence training for employees. This approach will help foster stronger relationships with diverse markets. Improving customer engagement is also emphasized, with recommendations to educate customers about ethical practices through various channels and implement feedback mechanisms to drive continuous improvement.

The research advocates for Decathlon to invest in community involvement by supporting local initiatives and partnering with non-profits, enhancing the brand image while contributing to social causes. It also suggests adopting transparent and honest marketing strategies, avoiding misleading claims. Collaborating with ethical influencers can further boost the brand's credibility.

Promoting inclusivity and diversity in marketing campaigns and leadership is also highlighted as a critical strategy to connect with a global audience and create a more inclusive brand. Strengthening the company's internal ethical culture is encouraged through ongoing training and establishing an ethics committee to oversee concerns.

To improve digital transparency, Decathlon is advised to share more information about its ethical practices and develop interactive tools for customers to explore product origins and environmental impacts. Measuring and reporting ethical performance, with the development of metrics to track progress and publishing annual reports on achievements, will help ensure accountability. Clearer communication around ethical practices and sustainability efforts is also recommended to enhance transparency and trust.

Improving product traceability will make it easier for customers to understand the ethical impact of their purchases. Strengthening partnerships with ethical suppliers and ensuring they meet high standards is essential, as is the development of innovative, eco-friendly products to lead in sustainability. Regularly reviewing and updating ethical marketing strategies based on consumer feedback and industry trends will help Decathlon maintain relevance.

Community-focused programs that align with brand values and social responsibility goals should be implemented to increase Decathlon's social impact. Celebrating success stories of ethical practices and sustainability achievements will reinforce the brand's ethical positioning and inspire further progress.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study aimed to explore the ethical considerations in international marketing, with a specific focus on Decathlon. By examining various sources and case studies, including academic papers and industry articles, we gained valuable insights into how ethical practices influence marketing strategies in a global context.

Ethics in international marketing is crucial as companies navigate diverse cultural and legal landscapes. The research highlighted several key areas where ethical considerations play a significant role. For instance, the paper by Carrigan, Marinova, and Szmigin emphasized the importance of integrating ethics into marketing strategies to address the challenges multinational companies face. These challenges often stem from varying cultural norms and legal requirements, which can impact how ethical issues are perceived and handled across different markets.

Decathlon, a leading global sports retailer, was used as a case study to illustrate how a company can successfully integrate ethical practices into its marketing strategy. According to Bajj and Karthikeyan, Decathlon's holistic marketing approach not only focuses on delivering high-quality products and services but also emphasizes building strong, ethical relationships with customers. This approach includes maintaining transparency, offering fair prices, and ensuring excellent customer service. Decathlon's strategy shows that ethical marketing can lead to lasting customer loyalty and a strong brand reputation.

The paper by Quester and Simpson revealed that cultural differences significantly influence how managers view ethical issues in international marketing. This means that what is considered ethical in one country may not be viewed the same way in another. For global companies like Decathlon, understanding and respecting these cultural differences is essential to avoid ethical pitfalls and build trust with customers worldwide.

The study also highlighted how Decathlon's marketing mix—its product offerings, pricing strategy, distribution channels, and promotional activities—reflects a commitment to ethical practices. The company's focus on providing a wide range of products at competitive prices, coupled with effective promotional strategies, demonstrates how ethical

considerations are woven into every aspect of its marketing efforts. This alignment between ethical values and marketing strategies helps Decathlon maintain a positive image and foster strong customer relationships.

The video analysis of Decathlon's success in India showed how the company's ethical and honest strategies contribute to its competitive edge over other global brands like Nike and Adidas. By prioritizing customer satisfaction and maintaining a sense of ownership, Decathlon has managed to stand out in a highly competitive market.

The research supports Alternative Hypothesis H1= The internal organization of Decathlon generally views the company's global marketing strategies as ethically responsible. This is evidenced by the company's sustained focus on transparency, fair pricing, cultural respect, and commitment to customer satisfaction. The integration of ethical practices into Decathlon's marketing strategies has contributed to its strong brand reputation and lasting customer loyalty, both of which align with the hypothesis that the company's internal organization perceives its marketing strategies as being ethically responsible.

Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of ethical considerations in international marketing. Companies that prioritize ethical practices are better positioned to navigate the complexities of global markets, build trust with customers, and achieve long-term success. Decathlon's case illustrates that integrating ethics into marketing strategies not only enhances brand reputation but also fosters customer loyalty. As businesses continue to operate in diverse and dynamic environments, adopting ethical practices will remain a key factor in driving sustainable growth and maintaining a competitive advantage.

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