

Its Been Done Before: An Archaeological Perspective on International Marketing

by

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Abstract

A commonly held belief is that the concept of global marketing is a post World War II phenomenon. However, a closer examination of archaeological artefacts within the Great Zimbabwe Empire suggests otherwise and provide evidence of a complex prehistoric society engaged in a global trade network. International trade involving Great Zimbabwe, Europe and Asia flourished for about 200 years, with glass beads, porcelain, ceramics being traded for gold, tin, slaves, rhino horn, ivory and carnivore pelts. As the level of trade increased, so too did the prosperity of local people, which was directly responsible for the rise of class-based societies in Southern Africa. Many of these activities, and subsequent effects on the social system within this society, draw strong parallels with current marketing practices, ideas and philosophies.

Introduction

Marketing is widely regarded as a relatively young discipline, emerging as an area of importance only over the past 50 years. With its roots firmly embedded in the areas of psychology, sociology and anthropology, marketers have attempted to better understand the attitudes and behaviors of consumers and the factors that influence such actions, beliefs and values. Organizations have increasingly used this information as a basis for developing and executing strategies for the pricing, promotion and distribution of products, services or ideas to create exchanges that satisfy both individual and organizational goals (Keegan and Green 1997). This baseline concept is accepted by marketing professionals around the world and has been expanded upon in the recent past with the emergence of the term 'global' or 'international trade' and marketing. Increasing travel and improved communications are responsible for converging national attitudes towards, among other things, styles in clothing, colour, music, food and drink. This globalization of culture has been capitalized upon, and even accelerated by companies that have seized opportunities to find customers around the world. In doing so, contemporary global marketers search for cultural universals - behavioral patterns common to all cultures. Murdock's (1945) seminal paper suggests that cultural commonalities include body adornment, decorative art, status differentiation and, more importantly, trade. What appears to be cultural diversity, then, is often simply a different expression of the same achievement - in other words, a different way of accomplishing the same thing. A widely-held belief amongst most marketers is that wholesale transformation has really only taken place in the 150 years since the Industrial Revolution and that this change has led to marketing and trade on a global scale. An example of this is provided in a well-known and widely used international marketing text (Keegan and Green, 1997):

"Prior to 1840, students sitting at their desks would not have had any item in their possession that was manufactured more than a few miles from where they lived - with the possible exception of the books they were reading."

This point of view is further reinforced with the notion that the term 'global marketing' did not even exist until as recently as two decades ago, and that trade, wealth and income are somehow dealt with differently today than they were, say, 2000 years ago (Keegan & Green 1997). Even 'mass customization' - the identification of a need experienced by a large number of people and the use of mass production techniques and mass marketing to satisfy that need - is considered a recent phenomenon. (Miller et. al. 2000). Global trade and marketing are seen as fairly recent phenomena, having emerged in the last two centuries, and accelerating after the Second World War. These recent roots and superior fiscal management are a *fait accompli* and "the implications of this reality are

crucial for the global marketer.” (Keegan & Green 1997). A close study of prehistory would suggest, however, that these assumptions warrant re-examination at least, and that so-called global marketers may be a little arrogant in claiming novelty. The premise that global trade and marketing are recent phenomena is in conflict with archaeological and anthropological evidence. This paper examines the archaeological findings relating to the rise and fall of the Great Zimbabwe Empire and provides evidence of a complex prehistoric society engaged in a trade network that can certainly be described as global or international.

The Great Zimbabwe Empire: cultural evolution

Since the 1950's much work has been undertaken at Great Zimbabwe Culture sites, and the advent of radiocarbon dating has made possible the establishment of a detailed chronology. We now know that Great Zimbabwe had its florescence between about AD 1290 and 1450. It was the capital of an empire that arguably encompassed most of present-day Zimbabwe as well as parts of Botswana, northern South Africa and Mozambique (Huffman 1972; Sinclair 1982). The economy at Great Zimbabwe was based on trade. This commerce was carried out with Arab traders sailing the East African Coast and items such as Ming Dynasty porcelain and glass beads from Venice were traded for gold, tin, ivory and slaves (Chittick 1970; Horton 1987). This represents an early expression of global trade, and repercussions resulting from this are still evident today in the study area. In order to fully understand the implications, an examination is necessary of the cultural and social changes that took place culminating in the Great Zimbabwe Empire. The first black people to occupy Southern Africa migrated from Central Africa in about AD 200 (Huffman 1989; Maggs 1984). However, hunter/gatherers first populated the area and formed part of what is known as the Stone Age. Early black migrants fall into the Iron Age, and these people brought with them a vastly different way of life compared to the Stone Age. Iron Age people were farmers with domestic crops and animals, and lived a semi-sedentary lifestyle. They made pottery and possessed the ability to smelt and work iron and copper. Cattle played a vital role in their society and Iron Age people lived in a settlement pattern called the Central Cattle Pattern (Kuper 1980; Maggs 1984; Huffman 1986a). Cattle were a measure of wealth in this patriarchal, rank-based society and men could attain status and rank by ownership of cattle. Bridewealth transactions were carried out with cattle acting as currency, and cattle also featured strongly in songs and idioms (Kuper 1982). The focus of these settlements was towards the central cattle byre, with other livestock kept elsewhere. Important members of society, usually men, were buried in the cattle byre. This central byre had a court associated with it, most generally to the side. It was here that men made important decisions and court cases could continue for days. Refuse from refreshment taken during these court cases was discarded in a special midden next to the court. The chief or headman was in charge of the court but village elders had major influence over decisions (Kuper 1982). It is important to note that the chief or headman was accessible to his followers, and lived amongst them, albeit with somewhat elevated status. Small-scale trade was practiced with other villages but economy and ideology were based on agro-pastoralism, with particular emphasis on cattle and cattle-ownership. This scenario irrevocably changed at about AD 800, when Arab traders began sailing along the East African coastline, seeking to establish trade links with the African interior. The earliest archaeological evidence of this is at a site called Schroda (Hanisch 1980; Huffman 1986b). Dated to about AD 800, the Iron Age inhabitants at Schroda commenced barter with Arab traders. Archaeological evidence suggests that carnivore pelts, rhino horn and ivory (both raw and worked) were leaving Schroda in exchange for glass beads (Hanisch 1980).

At about AD 950 the community living at Schroda fled, probably due to a threat of violence, and was replaced by another Iron Age community who established a large village at nearby K2. Trade links with the Arabs were strengthened, as alluvial gold from local riverbeds was now being exploited and traded, along with ivory, rhino horn and carnivore pelts. Quantities of Venetian glass beads traded into

K2 rose dramatically and this increased trade caused fundamental societal transformation (Huffman 1986b). The Central Cattle Pattern that had been in existence for hundreds of years began to change. The court midden at K2 engulfed virtually the entire central cattle byre and cattle were moved to the periphery of the settlement. This was probably a result of the increasing volume of trade which, in turn, would have led to a higher number of court cases, many of these the product of trade negotiations and disputes. Cattle were thus losing their value as currency, and trade was becoming more significant, resulting in the use of certain trade items as currency (Huffman 1986b, 1996). Utilization of imported glass beads at K2 is of interest. Blue-green glass beads were melted down by K2 residents and re-cast into larger beads. This possibly represents a form of currency control. At about AD 1050 the valley in which K2 was situated became overcrowded and the entire community moved their burgeoning city about two kilometers to a site called Mapungubwe. It was during this phase that gold was actively mined for the first time in Southern Africa, with a concomitant increase in trade with Arabs along the East Coast (De Vaal, n.d.; Horton 1987). Song Dynasty glazed ware from China now also formed part of the trade package entering the area (Meyer & Esterhuizen 1994), and tin was also exported (Miller 1995). Mapungubwe is dominated by an 80m high mesa, and this site was chosen as the new residence of the leader and some of his entourage, with the rest of the 5,000 or so followers living in the valley below. Guard-posts have been found at all the ascents, an indicator of the leader's increasing reclusivity. Golden artefacts, including a sceptre, which probably formed part of royal regalia, were excavated from burials on the summit. The leader had thus attained the status of a king. The court was located at the base of the hill and was probably run by trusted counselors. Significantly, there is no trace of cattle being penned within the town. Outlying regional centers have been discovered that probably served as Mapungubwe's support base, some mining gold, some cultivating cereals, and some farming livestock (Van Riet Lowe 1936). The leader, who had attained royal status, lived on top of the hill with commoners living down below. Currency and wealth were now measured in foreign trade goods, and not cattle. This Iron Age society was no longer rank-based and is considered the earliest expression of a class-based society in Southern Africa. This represents a fundamental shift in ideology, resulting from active participation in foreign trade (Huffman 1996). At about AD 1250 the Mapungubwe kingdom collapsed, probably as a result of an extended regional drought. This caused a political lacuna that was soon filled. Great Zimbabwe, situated about 400 kilometers north of Mapungubwe, had been in existence since about AD 900, albeit as a small Iron Age village, with limited trading ties. The opportunity was seized, and Mapungubwe's trade links were annexed and augmented. Large-scale gold and tin mining was undertaken (Miller 1995; Summers 1969) and there is also archaeological evidence of slavery forming part of the trade package. Trade items reaching Great Zimbabwe also increased in variety. Celadons and other glazed ware, including Ming Dynasty porcelain, were imported along with the ubiquitous glass beads from Venice (Garlake 1968; Meyer & Esterhuizen 1994). Interestingly, the highest quality ceramics were discovered in the royal wives' area, the interpretation being that these were gifts by traders to royal wives in order to curry favor with the king (Huffman 1996).

During its epoch, Great Zimbabwe was the capital of a huge kingdom, expressing influence north-south from the Zambezi River to South Africa, and east-west from the Mozambique coast into Botswana. A network of provincial and regional centers was established in order to more successfully manage the kingdom. Great Zimbabwe itself was home to more than 18,000 people and its settlement layout was a progression of the class-based system evident at Mapungubwe (Huffman 1996). The king at Great Zimbabwe, as at Mapungubwe, lived on top of a dominant hill, with his wives and the commoner population in the valley below. Significant areas were further sanctified by the erection of impressive dry-stone walls, providing ritual seclusion and a guarantee of privacy for royals. Societal regulations were encoded into the walling by means of masonry patterning and the use of colored stone, providing commoners and royals with a set of behavioral rules and etiquette. The Great Zimbabwe Empire collapsed at about AD 1450 for reasons as yet unknown. Various hypotheses have

been offered, including the over-utilization of natural resources in the immediate vicinity of the capital, the outbreak of an epidemic, or internecine strife. Whatever the reason, by the time the Portuguese established trading stations on the coast in the sixteenth century, Great Zimbabwe had already been abandoned for about 50 years (Axelson 1969; Da Silva Rego & Baxter 1962).

Parallels with Modern Marketing Thinking

International trade involving Great Zimbabwe, Europe and the East flourished for about 200 years. Items traded into Southern Africa included glass beads, porcelain and other ceramics, with gold, tin, slaves, rhino horn, ivory and carnivore pelts leaving the area. As the level of trade increased, so too did the prosperity of local people, which was directly responsible for the rise of class-based societies in Southern Africa. This is evident through the progression of Iron Age society in the study area from rank-to class-based from about AD 800 onwards. Nowhere else in Southern Africa was the influence of international trade more strongly felt, and Iron Age societies in non-affected areas remained rank-based and followed a completely different cultural evolutionary path. As a result, a complex social system was created in the Great Zimbabwe region, whereby the possession of certain items represented a high-level position or stature in society. Most gold items were associated with elite Zimbabwe towns rather than with commoner settlements, and most gold items were found at Great Zimbabwe itself. Glass beads, however, were numerous and were found in both elite and commoner settlements. Imported celadons and other glazed wares were, like gold, restricted to the ruling elite (Garlake 1968; Huffman 1996). Through this analysis, it can be seen that the activities undertaken in the Great Zimbabwe Empire, and the subsequent effects on the social system of that culture, draw some parallels with current marketing practices and ideas. Two main themes emerge from this discussion – that of (a) global marketing and (b) social class and consumption patterns – both of which have been extensively explored, analyzed and discussed in the marketing literature over the past 50 years.

Global marketing and international trade: The concept of global trade is usually associated with post-Industrial Revolution society, whilst the evolution of global marketing is mainly seen as being post World War II (Miller et. al. 2000). Obviously advances in technology have facilitated the ease with which organizations can trade their wares in international markets and information on how to do this effectively has been prescribed extensively in marketing textbooks. This involves, amongst other activities, understanding customer needs, monitoring changes in the external and internal marketing environments and developing strategic plans to effectively reach export markets. Accordingly, when export products are consistent with consumer wants and needs, consumers will be more inclined to exchange another item of value to acquire those goods, otherwise an alternate supplier will be sourced (Ortiz-Buonafina 1991). A greater degree of cultural diversity and a more dynamic environment have certainly made international trade a far more complicated process than what it once was. Similarly, identifying the needs of consumers when they have very diverse attitudes, behaviors, beliefs and values is equally difficult. Nevertheless, it is perhaps one of the most important tasks that global marketers need to undertake. By examining archaeological sites, it can be seen that international trade was prevalent in prehistoric communities and that the ‘globalization’ of world markets occurred well before it was discussed and analyzed within the marketing profession. Moreover, whilst there is a high level of sophistication in modern day marketing practices, the basic premise of delivering satisfaction to consumers and exchanging goods of value is one that can quite easily be dated back to this period.

Social class and consumption patterns: Empirical research has consistently shown close links between economic growth and export growth, with both being essential for the alleviation of poverty. Countries that have a closed economy and inward looking policies generally experience problems in achieving or sustaining high growth rates (Sharer 1999). In developing nations, economic growth depends greatly on those nations’ ability to develop effective output. In many instances this involves understanding and

managing the role of the informal economy, which is usually comprised of peasant markets, small-scale manufacturing and the provision of services often on a barter or non-cash basis (Miller et. al. 2000; Morris and Pitt 1995). The increased wealth of individuals within a society, along with their occupation, possessions and class-consciousness, brings with it a change in the social stratification and class system of that society (Engel, Blackwell and Miniard 1986). According to Packard's (1959) theory of conspicuous consumption, people consume products to demonstrate a superior level of status both to themselves and to their friends. They acquire, own, use, and display certain goods and services to enhance their sense of self, to present an image of what they are like, to represent what they feel and think, and to bring about the types of social relationships they wish to have (Goffman 1959; Belk 1988). This pattern of behavior is evident in both prehistoric communities, as already discussed, as well as modern society, where prestige brands are acquired as an outward display of status. Hence, whilst the symbols used to show one's position in society may have changed, the basic desire of humans to express and communicate their social class ranking to others has not altered significantly over many centuries.

Conclusion

Today, most nations, regardless of the degree of economic development or political philosophy, have recognized the importance of marketing as well as the necessity for developing strong international trade relationships. The production and distribution of goods and services in any society, whether it be on a domestic or international scale, is governed by a set of rules, which dictate what one must do or be to acquire one's livelihood. These rules, in turn, influence the process of human development, affecting personality, tastes, identities, habits and values of individuals within that society (Bowles 1998). An understanding of these issues and how they evolve is as important in today's market as it was in prehistoric times. Whilst the reasons behind the demise of the Great Zimbabwe Empire, and many other empires that followed, remain unknown the premise that the world is only now becoming a 'global' market place is somewhat misleading. Further exploration of other archaeological sites throughout the world would no doubt reveal a similar story to the one presented in this discussion and demonstrate that trade has been, and in all likelihood, will continue to be an important part of any country's long-term economic survival.

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