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Impact of culture on marketing of health services – Elekta in Brazil

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A B S T R A C T

We examine how culture influences the international marketing of health services. This is done by analyzing how culture affects trust, networks and standardization/adaptation and how trust develops and operates in relation to culture, networks and standardization and adaptation. Using qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews and researcher observations, we find that the cultural dimensions of power distance, individualism/collectivism and uncertainty avoidance have an impact on trust, network development and standardization/adaptation. This finding helps in deciding what parts of the service to standardize and what to adapt for successful services marketing. We conceptualize three interrelated levels of trust comprising country-, company- and individual trust. This multilevel trust offers an important understanding of how to manage cultural complexity in the international marketing of services. The theoretical model developed based on cultural dimensions can be useful when marketing services in other countries.

1. Introduction

This paper deals with the international marketing process relating to a complex health service that takes place in a different culture than the service-providing country. Researchers have noted that the marketing of services is complex when the market is far away from the home country (Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2006). In international marketing, managers must deal with the local culture, and in doing so experience problems in making the services visible to customers. Hofstede (1991) identifies cultural dimensions based on cultural differences and considers the importance of cultural understanding critical for engaging in international business. Czinkota and Ronkainen (2007) claim, however, that the world is becoming homogenous, with a limited number of products with universal brand recognition, requiring minimal product knowledge for use. We argue that most products and services are indeed not universal, making cultural dimensions a central issue in international marketing.

Culture is particularly important when deciding how services are to be presented to the local market. Chung (2005) suggests that when formulating marketing strategies for a new foreign host market companies can rely on strategies that they have used in their home market or those that they have employed in other foreign host markets. Researchers have debated the issue of

standardization/adaptation in the introduction of products to the international market (Lages, Abrantes, & Lages, 2008). Roper (2005) finds that literature on adaptation and standardization of the international marketing mix focuses on two dimensions: cultural diversity versus the convergence of markets and economies of scale in marketing, research and development, and production. We therefore argue that it is not possible to transfer the entire concept, but rather that certain adjustments must be made to the offering when entering a new market.

Cultural complexity, service characteristics such as heterogeneity, intangibility, perishability and simultaneous production, and consumption (Zeithaml et al., 2006), and deciding on adaptation and standardization make a manager's task difficult in the international marketing of services. Hyder and Fregidou-Malama (2009) have examined how the impact of service characteristics can be significantly reduced and marketing strategies can be formulated by developing trust and networks in the local market. Håkansson and Snehota (2000) state that trust is built up over time in a social exchange process where the parties learn to trust each other. However, doing business in a new distant location requires cultural understanding and methods to overcome cultural differences for building trust and networks. The services literature has extensively discussed marketing strategies, standardization and adaptation in international marketing (Grönroos, 2000; Wong & Merrilees, 2009). Researchers like Rajshekhar, Javalgi, Cutler, and Young (2005) have studied national culture in relation to services marketing and Soares, Farhangmehr, and Shoham (2007) concentrated on Hofstede's cultural dimensions in

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international services marketing, but to our knowledge no study has taken an in-depth look at the impact of culture on international services marketing. The current study fills this gap by focusing on the impact of culture on the marketing process by integrating trust, networks, and standardization and adaptation.

Trust can furthermore be discussed at several levels, i.e. at the individual, company and country levels. Michaelis, Woisetschläger, Backhaus, and Ahlert (2008) state that country of origin (COO) affects the way customers evaluate a high-risk product/service. Magnusson, Westjohn, and Zdravkovic (2011) also find that country-related attributes and the perception of a brand's COO favorability can positively affect consumer brand attitudes. Thus the COO image helps to develop trust at the country level when persuading customers to buy foreign products and services. Interpersonal trust, on the other hand, is developed at the individual level. A central premise of relational exchange theory is that personal relations generate trust and discourage opportunistic behavior between firms (Zaheer, McEvily, & Perrone, 1998). From this perspective, interpersonal trust is related to interorganizational trust. According to MacDuffie (2011), organizations cannot *trust* each other; trust is formed between individuals. Although individual and organizational trust have been discussed together (Doney & Cannon, 1997; Fang, Palmatier, Scheer, & Li, 2008), country-level trust is studied in isolation. We argue that trust at all three levels is interrelated and therefore to understand the role of trust it must be looked at collectively. We fill this gap and also examine the relationship between the levels of trust with respect to culture, networks and development of an international services marketing strategy. To do this, two research questions are addressed:

- How does culture affect trust, networks and standardization/ adaptation in marketing health services?
- How does trust operate at the individual-, company- and country level, and how are these levels of trust interrelated with respect to culture, network, and standardization and adaptation?

In our study, we conduct a case study on Elekta, a Swedish company engaged in the area of cancer treatment. Elekta has subsidiaries in 24 countries (Elekta, 2013) and its stated mission is to enhance people's lives and improve the quality of patient care. In 2007, the company established a subsidiary in Brazil to market medical services and serve the neighboring countries. Health care is a complex service that involves a combination of technology, human elements and emotions, and customers require total solutions to address this service offering internationally (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). There are distinct cultural differences between Brazil and Sweden (Gesteland, 2005; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010), as well as significant cultural diversity within the country of Brazil itself (Crane & Rizowy, 2005). Fastoso and Whitelock (2011) observe that marketing research on Latin American issues is lacking and call for a focus on new ideas relevant to Latin America. We fill this empirical gap by focusing on Elekta's marketing process in the Brazilian context.

This research thus makes two theoretical contributions and one empirical contribution: (1) it explores the impact of culture on the international marketing of services, (2) it analyzes trust at three levels and shows how multilevel trust affects international services marketing, and (3) illustrates the importance of context in developing trust, networks and standardization/adaptation.

2. Theoretical background

International marketing of services has been the focus of research on globalization strategies (McLaughlin & Fitzsimmons, 1996), service quality (Agarwal, Malhotra, & Bolton, 2010;

Smith & Reynolds, 2001), culture (Fletcher & Fang, 2006; Ozdemir & Hewett, 2010) and adaptation/standardization (Wong & Merrilees, 2009). Service quality has been considered a vital criterion for evaluation of the services (Grönroos, 2000). Zeithaml et al. (2006) argue that quality cannot be measured directly, and marketers must convince the market that the services offered meet customer requirements. This means that, depending on the cultural context, customers have different needs regarding standardization and adaptation.

Earlier research on adaptation/standardization focused on advertising (Papavassiliou & Stathakopoulos, 1997), while recent works are of a quantitative nature and do not distinguish between service and manufacturing firms (Lages et al., 2008; Vrontis, Thrassou, & Lamprianou, 2009). There has long been debate about whether firms standardize or adapt their international marketing offerings, and researchers suggest a compromise is needed to succeed. In this regard, a contingency approach has emerged, positing that marketers should do whatever is appropriate for each market, combining both standardized and adapted elements (Singh, Kumar, & Baack, 2005). Schmid and Kotulla (2011) suggest that a balance between standardizing and adapting marketing strategies across different cultures is necessary.

Clark and Rajaratnam (1999) recognize the complexity of culture in international services marketing. Hyder and Fregidou-Malama (2009) claim that cultural adaptation combined with networks and trust are necessary to address the communication gap between service providers and customers. Cultural sensitivity enhances the development of relationship trust (Altinay, Brookes, Madanoglu, & Aktas, 2014; LaBahn & Harich, 1997). We therefore consider cultural adaptation important, and argue that culture has an overall impact on the marketing process.

Hofstede et al. (2010) argue that differences in national cultural dimensions affect people's preferences for certain types of relationships and networks. Cultural dissimilarities may lead to differences in a firm's aims, management, operation and strategy implementation (Rodríguez & Wilson, 2002). Liang, Runyan, and Fu (2011) suggest that cultures affect people's attitudes and their relationships. More specifically, Garcia-Sánchez, Rodriguez-Ariza, and Frias-Aceituno (2013) find that collectivist and feminist cultures focus on sustainable issues, ethics and good governance, while Ford (2002) states that the effects of cultural differences can be avoided by developing relationships with customers and employing local people to develop trust.

A firm can build networks and trust with its collaborating partners through relationships (Håkansson & Johanson, 1992). Gulati (1995) and Zaheer and Zaheer (2005) find a link between trust and networks, and Laing and Lian (2005) highlight the importance of trust in reducing risk and uncertainty embedded in professional services. To deal with relationships in different cultural contexts, the above researchers find trust-building essential. Jiang, Chua, Kotabe and Murray (2011) emphasize the role of trust by focusing on understanding cross-border intra- and interorganizational trust. Jiang, Henneberg and Naudé (2011) find that cultural differences at the national level can affect personal trust and the way firms do business. We therefore see a necessity to consider trust at different levels to take cultural impact into account in the adaptation and standardization of services when entering foreign markets.

3. Theoretical framework

Our theoretical framework for the development of services marketing strategy in relation to adaptation and standardization rests on culture, trust and networks. Standardization and adaptation interact with trust and networks to provide service quality and respond to local culture, needs and values (Singh et al., 2005).
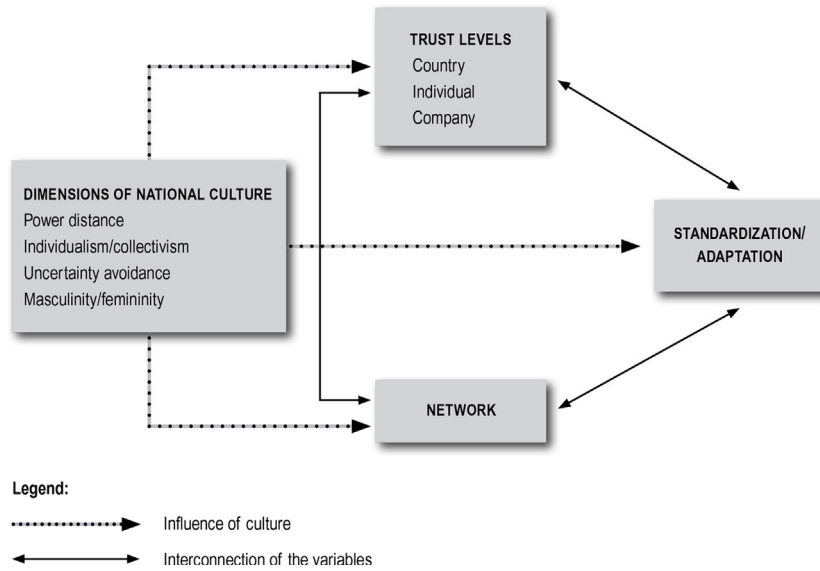
Fig. 1. The process of international services marketing.

The logic behind the framework is that building trust and networks, combined with standardization/adaptation, can help to resolve problems related to international services marketing. These constructs are discussed below (Fig. 1).

3.1. Culture and Hofstede's cultural dimensions

Hofstede (1991) defines culture as the collective programming of mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others. He discusses four cultural dimensions: power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, and uncertainty avoidance. *Power distance* focuses on relationships between people, where a small power distance indicates equality and a large power distance suggests authority and status in society. *Individualism* refers to independent values, and *collectivism* to societies where people are integrated and value informal relationships and loyalty to groups. *Masculinity* emphasizes earnings, advancement and assertiveness, and *femininity* signifies relations with others and nurturance. *Uncertainty avoidance* is linked to anxiety in unknown situations, where security is sought by developing rules and laws. Hofstede's national cultural dimensions have drawn the criticism of others. Fang (2003), for example, criticizes Hofstede's model as static and suggests that culture-related issues are dynamic, vibrant and intricate. Considering the wide acceptance of Hofstede's model (Hoffman, Mai, & Cristescu, 2013), however, we apply his cultural dimensions in our study.

Hofstede et al. (2010) assigned a score for cultural aspects of countries, showing one country's cultural distance relative to other countries. Index scores for Sweden and Brazil are shown in Table 1.

3.2. Trust

In our framework, trust is an important factor for the development of successful long-term business relationships

Table 1
Scores for dimensions of culture for Sweden and Brazil.

Cultural dimension	Sweden score	Brazil score
Power distance	31	69
Individualism/collectivism	71	38
Masculinity/femininity	5	49
Uncertainty avoidance	29	76

Source: Adapted from Hofstede et al. (2010).

(Aurier & N'Goala, 2010; Ford, 2004; Madhok, 2006). Sabel (1993) defines trust as the confidence between partners in a relationship that they will not exploit the other's weaknesses, and Parkhe (1998) maintains that the greater the uncertainty surrounding future events, the greater the trust required. The need for trust only arises in a risky situation (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Perlmutter (1969) argues that it is difficult to build trust between people of different nationalities. Both risk and cultural differences are likely to make a firm's work of marketing services across national boundaries even more difficult. Understanding trust at the country, company and individual levels is therefore important when dealing with international marketing. Mayer et al. (1995: 712) argue that trust reflects a willingness to take risk.

Trust at the individual level therefore involves interdependence and risk between the trusting individuals. Sheppard and Sherman (1998) state that trust has to do with accepting the risks associated with the type and depth of interdependence inherent in a given relationship.

Trust at the company level occurs between organizations and is frequently conceptualized using two dimensions: benevolence and credibility (Altinay et al., 2014). *Benevolence* denotes the belief that one party will act in the interests of the other (Anderson & Narus, 1990), while *credibility* is the belief that a partner is competent and reliable in fulfilling his obligations (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Michaelis et al. (2008) suggest that the reputation of country of origin (COO) develops initial trust and is relevant for establishing relationships when entering a new market. Country-level trust needs to be discussed in relation to national culture as it affects the way in which people consciously and unconsciously think, feel and act (Sweeney & Hardaker, 1994). The importance of national culture has been extensively studied in international dyads as it has an impact on the strength of social and structural bonds between the interacting parties (Gounaris, 2005; Kale & Barnes, 1992). This shows that trust at the national level has an impact on trust at the organizational level. Similarly, it is also possible that functions at one level lead to trust at another level. Hyder and Fregidou-Malama (2009) have observed how trust is built as a result of a foreign firm's reputation and the involvement of local people in international marketing.

Fang et al. (2008) and Currall and Inkpen (2002) have emphasized the role of multilevel trust in marketing research. Fang et al. (2008) examine interorganizational trust between

collaborating firms, between the firm and its representatives in the collaboration, and interpersonal trust between the representatives of the collaborating firms. Currall and Inkpen (2002) also discuss trust at three levels – personal-, group- and firm level. They argue that trust facilitates collaboration and moves from one level of trust to another. Our study also applies this approach but differs from the above studies on the issue of country-level trust. We argue that country-level trust is vital to understanding company and individual trust when marketing in international contexts.

3.3. Networks

Johanson and Mattsson (1992) argue that trust forms the basis for cooperation. A *network* refers to a set of nodes and the relationships connecting them (Ojasalo, 2004). Ritter, Wilkinson, and Johnston (2004) recognize that firms are embedded in a network of ongoing business and non-business relationships that both enable and constrain their performance. Since firms cannot function in isolation (Batt & Purchase, 2004), they need to be involved in networks to generate resources.

Hyder (2008) suggests that cultural dimensions influence the development of relationships and he also (1999) distinguishes between formal and informal relationships in relation to developed and developing countries. Håkansson, Ford, Gadde, Snehota, and Waluszewski (2009) argue that networking is significant in international marketing where the customers are different and political bodies can make doing business either easy or difficult. We expect that an understanding of cultural differences supports the establishment of networks and trust, indicating what to adapt/ standardize to reduce the impact of heterogeneity and intangibility in services marketing.

3.4. Standardization/adaptation

Academics have debated the strategy of standardization versus adaptation in international marketing (Ryans, Griffith, & White, 2003; Vrontis et al., 2009). *Standardization* prevails when a multinational company markets its offerings while keeping the basic concept and marketing mix unchanged. *Adaptation* demands that the company listen to the local market and adjust its offerings to fit the needs of customers. Papavassiliou and Stathakopoulos (1997) claim that firms do not adopt full standardization or adaptation in international marketing, but find solutions in between the two extremes. Schmidt, Tyler, and Brennan (2007) state that managers neglect and undervalue the role of intangible adaptations, which can include human resources and organizational changes. Chung (2005) believes that, in the EU, service-providing firms should apply an adapted product strategy or standardized marketing strategy, depending on the similarities between the countries in question. We argue that combining standardization and adaptation, and fitting marketing practices to national cultures enhances the quality of the service, making it tangible and homogeneous (Fig. 1).

In sum, our theoretical framework describes how cultural dimensions influence trust and networks for selecting standardization and adaptation in marketing international services.

4. Methodology

A qualitative method and case study is applied to build theory. Eisenhardt (1989) notes the case study as a suitable research method to generate theory and capture the dynamics of a real-world situation. Siggelkow (2007) states that case studies can develop existing theories by finding and filling theoretical gaps. Using the case of Elekta in Brazil, we give a holistic description from a Swedish and a Brazilian perspective to illustrate a contemporary phenomenon. Doz (2011) and Poulis, Poulis, and Plakoyiannaki (2013) argue that qualitative research can contribute to understanding actors in contextual settings and international relations. According to Yin (2009), international business is complicated, justifying a case study approach. In the current study, we have covered all key people engaged in the firm's services marketing process, which Doz (2011) claims is a major argument for gaining an understanding of a certain phenomenon.

Use of a case study is a common approach in international marketing research (Ghauri, Tarnovskaya, & Elg, 2008). Zaheer et al. (1998) suggest that in-depth case studies are important for understanding how trust is built over time. Zeithaml et al. (2006) state that a service like surgery has credence quality, which makes quality evaluation difficult. The case of Elekta demonstrates several features that justify this method: (1) the complex and unique nature of the core service solution; (2) a well-known service solution marketed internationally; (3) cultural distance between two countries; and (4) a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context.

We collected data in the form of direct observations and semi-structured interviews. 16 people were interviewed in Sweden and Brazil in 2010–2012. The interviews were tape-recorded and lasted 1–3.5 hours. Four interviews were conducted in Swedish and the others in English. We also had discussions with service support engineers, administrators, controllers, project managers, quality assistants and various specialists at the Elekta office in Sao Paulo. The recorded interviews were transcribed and coded by the authors.

In Sweden, we interviewed Elekta's vice-presidents for Brazil (VPB) and international neuroscience sales and marketing (VPI), its executive vice-president (EVP), and the market development manager (MDM) for Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America at head office, and a medical physicist at Karolinska University Hospital (MPK). In Brazil, we interviewed the company's services director (SED), financial and administrative director (FAD), marketing and communication manager (MCM), neuroscience sales manager (NSM), sales and distribution manager (SDM), commercial and business relations manager (CBR), and the chief medical physicist at the Cancer Institute of Sao Paulo (MPS), two medical doctors (MD1 and MD2) specializing in Gamma Knife treatment, and the chief medical physicist (MPG) and one nurse (MNG) at Hospital Santa Paula. The interviewees were selected using the snowball technique (Babbie, 2010), applying the criteria of direct involvement and knowledge of the business operation. Table 2 gives comprehensive information on the informants.

Due to the sensitivity relating to the cultural aspect, and to increase the study's credibility, contextual observations and written sources of information such as annual reports and policy documents were also used. Our visit to Elekta Brazil and review of the company documents offered an understanding of the working conditions there, the company's structure, and collaboration between employees and customers. Our context-related observations supported the formulation of appropriate interview questions and preliminary analysis of the data. Using different sources allowed triangulation of the data (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1981).

The data were inductively coded into five emerging categories: The case and its characteristics, influence of local culture, trust development, network construction, and selection of standardization/adaptation. Within the categories, we included empirical evidence, seeking similarities and differences and quotations from the interviewees. The findings were discussed and interpreted in relation to the relevant theories (Yin, 2009). We have applied four patterns with which we were able to analyze different parts of the theoretical framework that illustrate relationships between the constructs (Fig. 2).

Table 2
Data information.

Code	Professional roles	Industry experience Years (y) Months (m)	Company experience Years (y) Months (m)	Country	Gender
VPB	Vice president of Elekta in Brazil	10 y, 9 m	3 y	Brazil	Male
VPI	Vice president of international neuroscience sales and marketing	7 y	23 y	Sweden	Male
EVP	Executive vice president	23 y	11 y	Sweden	Male
MDM	Market development manager for Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America at Head Office	8 y	5 y, 5 m	Sweden	Male
MPK	Medical physicist at Karolinska University Hospital	17 y	8 y	Sweden	Male
SED	Services director	9 y	3 y, 9 m	Brazil	Female
FAD	Financial and administrative director	13 y	3 y, 2 m	Brazil	Female
MCM	Marketing and communication manager	5 y	2 y, 11 m	Brazil	Female
NSM	Neuroscience sales manager	9 y	3 y, 2 m	Brazil	Male
SDM	Sales and distribution manager	8 y	1 y	Brazil	Female
CBR	Commercial and business relations manager	21 y	3 y, 9 m	Brazil	Male
MPS	Chief medical physicist at Cancer Institute of Saõ Paulo (ICESP)	3 y	Customer	Brazil	Female
MD1	Medical doctor #1 specializing in Gamma Knife Treatment at Hospital Santa Paula	30 y	Customer	Brazil	Male
MD2	Medical doctor #2 specializing in Gamma Knife Treatment at Hospital Santa Paula	30 y	Customer	Brazil	Female
MPG	Chief medical physicist specializing in gamma Knife at Hospital Santa Paula	13 y	Customer	Brazil	Male
MNG	Nurse specializing in Gamma Knife treatment at Hospital Santa Paula	–	Customer	Brazil	Female

5. Empirical evidence

5.1. The case and its characteristics

When Elekta entered the emerging market of Brazil in 1998, they started by marketing their health care offerings through a third-party distributor, a Spanish representative. This solution soon proved to be ineffective and created conflicts, and therefore a wholly owned company in Sao Paulo was established. The company sells to and serves markets in Latin America, using distributors in the countries where they do not have employees. To structure and organize this operation, Elekta drew up a protocol with a step-by-step description of how to proceed, which their local employees follow.

The Brazilian subsidiary grew quickly, creating management-related difficulties that Elekta was not prepared for. Latin America and Brazil have a high rate of growth, and Elekta acquired a 55% market share in the two years leading up to the study, as well as 80% of the public market for linear accelerators. The company markets its offerings under the brand names *Gamma Knife*, *Linear Accelerator* and *Elekta Software*, and its strategy entails selling treatment facilities not only in Sao Paulo and other states in Brazil, but also in other Latin American countries where it also wants to establish new business.

The company employed 41 local people in 2011 and Elekta stresses the importance of having the right employees. The company succeeded in hiring a local person recruited from a US competitor, for whom this person had worked for about 11 years. This new recruit has unique expertise and knows how to do business in Latin America. Employees must also be able to speak the parent company's language, which is English, as well as Spanish. Since 2007, the company has recruited more people from US competitors. In 2010, Elekta acquired Nucletron, and its Brazilian representative is now employed by Elekta in Brazil.

The company's philosophy is *care for life and saving lives*. It currently offers total solutions for oncology clinics. That includes the products and software components like diagnostic and planning systems. Elekta's aim is to develop training systems close to therapy locations.

The company's mission includes providing high-tech equipment and qualified service support to its customers (hospitals) and users (medical doctors, medical physicists and nurses). The vice-president comments:

> The challenge for us is the rapid growth. Things move quickly and the challenge is how to get the organization to develop in relation to a growing market. (VPI, 2010)

5.2. Influence of local culture

It was pointed out that in Brazil everything is different than in Sweden, from the climate to how people behave. When the Spanish representative was responsible for the business, relations were tense. The Spanish representative was seen as *big brother* and language was a problem. To resolve this, Elekta has employed local people, sometimes recruiting from its main American competitor. Employing local people is cheaper and accepted by the customers for easy access and communication. In addition to Portuguese, employees must speak English, and also Spanish. The quality of service has been enhanced by local people who understand the business culture, the market and the customers, and can deliver safe and good quality care.

The vice-president states that Swedes are approachable and treat employees as collaborating partners. All employees are treated equally and receive support from Elekta. When directors from Sweden visit Brazil, they are open, supportive and show respect to all employees. Respondents also state that the Swedish executives focus on adapting their mindset to the local culture, and feel that Swedish culture fits well in other countries. The services director states:

> I never received a "no" as a response from any Elekta manager so this is wonderful. I get great pleasure from working at Elekta. (SED, 2011)

The respondents perceive the Swedish–Brazilian relationship as positive. The Brazilians consult the company both formally and informally about Elekta and about the treatment or rules that should be followed when doing business with Sweden. They also inquire about the quality of Swedish products or services they import from Sweden. Doctors and other professionals ask permission to use Elekta material for teaching purposes, or for advice on purchases.

5.3. Trust development

The respondents commented that Sweden has a good reputation in Brazil: for consistency, quality products, for being an organized and successful country, for having been neutral for centuries, and for not focusing solely on profits. They perceive that Sweden brings benefits and advantages to the users through the development of the Brazilian health services market by introducing new technology with innovative software. People like the brand *Sweden*, and see Sweden as a non-controversial country to

do business with and as well-liked at the government level, with the half-Brazilian heritage of Queen Sylvia being a noted factor. According to the vice-president:

> The queen is our best seller. People know her and she speaks the local language. (VPI, 2010)

Even company reputation is an important way of becoming known in the market. The innovator of the radiation technology used happens to be the founder of Elekta, which facilitates Elekta's acceptance in the market. How people are treated and get support from Elekta spread quickly through word-of-mouth. The financial and administrative director provides a concrete example of this:

> I took a Spanish class with a teacher who had a mother suffering from cancer. She took her mother to a hospital where the oncologist told her there was no chance of survival. Later she was treated at Hospital Santa Paula with Gamma Knife, successfully. That was 8 years ago and the mother is still alive. (FAD, 2011)

Elekta uses a training package to educate its employees and the end-users. It provides everyone who offers the service education and training to learn how to use the technology, to become certified users to ensure that all customers receive exactly the same service and offer the best treatment for the patients. The service technicians and salespeople receive expert help from support staff from Sweden responsible for drawing up contracts and adapting them to local rules.

The company offers two kinds of training: application training via a local Elekta team, and overseas training. The firm has agreements with treatment centers in France, Germany, the UK and the US, and sends customers for 1–2 weeks of hands-on training with senior doctors. A follow-up of the training is conducted to check whether the new users are sufficiently comfortable with the machines to move ahead. The VPB stresses the importance of this process to ensure competence and as a friendly gesture:

> We apply not only the same method of treatment, but also the same quality control, which is a very important part of radiation therapy. (VPB, 2011)

Elekta prioritizes personal marketing and personal contacts are very important. The goal is to have local management and local services to show commitment to the local market. They strategically recruit people who know the market, have good relationships with doctors, and who are known and respected in the local community. The marketing and communication manager explains:

> Trust is the most important... everybody knew him, he is trustworthy and they trusted him and the company he worked for. (MCM, 2011)

The respondents observe that radiotherapy is a small market and people know each other. Trust and confidentiality are key to success. It is important that the individuals working for Elekta in Latin America are perceived as motivated and sensitive, and deal with and respond to customer requests as quickly as possible. As the sales and distribution manager puts it:

> If the customers are happy, they can be our salespeople in the future. (SDM, 2011)

Elekta markets its equipment to the doctors by hiring local people who understand local regulations and customs and what the customers need. The users must then be trained to use the machines and perform the treatment to be trusted by the patients and to ensure that the equipment is reliable. Elekta offers customized after-sales maintenance and customer support with

engineers located in the hospitals to proactively find solutions even before the customer knows there is a problem. They tailor the technology to the customer's needs and have the right person to treat the right need.

Elekta has a customer support department and provides equipment upgrades for an extended period. They have a manager on staff specialized in public sector matters who has relationships with the government and who thus knows what is going to happen in the market.

5.4. Network construction

The respondents explained that when entering a new market Elekta investigates the market and the competitors, the economic development and stability of the country, currency issues, people's purchasing power, and the public's focus on health issues. It is important to understand the market potential and trade- and/or competition barriers, which include political decisions that can change overnight.

As the financial and administrative director explained, there have been no problems with Elekta's establishment process because of the common interest in solving health problems shared by politicians, ministry officials and hospital administrators. Elekta may be asked to assist in the planning of cancer treatments because of a lack of local experts, or to help with financing due to high interest rates in Brazil. Elekta cooperates with the Swedish Export Credit Corporation, which can offer customers up to 85–90% long-term financing for the equipment at a lower interest rate than offered by Brazilian banks. Elekta helps the customers with installation, training, and after-sales maintenance and support. According to the services director, it is important to develop long-standing partnerships with the customers, which she describes using a metaphor:

> We get married with the customers for almost 15 years. We serve people and it's our responsibility to keep customers satisfied and happy with the equipment and the treatment. (SED, 2011)

Close relationships with the customers are developed even before they become customers. Customers are taken to see the equipment and training, to visit workshops and congresses, and to meet research groups and exchange views with existing customers. Elekta develops relationships with clinical experts and has an agreement with the National Cancer Institute to serve the doctors and physicists 24 hours a day, as well as to access the equipment for demonstrating it to potential customers. For example, the neurosurgeons and radiation oncologists receive training in Brazil from the Cancer Institute and Sao Paulo State University, where Elekta supports medical students.

Elekta also forms relationships and development agreements with hospitals outside Brazil such as the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, to provide training and support for employees through transferring know-how. Elekta's plan is to develop a reference and training center in Brazil to serve its Latin American customers and contribute to market development.

5.5. Selection of adaptation/standardization

Elekta is able to adapt the specifications of its offerings to match a country's medical products and treatment, allowing customers to use the technology and upgrade it for at least 15 years. It is important that customers decide what configuration they want, and Elekta adapts the solution and offers customized training to ensure that the customer achieves top quality from the equipment purchased. The commercial and business relations manager states:

...We try to see which kind of customer we have. And also which kind of needs this customer has. Sometimes the customer needs technology and sometimes special prices. (CBR, 2011)

Elekta deals with the Brazilian government when seeking permits to use nuclear radiation, with local governments for import licenses, and with Brazilian banks to run credit checks on customers buying the medical equipment. For the registration process, the National Agency for Sanitary Vigilance (ANVISA) checks the factories where equipment parts are made to certify that import is permitted from these factories. The vice-president of Elekta in Brazil explains:

It's a complex bureaucratic process to bring the medical equipment into the country...it takes 6 months to a year to register a machine. (VPB, 2011)

Relationships with the doctors are important because they can tell whether the equipment is reliable. The Leksell Gamma Knife Society is a forum for the exchange of ideas and feedback regarding changes to the offering. But it can be difficult to effect change if Elekta does not believe a proposed development would be of use to other customers as well. The medical physicist at Karolinska confirms this:

We give them feedback. There's a customer report form that we can send to them telling what we want or what is wrong. (MPK, 2010)

Brazilian researchers in cooperation with Elekta Sweden recently published a scientific article about a mental disease treated by the Gamma Knife in Brazil. The company is also involved in research to enhance the quality of treatment and development of the equipment and training. To perform the treatment, accessories must be adapted – adaptations that are carried out by a local company. At present, skin cancers and other diseases are treated, which also adds value to the company.

Regarding salaries, the decisions are local and the salaries higher than other foreign companies offer in Brazil. When Elekta started in Brazil, the competitors lowered their prices. Elekta opted to set a basic price, hoping to raise it later. In its local subsidiaries, Elekta establishes legal entities with a local plan in line with its main vision, and how quickly the organization should develop is discussed with the subsidiary. Elekta sets the same human resource management policies for all subsidiaries. According to the marketing and communication manager, adaptations are made:

The Brazilian subsidiary adapts the message – not only by translating it, but by adding color and changing the image to bring life to the message to adapt it to Brazilian reality. (MCM, 2011)

It is also noted that all employees are encouraged to contribute to innovative development that can also be used in other countries to enhance the quality of the services offered. The evidence for the constructs is summarized in Table 3, which serves as the context for the process of Elekta health services marketing in Fig. 2 presented in the next section.

6. Discussion

This section presents the different themes arrived at by combining constructs of the theoretical framework. The major findings are then linked with theories to demonstrate the strength and relevance of the empirical study. Fig. 2, describing features relating to the four constructs of the theoretical framework, is developed based on the supporting evidence (Table 3) for each

Table 3
Summary of the evidence for the constructs.

Constructs	Data sources	Evidence
Culture	Interviews Observations Documents	Follow head office guidelines Conflicts with representatives Customization of the treatment Informal consulting on business issues
Trust	Interviews Observations	Sweden has good reputation Training package for ensuring competence Quality control Service technology Expert help from head office Recruitment of local experts
Networks	Interviews Observations	Shared interests with government Cooperation with organizations outside Brazil Partnerships with customers and users Relationships with universities, doctors and students
Standardization/ adaptation	Interviews Observations Documents	Same solutions, training and treatment Local specifications, accessories and people Lower prices Local innovations Research publications

construct and interrelationships between the constructs of the framework.

6.1. Culture, trust and standardization/adaptation

Our findings show that the Brazilians were not willing to trust the Spanish representative, which made communication difficult. In contrast, Brazilians perceive Sweden as a country that is honest and friendly, and produces quality products. As Michaelis et al. (2008) argue, COO is an important factor in increasing trustworthiness when the quality of a product/service is difficult to assess. Trust in Sweden as a country created a positive attitude toward Elekta offering services in the local market, which indicates a transfer of trust from the country- to the company level. Movement of trust between different levels has also been stressed by Currall and Inkpen (2002) as leading to fruitful collaboration. The case of Elekta in Brazil is a good example of the development of trust at the company level (Altinay et al., 2014) and at the country level. By maintaining service quality, Elekta acquired credibility in the local market through tangible service offerings and development of company trust (Gounaris, 2005). These issues can also be linked to the high uncertainty avoidance in Brazilian culture (Table 1).

According to Hofstede et al. (2010) and Gesteland (2005), laws and rules are important to avoid uncertainty in unknown situations, and language can help to capture nuances in communication between two parties, which enhances trust. Elekta introduced two cultural adaptations in this respect: termination of its Spanish representative, and recruiting local people with market knowledge and an understanding of legal procedures in the country through establishment of Elekta Brazil. The empowerment of local people was appreciated by Elekta Brazil's personnel, and customers and users of Elekta's health services, and can be related to Sweden's small power distance and the collectivism in Brazil (Table 1).

Elekta emphasizes teamwork and employees feel it is easy to socialize and develop formal and informal contacts (Hyder, 1999), which enhances trust in Elekta as a reliable company. Although Sweden is an individualistic country, the Swedish executives show respect for the social integration that characterizes a collectivist society. In international health services marketing, it is important to minimize the cultural gap and in this case, the local people are met in a way they understand and trust. Elekta Brazil emphasizes
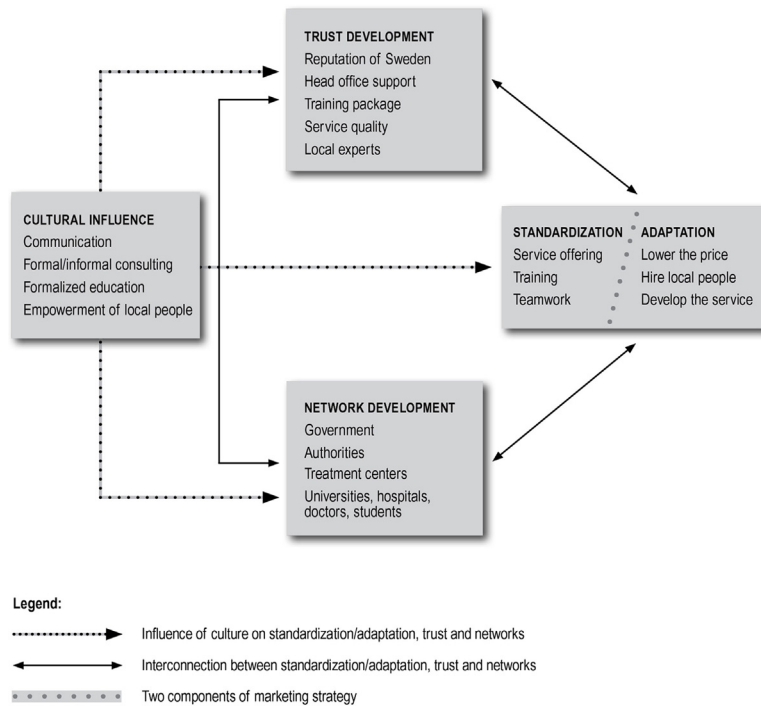
Fig. 2. The process of Elekta health services marketing in Brazil.

treating customers in a welcoming manner and making them feel they are supported by head office. Ozdemir and Hewett (2010) observe that, in collectivist cultures, service providers can draw the interest of customers by training frontline employees to socialize and be caring. By adapting to the local culture and formalizing education and training, Elekta has succeeded in gaining the trust of its customers, users and employees, as illustrated in Fig. 2.

Training has been offered to maintain the high quality of the health services. Technical support is important and customers know what to do and what kind of support they can get from the experts. This standard service offering has two benefits: it reduces customer uncertainty and creates a reliance on the service provider. This trust of the organization increases the credibility of the company, as Morgan and Hunt (1994) also argue. The local employees show an interest in following rules and instructions, which have been developed and updated by head office. Schneider and Barsoux (2003) suggest that formalization and standardization of policies and procedures reflect high uncertainty avoidance and large power distance, which our case also indicates for Brazil.

6.2. Culture, network and standardization/adaptation

Elekta encourages the use of their medical equipment for new treatment procedures, and the participation of their customers and employees in the development of both the service and the equipment. Coming from an individualistic country, Elekta emphasizes individual participation and reputation (Table 1). This is achieved by promoting teamwork and considering local companies part of the Elekta team, offering training and education as a part of its standardization program.

Elekta employs competent, known local people to facilitate communication with the customers, and to develop trust and understand customer needs. Dealing with health care is a risky business and requires personal trust, and personal relations are thus highly valued (Altinay et al., 2014; LaBahn and Harich, 1997). The case also reflects Brazil's high uncertainty avoidance (Table 1). The marketing people and technicians allow customers to make inquiries that have nothing to do with Elekta's business activities.

This informal relationship has been developed in response to the collectivist culture of Brazil and to increase customer confidence in the individuals and the company (Hofstede, 1991). The connection of the current Swedish queen to the local language reflects the high power distance of Brazil.

6.3. Trust, network and standardization/adaptation

Elekta has developed networks with government, local agencies and authorities to ensure approval of import licenses for the nuclear materials needed to perform treatments. Due to collectivism in Brazil, networking with hospitals, doctors and other professionals was necessary to create trust in the company. Trust has been enhanced by lowering prices, hiring local people, and adjusting service solutions to the context. This adaptation is in line with Singh et al. (2005), who argue the need to follow the local context in international services marketing. Ritter et al. (2004) identify networking with firms as important for generating vital resources. The local employees have developed formal and informal relationships and networks with customers in- and outside Elekta's business activities to avoid misunderstandings and ensure individual trust. This supports Ford (2002), who claims that employing local nationals helps to minimize cultural differences and contributes to the development of trust.

Quality control, training packages and technical support are based on standardization, which Elekta provided through formal procedures influenced by the small power distance of Sweden. Here, consistency is important, and customers need to know that support is available when they need it. Elekta developed standard solutions to handle this, by developing local and international teams and recruiting local people connected to the sector. Thus, network development is linked to company- and individual trust, achieved through standardization and adaptation (Fig. 2).

6.4. Integration at trust levels

Adaptation is achieved through empowering local people, adjusting prices and the service, and by developing formal and

informal relationships with customers, demonstrating Elekta's engagement in the Brazilian market. Perception of trust is important when the service is complex and the host country culturally different from the service-providing country, as Perlmutter (1969) also argues. Making local people responsible for the health care is valuable at all the trust levels. At the individual level, trust is developed between the customer and the seller through developing informal and formal relationships. When trust is developed at this level, particularly in health services, all of the credit goes to the company as it stands for the service offering being marketed. This also has a bearing on trust at the country level because, as a foreign firm, Elekta relies on a local workforce, and thus lifts the reputation of the country and makes the service offering visible.

Håkansson and Snehota (2000) suggest that trust is built through a social exchange process. For Elekta, trust development at the individual level by recruiting local experts from the competitors has helped the parties come closer. Individual trust in this case has extended trust at the company level and made the process transparent to the customers. Hiring people from Elekta's American competitor also shows a shift of trust to the country level as well. Elekta preferred to rely on local competence than hiring Swedes to compete with the American company. This confidence worked as a recognition of the local nationals, integrating trust at individual and country levels (Sweeney & Hardaker, 1994). Trustworthiness provides tangibility and the perception of quality by the local people (Hyder & Fregidou-Malama, 2009). Elekta has also offered a well-designed training package including visits to international research centers, increasing the company's credibility (Altinay et al., 2014).

Heterogeneity of the service offering has been solved by knowledge transfer and building local networks of customers, doctors, students, medical physicists and government agencies, who received similar messages from Elekta. Customers were also integrated in networks comprising international training centers, quality control centers, and experts in neurosurgery. This network development reflects the high power distance and collectivism in Brazil. It shows how trust is developed at the country level by respecting local culture and also has a positive impact on the company, developing company trust. Trust at the country level affects and initiates trust at the company level (Fang et al., 2008; Magnusson et al., 2011).

Elekta values offering its employees education and access to expertise, which facilitates the standardization of its offerings, giving individuals the opportunity to contribute to providing quality service. Schneider and Barsoux (2003) find that cross-cultural training facilitates communication between different nationalities and the development of company and individual trust and problem-solving skills. Elekta has developed high-quality standard training worldwide to keep the service offering consistent and trustworthy. Hyder and Fregidou-Malama (2009) have also observed that service providers put much effort into developing trust and networks, thereby fulfilling the customer's expectations of homogeneous service quality.

To sum up, a service provider needs to develop networks and trust, and to standardize and also adapt to the local culture to address the problem of heterogeneity in services. Relying on Sweden as home to quality products and services has been identified as a country-level trust that sparks the development of trust at other levels. This finding fills an important gap for the multilevel trust approach in connection with the international marketing of services. By demonstrating country-level trust and its impact on company- and individual trust, we link to and extend earlier research (Currall & Inkpen, 2002; Fang et al., 2008). Recruitment of local expertise leads to trust at the individual level, which also has an impact on trust at the country level.

7. Conclusions and implications

Two research issues in the context of international marketing of health services have been dealt with in this study:

(1) cultural impacts on trust, networks and standardization/adaptation, and
(2) how trust at the individual, company and country levels operates and is interrelated with respect to culture, network, and standardization and adaptation.

The study reveals that the cultural dimensions of power distance, individualism/collectivism and uncertainty avoidance have an impact on trust, networks and standardization/adaptation. Power distance influences the communication process and the development of formal relationships and networks, leading to standardization. Collectivism enhances informal relationships and the transfer of know-how, and leads to trust development and adaptation. The individualistic characteristic of the Swedish firm in focus is not found to be a problem in practicing an adapted policy in the local market. Uncertainty avoidance, low power distance and collectivism result in empowerment of local people and the learning process, leading to the formation of networks, trust development, and adaptation and standardization. Standardization was the main strategy used when it came to product quality, training, consistency in the service offering, and dealing with the treatment in health care. Cultural dimensions can predict the need for standardization/adaptation, but it is not easy to determine in advance what the optimal combination of this construct should be.

Dealing with trust at the individual-, company- and country level, and the interrelationships between the levels, has shown how the process of international service marketing can go smoothly. By stressing the fluid nature of the mechanism of trust, this study demonstrates how dynamic trust is. Country-of-origin has been particularly important in initiating trust at the country level, which then passed through the other trust levels. This reveals how trust is linked with culture and later influences the marketing process, integrating network and standardization/adaptation. Our research confirms the importance of considering multilevel trust in studying the process of international marketing of services. Moreover, we have extended the theory of multilevel trust by introducing and integrating country-level trust to understand the mechanism of trust building.

One exciting finding of our study is the convergence of the intensions of individualism and collectivism regarding how to enhance service quality. Elekta Sweden is characterized by an individualistic culture, where employees and customers are treated as individuals and accepted as part of the team. In Sweden, the company offers the same treatment and learning opportunities and participation for everyone. Similarly, Elekta meets the requirements of the Brazilian collectivist culture, which demands equal treatment of local employees and network actors. Does this paradox affirm Fang's (2003) thesis that cultural dimensions may not capture cultural dynamism? Are individualism and collectivism opposite sides of the same coin? This could be an issue to explore in future studies.

Our study reveals that culture plays a role in the process of international services marketing, indicating the importance of cultural context. By focusing on the Brazilian context, we have been able to show that the process of marketing health services is complex and must be understood from a holistic perspective, a mere snapshot simply does not work. We also found that trust, networks and standardization/adaptation are interrelated, justifying the use of the case study as an appropriate method for theory building (Eisenhardt, 1989; Siggelkow, 2007; Yin, 1981).

7.1. Theoretical and practical implications

This research contributes to the international services marketing literature by developing a theoretical framework for international marketing of services based on culture, trust, networks and standardization/adaptation. Another of its contributions relates to the categorization and interrelatedness of trust at the individual, company and country levels for understanding the role of trust in the internationalization process. The Brazilian context offers unique knowledge on how to market health services, which takes into consideration the complexity of the service offerings and cultural distance between Sweden and Brazil.

The managerial implications suggest that it is important to employ local people familiar with the culture and the market, and take COO seriously as a factor that can be effective in strengthening a company's image in international services marketing. Understanding and developing trust at the individual, company and country levels is necessary to deal with intangible and heterogeneous characteristics of services. An important task for managers is gaining access to the right networks and understanding the mechanism of shifting trust from one level to another. By investigating cultural dimensions in each country, our theoretical model may be used to develop trust and networks and determine the standardization/adaptation required to meet the challenges of international services marketing.

7.2. Limitations and further research

Although the design of the research allows us to study a contemporary phenomenon in its real-world context, the validity of the study can be questioned because the unit of analysis was limited to Brazil. However, we have addressed this issue by carefully selecting informants from different categories such as public and private customers, employees of the Brazilian company, and head office executives in Sweden. Further, we conducted observations at the hospitals and company locations to capture context-related effects. Our interview and observation data provided rich evidence, which has been presented here in the citations, tables and figures. Due to the rigorous data collection and documentation process, we believe the conceptual model developed, reflecting the impact of cultural dimensions, can be replicated in other cultural contexts, manufacturing industries and service sectors for the purpose of generalization.

The identification and interrelatedness of trust at different levels offers new insight on how to deal with trust in international services marketing. However, additional benefit could be drawn by further development of the concept in relation to domestic marketing and product marketing. Country-level trust, which we introduce in this study, also needs to be further investigated. Multilevel trust could also be tested on a number of countries to see whether it holds or uncovers other theoretical insights. Our study indicates that masculinity/femininity may not be important in the marketing of services, which is not in line with Hofstede's theory. This may be due to the nature of the Brazilian market or may be explained by the absence of a gender perspective in the research questions or our interpretations, and warrants examination in future study.

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