

# An Evolution of A 30 years of Cross-Cultural Marketing Research for Small Medium Enterprises: A Systematic Literature Review

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## ABSTRACT

This research visualized the evolution of meaning and trend in the direction of Cross-Cultural Marketing (CCM) in Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) research over the past 30 years, from 1995 – 2025. This research is a type of qualitative descriptive research that focuses on literature studies through a Systematic Literature Review. The data retrieved were articles registered on 4 search engines; Proquest, Ebsco, Scopus and Emerald. The articles were analyzed using the funneling technique so that out of 1015 articles, only 60 articles were selected as final data. The results show that over the past 30 years, the meaning of Cross-Cultural Marketing (CCM) has evolved in a way that it is re-conceptualized as a marketing activity that aims not only to focus on entering new markets but also being able to win global competition. The CCM supports the formation of a global mindset and SMEs understanding of the host country's culture through internal (resource building and commitment) and external factors (regulations and technological media).

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In an era of globalization, the internationalization of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) has become a phenomenon that has attracted attention of many researchers. SMEs, as one of the pillars of the economy in many countries, have great potential to expand markets and increase growth through penetration into international markets (Huff, 2010; Selvarajah et al., 2019). The phenomenon of internationalization of SMEs offers great opportunities for business growth and expansion. By accessing international markets, SMEs can increase their competitiveness, diversify risks and access new resources. However, challenges such as limited resources, regulatory complexity, cultural differences, global competition, and network management must be properly addressed (Atabay & Guzeller, 2021; Ricard & Saiyed, 2015; Sinkovics et al., 2005; Sukunesan et al., 2020). In addition, support from the government, access to resources and training, and collaboration with local and international partners can help SMEs achieve success in the internationalization of their business (Matlay et al., 2006).

The internationalization of SMEs can be implemented through several strategic steps (Jovović et al., 2017; Ricard & Saiyed, 2015; Sukunesan et al., 2020). First, SMEs need to conduct comprehensive market research to understand consumer profiles, market trends, and competition in the intended international market. Furthermore, SMEs need to adapt their marketing strategy taking into account the differences in culture, language, and consumer preferences in the target market. This includes product modification, appropriate branding and use of relevant language. SMEs also need to establish partnerships with local or international partners who can assist in distribution, logistics and expanding their business network. In addition, SMEs must ensure that they comply with applicable international trade rules and regulations and

pay attention to the financial and risk management aspects associated with international operations. Through continuous effort, commitment and proper adaptation, SMEs can succeed in internationalization and seize growth opportunities in the global market.

The urge of Smes to scale up their business is because they play important role. The role of SMEs in the global market is very significant (Belniak, 2015; Canham & Hamilton, 2013; Kuivalainen et al., 2013; Marcus, 2013; Nijhof, Andre HJ Jeurissen, 2017). Even though SMEs may have a smaller scale compared to large companies, they make an important contribution to the global economy. Some of the roles played by SMEs include 1) Job Creation (They provide job opportunities for local residents and contribute to reducing unemployment and increasing the economic welfare of the community); 2) Innovation and Creativity (SMEs are often hotbeds of innovation and creativity. With limited resources, SMEs are often more flexible in creating new, unique products and services. They are able to respond to rapid market trends and meet changing customer needs); 3) Export Opportunities: (SMEs can become important actors in increasing a country's exports. By internationalizing and expanding into global markets, SMEs can help generate foreign exchange earnings, expand the country's export base, and increase competitiveness in international markets); 4) Local Empowerment (SMEs are often based in local communities and can contribute to empowering the local economy. By creating jobs, SMEs help reduce economic inequality and increase economic independence at the local level); 5) Preservation of Local Culture and Products (SMEs often produce goods and products that have local cultural and heritage values. Through the production and marketing of local products, SMEs can promote and preserve the traditions and cultural wealth of an area); 6) Environmental Sustainability (Many SMEs practice a

sustainable approach in their operations. They are often more flexible in adopting environmentally friendly business practices, reducing negative impacts on the environment, and promoting awareness of the importance of sustainability); and 7) Encouraging Economic Growth (The role of SMEs in economic growth is very important. SMEs create added value in the supply chain, contribute to national income, increase productivity, and encourage the growth of related sectors such as transportation, logistics and other supporting services). With this role, SMEs become a vital force in global economic development. It is important for the government and other stakeholders to provide the necessary support and facilities for SMEs so that they can grow and develop in the global market (Belniak, 2015; Canham & Hamilton, 2013; Kuivalainen et al., 2013; Marcus, 2013; Nijhof, Andre HJ Jeurissen, 2017).

Cross-Cultural Marketing (CCM) further strengthens SME competitiveness in foreign markets (Kaynak & Herbig, 2014). CCM involves strategic marketing across culturally diverse consumer groups (Engelen & Brettel, 2011). SMEs must understand demographic and behavioral data to tailor products and communication to local needs (Leblanc & Herndon, 2001), use accurate translations and culturally aligned messages (R. G. Tian & Lan, 2009), and develop culturally relevant brand identities and product adaptations. Targeted marketing campaigns through digital channels are essential, aligning with technological advancement influences on industry marketing (Terlutter et al., 2006). For example, Australian brands marketed to Indonesian consumers via social media maintain country-of-origin identity while remaining culturally acceptable (Pires, 1999; Quester et al., 2000).

However, post-Covid-19 CCM research remains fragmented, with most studies

focusing on outcomes such as brand equity, purchase intention, and customer decision-making rather than foundational CCM concepts for SMEs (Clarke & Micken, 2002; Dolnicar & Grün, 2007; Malhotra et al., 1996; Munson & McIntyre, 1979). This gap presents both challenges and opportunities: SMEs must innovate, collaborate, and build adaptive marketing strategies to strengthen international competitiveness. Therefore, further research is needed to define CCM in the SME context and explore future directions in cross-cultural strategies.

This study examines how the meaning of CCM has evolved over the last 30 years and identifies future research paths, contributing to SME marketing literature and practice by clarifying foundational concepts and emerging trends in cross-cultural marketing for SMEs.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

To understand the importance of CCM, SMEs must look no further than the advantages it provides businesses of all sizes (Craig & Douglas, 2011; Engelen & Brettel, 2011b; Hermeking, 2005; Mower et al., 2013). First, it helps to identify the right people to target and allows businesses to craft their message accordingly. This is especially beneficial for SMEs who usually have a tight advertising budget and need to ensure that their target audience will actually respond to their message. In addition, CCM can help SMEs expand into new markets by understanding the needs of their customers and adapting their offerings to meet these needs (Wróblewski & Lis, 2021).

In addition, CCM allows MSMEs to increase brand awareness (and ultimately increase sales) by adapting their messages to different cultures. Likewise, it helps businesses gain a better understanding of

their market, and the factors that may influence it. Many of these factors may be foreign to SMEs and can only be understood through research and analysis of cultural cues and traditions (K. Tian & Borges, 2011; R. G. Tian & Lan, 2009). Finally, CCM allows SMEs to remain competitive in their respective markets. By understanding the competition and adapting to new trends, SMEs can ensure that they stay in the game. The same goes for developing marketing strategies, being aware of cross-cultural differences will ensure that the strategies developed are effective and efficient. SMEs should take the time to understand cross-cultural marketing trends and use them to their advantage. With increasing globalization and a more interconnected world, cultural sensitivity is becoming increasingly important for businesses of all sizes. Conducting this research and analysis to understand different cultures will greatly help businesses that want to grow, build their brand, and stay competitive (Huff, 2010; Manrai, 2016; Pires, 1999).

In the literature, there is no research that bridges and answers the gap regarding the basic definition of CCM for small medium enterprises. Existing research only focuses on proving the influence of CCM on other fields such as brand equity, customer intention, purchase decision (Clarke & Micken, 2002); (Dolnicar & Grün, 2007); (Malhotra et al, 1996); (Munson & McIntyre, 1979). The lack of research in the field of CCM for MSMEs is a significant challenge in dealing with diverse international markets. However, behind these challenges there are opportunities for SMEs to develop competitive advantage, innovate, and develop adaptive marketing strategies. Through collaboration, knowledge exchange, and creativity, SMEs can take advantage of these opportunities and successfully face challenges in cross-cultural marketing. Therefore, more attention is needed in terms of research that

focuses on cross-cultural marketing for SMEs in order to strengthen their position in global competition and take advantage of growing international market opportunities.

### 3. METHOD

This research is a type of qualitative descriptive research using Systematic Literature Review (SLR). According to Jesson, Matheson, & Lacey (2011) there are 6 stages in conducting SLR, namely: 1) Determine the research question; 2) Design research plans; 3) data collection; 4) Assessment of study quality; 5) Design data analysis; and 6) Designing data synthesis. There are two referenced research objectives, namely to describe the evolution of meaning and trends in the direction of cross-cultural marketing research for 30 years, namely from 1980 – 2022. The data taken is articles registered on 4 search engines, namely Proquest, Ebsco, Scopus and Emerald via search for "advance search" which was carried out on May 3, 2023. Keywords were then arranged using BOOLEAN "OR" and "AND" according to the research question. So that a research string is obtained. In the first stage, 1015 articles were found, which were then filtered with inclusion and exclusion to obtain a final article of 60 articles. (Abou Aish et al., 2003; Aïssaoui & Geringer, 2018; Alsaleh et al., 2019; Armario et al., 2008; Atabay & Guzeller, 2021; Áttekintés, 2020; Belniak, 2015; Burnaz et al., 2009; Cadogan, 2012; Canham & Hamilton, 2013; Chetty & Campbell-Hunt, 2003; Craig & Douglas, 2011; Dabić et al., 2020; Engelen et al., 2009; Engelen & Brettel, 2011b, 2011a; Flynn et al., 2000; Hermeking, 2005; Huff, 2010; Hutchinson et al., 2006; Jie & Harms, 2017; Jovović et al., 2017; Kaynak, n.d.; Kazemi et al., 2019; Kuivalainen et al., 2013; Kustin, 2004; Leblanc & Herndon, 2001; Loane & Bell, 2006; Malhotra et al., 1996; Manrai, 2016; Marcus, 2013; Mathematics, 2016;

Matlay et al., 2006; McKenzie & Merrilees, 2008; Menzies et al., 2020; Milton-Smith, 1997; Mower et al., 2013; Myers, 1995; Nijhof, Andre HJ Jeurissen, 2017; Okazaki & Mueller, 2007; Oliveira, 2018; Peuker et al., 2020; Pires, 1999; Priyono et al., 2020; Ricard & Saiyed, 2015; Selvarajah et al., 2019; Seydou et al., 2017; Shiu & Dawson, 2002; Singhapakdi et al., 2001; Sinkovics et al., 2005; Stigsdotter & Bergfelder, 2007; Sukunesan et al., 2020; K. Tian & Borges, 2011; R. G. Tian & Lan, 2009; Tsai & Men, 2017; Walton et al., 2008; Wan Zahari Wan Yusoff and Maziah Ismail, 2008, 2008; Wróblewski & Lis, 2021). Then the articles are synthesized so that they become research finding.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

##### *Determining the Research Question*

The research questions were formed based on the urgency that was found empirically that in the post-Covid-19 era as it is today, research on trends regarding CCM is still confusing. In the literature, there is no research that bridges and answers the gap regarding the basic definition of CCM for SMEs. So, from this justification two research questions are raised as follows:

RQ 1: How has the definition of CCM for SMEs evolved?

RQ 2: What are the trends in the CCM research direction for SMEs?

##### *Design Research Plans*

In designing a research plan, it is necessary to analyze the identification of the components contained in the research question. According to Methley et al (2014) PICO is a tool that can help analyze the components of the research question whether it is

appropriate to the problem, the interest of the research to the context / purpose of the research or not. The table is as follows:

**Table 1. Research Question Designed by PICO**

| No   | Research Question                                           | Problem                            | Interest                        | Context                        |
|------|-------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| RQ 1 | How has the definition of CCM for SMEs evolved?             | <i>The evolution of Definition</i> | <i>Cross Cultural Marketing</i> | <i>Small Medium Enterprise</i> |
| RQ 2 | What are the trends in the CCM research direction for SMEs? | <i>Research trend direction</i>    | <i>Cross Cultural Marketing</i> | <i>Small Medium Enterprise</i> |

Table 1 shows research questions that can be stated according to the problem, the interest of the research to the context / purpose of the research area.

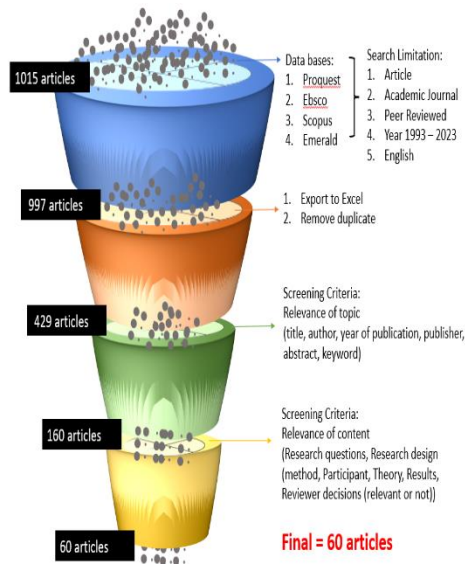
##### *Data Collection*

Data collection in this study was carried out by comprehensive research. The data taken are articles registered on 4 search engines, namely Proquest, Ebsco, Scopus and Emerald, namely on May 3, 2023. Keywords are then arranged using BOOLEAN "OR" and "AND". so that a research string is as follows:

*“Cross cultural marketing small medium enterprise OR cross-cultural marketing SME OR global marketing small medium enterprise OR international marketing small medium enterprise OR internationalization marketing small medium enterprise OR internationalization marketing small medium enterprise OR home country OR host country AND definition OR*

*concept OR meaning OR element OR image OR dimension OR factor OR key AND relation OR relationship OR impact OR influence OR connect"*

Furthermore, the search string is used in advance research on the four data bases, while the flow is described as follows:



**Figure 1. Funnel Diagram**

Figure 1 shows a funnel diagram that describes the data search process using 4 tools (Proquest, Ebsco, Scopus and Emerald). In the first stage, 1015 articles were found using search limitations such as "Article, Academic Journal, Peer Reviewed, Year 1993 – 2023 and English". After that from the four databases, it is compiled and extracted based on the same data / eliminating the same data. So that found 429 articles. Furthermore, exclusion is carried out in the form of screening criteria / Relevance of the topic, such as: Title, Author, Year of publication, Publisher, Abstract, Keyword.

So that 160 articles were found which were then extracted/filtered again by reading the full text with exclusion in the form of screening criteria/Relevance of Content, such as: Research questions, Research design (method, Participant, Theory, Results),

Reviewer decisions (relevant or not). So, it was found that the final articles that were finalized were as many as 60 articles.

### **Assessment of Study Quality**

Popay, Rogers & Williams (1998) stated that in conducting an assessment of study quality in qualitative research studies, data triangulation techniques can be used. However, there is an implementation of assessing a quality in qualitative terms that can be represented by a question such as "how are different sources of knowledge about the same issue compared and contrast?". From this question the researcher can elaborate on the answers to the questions without being biased/subjective. This is because data is never pure (Popay, Rogers & Williams: 1998). Rather, there is a "continuum of contamination in both the collection and the presentation of the data" (Plummer, 1983). So, this stage is aimed to do a comparative analysis of each identity and context of the article.

### **The Meaning of Cross-Cultural Marketing**

Over the past 30 years, the definition of Cross-Cultural Marketing (CCM) has evolved significantly, particularly through the development of technology. In the early 1990s, technology in marketing was limited to traditional electronic media such as television advertisements, typically in the form of short commercials or live shopping formats. This marketing medium required substantial budgets and was therefore mostly accessible to larger firms rather than SMEs. At that time, technology in marketing functioned primarily as a broadcast tool and effectiveness assessments relied on manual research. The objective of advertising was largely transactional, focusing on sales.

From 2010 onward, technology expanded beyond mass media into digital platforms, websites, and social media. Technology has transformed from a mere promotional

channel into an integrated system capable of generating insights through algorithms, data analytics, and automated reporting. Marketing activities now aim not only for sales but also for brand equity, customer engagement, and global visibility. This shift aligns with the emergence of Industry 4.0, where technological adoption becomes a central driver of business competitiveness. Consequently, technology now acts as a strategic enabler that facilitates SMEs' expansion into international markets and mediates cross-cultural interaction.

Another evolving concept in CCM is the SMEs' international network. In the 1990s, international networks were understood mainly as export partners that facilitated product shipments across borders. Between 2010 and 2023, this understanding broadened to include global mentors, international strategic partners, and digital market researchers who support SMEs through strategic consultations, cultural insights, and digital market intelligence. Access to mentorship and digital data has become essential for SMEs preparing to compete globally.

In contrast, several CCM keywords have remained consistent over the last three decades, such as culture and global competitiveness. Cultural understanding continues to serve as the foundation of cross-cultural engagement, and SMEs' ability to compete globally still depends on understanding market conditions and building the capabilities required to succeed across cultural boundaries.

This study identifies key themes in the evolution of CCM: internal and external factors, global mindset, expansion, culture, technological development, market entry, commitment, global market orientation, regulation, resource building, SMEs' international network, knowledge-based

view (KBV), market diversification, micro-to-macro strategic alignment, resource-based view (RBV), global competitiveness, and internal market development.

Therefore, the meaning of CCM for SMEs can be defined as a strategic marketing approach to entering new markets that begins with developing a global mindset and cultural understanding. This process integrates internal capabilities (resources, commitment) and external enablers (regulation, partnerships, market entry strategies) through technology-mediated activities to achieve competitive success in global markets.

### **Cross-Cultural Marketing Research Trends**

CCM is supported by four core disciplines: anthropology, psychology, strategic management, and international business. Originating from anthropology, CCM initially focused on how individuals understand cultural history and develop cross-cultural connections (Yousef, 2020). With globalization and technological advancement, these cultural competencies expanded beyond daily social interaction into business and marketing contexts.

Industry 4.0 has accelerated the relevance of CCM to SMEs, as many aspire to scale internationally. One of the primary challenges for SMEs in applying CCM is ensuring they have agile and efficient organizational structures (Priyono et al., 2020). SMEs also require strong social capital, including public trust and relational capabilities, which influence strategic decisions related to foreign market entry (Menzies, Orr & Paul, 2020).

Publication trends over the past 30 years reveal fluctuations in CCM research output. However, insights from this systematic literature review indicate that future CCM studies are likely to increase, particularly

those examining technological interventions and how digital platforms shape cross-cultural marketing practices for SMEs. As global markets become increasingly interconnected, technology-enabled CCM strategies will continue to grow in importance.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that it is re-conceptualized as a marketing activity that aims to not only focus on entering new markets but also being able to win global competition. The CCM supports the formation of a global mindset and SMEs understanding of the host country's culture through internal (resource building, commitment) and external factors (regulations and technological media).

Since the last 30 years, research on CCM has experienced fluctuations in the number of publications. The results of this study can provide an overview of the direction of the prediction of CCM research trends in the following year. In the further, the research of CCM is predicted to increase in the number of studies that examine how technology intervenes in the implementation of CCM for SMEs. This can be seen from the chat flow and analysis through the Systematic Literature Review on articles from the last thirty years.

This study recommends for future researchers to find out how the CCM model is in Industry 4.0 or 5.0 and also describe how the form of technological involvement in the implementation of CCM. For SMEs, this study recommends considering the direction of the CCM research trend in building internal resources and in developing marketing strategies in carrying out international and global marketing.

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