

Marketing Capabilities and the “Salmon Run” Toward Adaptation

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Abstract Scholars agree that the longstanding standardization–adaptation debate, which is around for more than 40 years, is not solved yet. More than that, a recent systematic review by Schmid and Kotulla (2011) found that only four papers out of 330 aimed to theoretically explain why firms actually *chose* to standardize or adapt their marketing across nations in *a certain way*. Hence, the research on standardization/adaptation is characterized by nonsignificant, contradictory, and even confusing. Against this background, the authors reveal a new potential driver for the decision to adapt, namely, international marketing capabilities. In general, the authors propose that different degrees of marketing capabilities impact the strategic decision regarding whether to adapt or standardize. More specifically, the detailed knowledge acquired for a new territory (via the marketing capabilities) is posit to push toward over-adaptation of the marketing mix elements, which accounts for differences between home and host countries. This notion is in the spirit of Homburg et al. (2011) findings that there is an optimum level with regard to customer-oriented behaviors... “Thus, there are times when the customer should not be king” (p. 68). Recently, Deresiewicz (2014) noted that “The force that drives the salmon run is fear” (p. 21). The authors argue that similar phenomenon occurs in the export-marketing arena when firms are afraid to be too different from their international competitors or international customer expectations and adopt an over-adaptation strategy.

In sum, the core belief of this research is that a tradeoff approach, which seeks an *either/or* decision regarding standardization or adaptation, is not appropriate and firms should consider developing *both/and* approach (adapting some elements and standardize other elements), and avoid the “salmons run” toward the adaptation

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direction that might lead to inferior performance. This research contributes to the adaptation/standardization stream of research by showing that firms' marketing capabilities may serve as driver for adaptation that ultimately affect the international marketing strategy and firm's international performance.

References available upon request.