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International Business and the Challenges of Global Competition

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Abstract:- Challenges to the international expansion of a firm's business must be well understood and addressed. They include country, political, and currency risks and structural and employee capacity challenges. Recent developments such as the rise of protectionism in mature liberal markets, climate change, the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war have escalated global business risks.

The impacts of the coronavirus pandemic over the last two years and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war have had a debilitating impact on the global business ecosystem, which the uncoordinated responses from different governments have exacerbated. Foreign companies operating in Russia have been forced to suspend or exit the profitable Russian market by parent governments, investors, and shareholders, even at a significant loss, thus dampening the ability to compete against peers. The actions taken could even lead to permanent loss of market that they have striven hard to acquire.

The coronavirus pandemic could be rightly called an act of God since the world could not prevent its spread. That cannot explain the current war situation in Ukraine because the political actors' unwise decisions are responsible for the severe losses and existential challenges faced by international companies and the global population. This paper discusses the impact of this emergent risk to international businesses that the Russia-Ukraine war has thrown up where a friendly host country suddenly becomes an international pariah, and business operations and survival now moved to the vagaries of international politics.

I. INTRODUCTION

The profitability and competitiveness of a firm depend on its ability to exploit and deploy its available resources to create products or offer services that provide sustainable value and then cost-effectively deliver the value to consumers. Firms always compete for the patronage and continued loyalty of consumers for their products or services, and the extent to which they are successful determines their market share. A firm will enjoy a competitive advantage in a market segment if there is a difference(s) between it and its competitors in the marketplace sufficient to secure the loyalty of a significant set of buyers, which is reflected in some product delivery attributes (Coyne,1986). Firms seek the opportunity to expand their businesses wherever they can find a new market for it. Expanding from the familiar local market to the global marketplace gives a growing company access to more customers, new talent and greater possibilities.

The Globalization of Markets theory propounded by Theodore Levitt, which described how well-managed companies aided by Technology offer globally standardized products that are advanced, functional, reliable and low priced (Levitt,1983), has generally been deemed too simplistic due to the realities of the uniqueness of each market. Multinational firms that think globally and act locally were considered more realistic. Following from the above, Thompson, Strickland & Gamble's (2013) description of global competition as existing when competitive conditions across national markets are sufficiently linked to form a true world market and when leading competitors compete head-to-head in many different countries may be too simplistic.. We will therefore stick with internationalization rather than the globalization of firms in this paper.

The cross border expansion of business enables the production and sale of goods and services between countries. Business becomes international when goods are produced local and sold locally and internationally, goods are produced abroad and sold locally or goods are produced abroad and sold both locally and internationally. The expansion enables the Firm to have a healthy and diversified earnings portfolio, which provides it with a natural hedge against the volatility of local growth, country risk, and currency risk and allows it to obtain key resources economically. The success or otherwise of the international expansion of the Firm's business affects some key set of people and groups within and outside the Firm called stakeholders.While International Firms can secure more markets for their products and services, there are competitive challenges common to all and peculiar to each market which aspiring global Firms must be prepared for to find success during their global expansion.

Internationalization can be fascinating but risky if the proper study of the selected countries has not been done or is shoddily carried out. Significant reasons behind the popularity of internationalization of businesses include the opening up of trade borders by most countries across the world and the elimination of trade barriers, among many others (Azuayi,2016). The uniqueness of each country is reflected in its Government, policies, laws, cultures, currency, time zones and economic and human development level (Cote,2020). International Firms should expect to navigate the challenges of dealing with language barriers, cultural differences, management of global teams, Currency Exchange and Inflation Rates and Nuances of Foreign Politics, Policy, and Relations to succeed.

Internationalization has become much easier due to the advancement in communication and technology. These are crucial in ensuring that foreign businesses are properly and timely operated without experiencing problems.

Today's operating business environment is characterized by rapid, continuous and unpredictable changes clouded by uncertainties. The major drivers of these changes are "technological changes and globalization" (Voelpel, Leibold&Tekie, 2004; pp. 258). As a result of these changes, the traditional business marketplace has transformed in a very fundamental way into a knowledge propelled new economy or networked economy (Tapscott, 1997: Voelpel, Leibold&Tekie, 2004). For companies operating in today's business environment to flourish and remain relevant, they must continuously re-invent business strategies and evolve several new business models in addition to upgrading existing ones. The invention of new business models and improvement of existing ones provide firms with disruptive competitive advantages.

Business model represents the strategic choices that are made within and outside the organization to create and capture value and offers a dominant means for executives to make and communicate their strategic choices (Shafer, Smith & Linder, 2005). One of the strategic choices commonly made by most businesses is the internationalization of their operations abroad. Internationalisation of business has been of great interest to most enterprises as they see their long-term future growth and sustainability in cross border expansion. The domestic markets in most developed economies have become too competitive with inadequate opportunities for generating returns that will satisfy the shareholders. Emerging markets have been projected to produce 70% of the world GDP growth by 2030 whilst developed economies have been projected to have a modest future growth expectation (Berger, 2012). Therefore, the future business growth is in the relatively unexplored emerging markets.

II. RELEVANT THEORIES & MODELS FOR ACHIEVING COMPETITIVE MARKET ADVANTAGE

Businesses are established to create and deliver value to generate profits. The success of an enterprise depends on its ability to earn superior returns after securing its markets by engaging in activities that limit price reduction and cost increases. Firms rightly position themselves to secure the buyers' patronage in the market by offering costs lower than competitors for the same benefits or providing unique benefits and charging higher prices. Thus, competitive positioning is achieved when a firm can create a product or offer a service that extraordinarily brings value and delivers this value to consumers cost-effectively (McGahan,1994). There has been an ongoing discussion among strategic management experts on how a firm can achieve a competitive advantage over its industry peers and generate higher profits (rents).

One perspective has come to be widely practiced in organizations after gaining strong support in academic circles and among many consultants. This perspective based on microeconomic theory establishes a link between industry structure, firm behaviour (e.g. price, capacity, advertising, R&D), and possibilities for profitability. This perspective has been referred to as the 'Structure-conduct-performance framework' (SCP). The SCP framework explains the connection between economic or market structure, market conduct and its performance (Gordon, 2022), noting that these three elements or variables of a market are considered important as they influence market behaviours exhibited by buyers and sellers.

The structure–conduct–performance (SCP) framework argues that market structure is a determinant of firm conduct, which determines performance. It states that the degree of market concentration is inversely related to the degree of competition. This is based on the assumption that market concentration encourages firms to collude. Based on this relationship between industry, firm behaviour and profit, the SCP perspective suggests that an attempt be made to analyze and contextualize the competitive conditions of industries by examining the underlying structure (the factors that determine market competitiveness) of an industry. Market structure can be measured by several factors, such as the number of competitors in an industry, the heterogeneity of products, and the cost of entry and exit. Understanding the industry's structure provides the strategist with the necessary information to determine firms' conduct (behaviour) and performance.

III. RELEVANT THEORIES & MODELS

A Firm is a collection of resources and capabilities that provides the source of returns and the basis of its strategy. A successful firm will need to position itself effectively in its industry by understanding the industry's underlying structure and the factors that determine market competitiveness. Several theories and models have been developed to analyze and understand how firms compete with industry peers for profits and gain an advantage in a market and how strategies could be developed to enhance and sustain competitive advantage. The model to achieve this, called "Five Forces that shapes industry strategy", was propounded by Michael Porter.

The underlying structure of an industry must be analyzed in terms of the Five Forces that Shapes Strategy to understand profitability and competition in an industry. The Five Forces Porter (2008) listed are the bargaining power of suppliers, bargaining power of buyers, barriers to entry, the threat of substitute products or services and rivalry among existing competitors. Porter argued that the industry makes no profits where the forces are intense, but the converse is true in industries where the forces are benign.

Porter's Five Forces strategy model focuses on the external competitive environment of an organization. However, a firm's internal environment, resources and capabilities are more critical in determining the strategic action and analyzing the potential of these resources for generating a sustained competitive advantage for this organization. Therefore, a major area of research in the strategic management of an organization is to understand the unique sources of its sustained competitive advantage.

Barney (1995) made us understand that Porter's (2008) model analysis dealt only with the environmental factors that affect the industry and is only one part of the story of gaining competitive advantage. According to Barney (1995), a firm cannot create sustained competitive advantage by simply evaluating environmental opportunities and threats and conducting business only in high-opportunity, low-threat environments. He argued that with the competitive positioning advantage of Porter's (2008) model, analysis of the Firm's unique resources and capabilities, defined as including all inputs into the production process, such as physical, financial, human and other assets an organization uses to manufacture, develop and deliver services to its customers, is required.

Barney (1995) notes that market share between these two competitors tended to shift back and forth over time with no clear winner resulting in what he calls "competitive parity". However, some firms have started to opt for competing in different niches and geographies, perhaps recognizing that their past strategies did not result in a competitive advantage over the other. This means that Firms are starting to leverage resources and capabilities that result in a competitive advantage that helps them pursue growth rather than just protection of interest or holding steady market share.

"If all you are trying to do is essentially the same thing as your rivals, then it is unlikely that you will be very successful.

Michael Porter, Professor at Harvard Business School

"If you don't have a competitive advantage, don't compete."

Jack Welch, GE's legendary former CEO

These sound like simple advice, but determining in practice whether a firm has a competitive advantage, which resources and capabilities contribute to that advantage, and how this change over time is a complex task.

The Resource-Based View (RBV) model combines the internal analysis of phenomena within companies with the external analysis of the industry and the competitive environment. The framework for this internal analysis of the resources and capabilities of a firm was provided by Barney (2008). He postulated that managers must look inwards for valuable, rare, and costly to imitate resources and exploit them through their organizations" (VRIO) to discover its unique resources and capabilities for creating sustained competitive advantage. RBV model help put core competency ideas into practice and develop sensible diversifying strategies (Collis & Montgomery, 2008).

A sustained competitive advantage is established when competitors cannot readily imitate the Firm's superior product/delivery attributes. A firm, therefore, needs to evolve a deliberate strategy to ensure that the capability gap between it and its competitors is never breached. This strategy may include direct reinvestment of profits, continuous innovation for product/service differentiation, capacity enhancement, cost efficiency, market expansion, product promotions, etc. Successful identification and focused implementation of the competitive strategy will help sustain the superior performance of a firm over its competitors.

For an effective strategy, it is important to understand the relationship between a firm's environmental opportunities and threats and its internal strengths and weaknesses (SWOT analysis). SWOT suggests that internal and external factors affecting a firm should be explored to understand the sources of competitive advantage.

IV. DYNAMIC CAPABILITIES

In this volatile and uncertain dynamic global environment essentially driven by technology, a winning organization will seek to achieve a competitive advantage by demonstrating "timely responsiveness and rapid and flexible product innovation, coupled with the management capability to effectively coordinate and redeploy internal and external competencies in order to achieve congruence with the changing business environment (Teece, 2007).

Competencies and capabilities typically must be built because they cannot be bought in the organizational processes of firms. Leamed et al. (cited in Teece, Pisano &Shuen, 1997) stated that a company's success or even its future development depends on its ability to find or create 'a competence that is timely distinctive, i.e. what an organization can do very well.

The competitive advantage of firms lies in their managerial and organizational processes (Teece, Pisano &Shuen, 1997). They typify how things are done in the Firm, i.e. routines or patterns of current practice and learning and shaped by specific asset position (current specific endowments of technology, intellectual property, complementary assets, customer base, and its external relations with suppliers), and the paths available.

Dynamic capabilities refer to the ability to achieve new forms of competitive advantage in the face of market dynamics by driving changes in operational capabilities and function (Teece, Pisano &Shuen (1997). They are strategic activities that manipulate asset configurations according to the logic of exploitation or exploration.Dynamic capabilities seek to explore how firms evolve and prosper in a complex and highly competitive market within which strategic insight is considered essential (Holt & McNulty, 2008). The dynamic capabilities approach focuses on the Firm's internal processes, deployment, and evolution.

The better the group of people are at fulfilling the customer's demands (be it internal or external to the Firm), the greater the competencies exhibited by the group of people along with technology and other elements. These non-static competencies that gradually evolve through learning were defined by Drejer (2000) as a system of technology, human beings, organizational (formal) and cultural (informal) elements and the interactions of these elements. The development of competence hinges on the understanding of the dynamic interactions of these elements through the process of critical reflexive learning.

Learning is a process by which repetition and experimentation enable tasks to be performed better and quicker, enabling new production opportunities to be identified (Teece, Pisano &Shuen, 1997). It involves both organizational and individual skills. Organizational learning would be observed in the levels of competence development proposed by Drejer (2000), beginning from Novice to Advanced beginners, proficient, expert and world-class.

According to Teece, Pisano &Shuen(1997), the capabilities approach indicates that competitive advantage is not just a function of how one plays the game but also a function of the 'assets' one has to play with and how these assets can be deployed and redeployed in a changing market.

V. SYMBOLIC CAPITAL

We recognize that firms operate in a market and discursive environment in which Firms are viewed as embedded in social contexts consisting of ties, norms, values, beliefs, and regulatory pressure. Therefore, a Firm's success and survival depend not just on superior profits earned but on its "abilities to conform to socially defined standards of behaviour and action" (Holt & McNulty, 2008). The socially defined standards of behaviour and action are known as Symbolic Capital. Symbolic Capital is a resource by which authority and credibility are established amongst employees, peers, customers, regulators and other organizational constituents through the capability to articulate legitimate judgments and actions from a specific institutional position.

Understanding the Firm as a dynamic domain of resources and capabilities requires recognizing that firms are subject to market and institutional forces. Institutional theorists attribute organizational success and survival at least partly to firms' abilities to conform to socially defined standards of behaviour and action. As organized phenomena embedded in a social context, it is a necessity that firms secure legitimacy and support by demonstrating acceptable and appropriate behaviour. In this late modernity, Firms need to consciously invest in their symbolic assets as much as it does in economic assets. Accordingly, Oliver's (1997) concept of sustained competitive advantage combines resource-based and institutional perspectives to argue that firms need both asset and institutional Capital for sustained competitive advantage.

VI. CULTURE AS COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE TOOL

The importance of organizational culture was underscored by Schein (1996), who noted it as the missing concept in organization studies and defined it as a "more profound level of basic assumptions and beliefs (paradigm) shared by members of an organization that operate unconsciously and define an organization's view of itself and its environment in a taken for granted fashion (Schein, 1986 cited in Kemp & Dwyer 2001).

Paradigm is essentially cultural, evolves and embraces assumptions about the nature of the organizational environment, the managerial style in the organization, the nature of its leaders, and the operational routines (Johnson,1992). Culture and its main elements were defined by Johnson (1992) using the "cultural web" as a framework. Johnson (1992) identified six major components of the "cultural web': routines and rituals, stories, symbols, power structures, organizational structures and control systems.

An organization is continually shaped by the many pressures for change in its environment, manifesting in external opportunities and threats and internal strengths and weaknesses (Barney, 1995). External changes could be economic, legal, political, environmental and technical, while internal changes could be in developing competence, changing consumer tastes and behaviours or employee issues such as needs for recognition, satisfaction at work, achievement and advancement.

Strategies are the creation of people whose thoughts and decisions are largely shaped by their paradigms. The strategic intent would thus be to ensure that the organization's response matches the changes in the environment, which would be largely determined by organizational culture. Managers, according to Johnson (1992), are "likely to deal with the situation in ways which are in line with the paradigm and the cultural, social and political norms of organizational life" but cause resistance to significant change when the action required is outside the scope of the organization's paradigm and the constraints of the cultural web described above.

Strong cultures connote deeply held and widely shared core values and impact significantly on the behaviour of the employees. Culture gives identity to the organization's members, generates in members commitment above personal interests and provides a "social glue that holds the organization together, thereby acting as a control mechanism that shapes the attitude and behaviour of employees" (Robbins et al., 1994 cited in Kemp & Dwyer 2001). A distinctive organizational culture can ensure that all the components of the organization are working to a common end and provide a basis for difficult-to-imitate competitive market advantage (Kemp & Dwyer, 2001).

VII. QUEST FOR SUSTAINABLE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Sustainable Competitive Advantage is the goal of every competitive strategy, and it is established when competitors cannot readily imitate the Firm's superior product/delivery attributes. Coyne (1986) identified the conditions that must be satisfied for a competitive advantage to be meaningful in strategy. These are:

- Customers must sense a consistent difference in important attributes between the producer's product or service and that of the competition.
- The difference must be the direct consequence of a capability gap between the producer and his competitors.
- Importantly, the difference in attributes perceived and the capability gap can be expected to endure over time. An advantage over the competition is durable only if competitors cannot readily imitate the Firm's superior product/delivery attributes. In other words, a gap in the differentiation's capability must separate the Firm from its competitors; if not, no meaningful competitive advantage exists.

Sustainable competitive advantage is hard to achieve because competition could quickly copy the advantage or disrupt the market with a better product, as exemplified by the following examples.Minnetonka, Inc. worked on developing its liquid soap and was the first to introduce it to the market, but that advantage did not last long as competitors quickly copied the product. Texas Instruments attempted to exploit an advantage over its competitors in the wristwatch market, but target consumers did not welcome the product. The barriers that RCA built in the vacuum tube market became irrelevant when transistors and semiconductors were born (Coyne,1986).

Herein, these companies' quest to create sustainable competitive advantage in their industry was undermined by easy imitation by competitors, unenthusiastic market reception of new products or total market disruption by competition.For a Firm to enjoy a competitive advantage in the market segment, the difference in essential attributes must be felt in the marketplace sufficiently for the product to have a footprint in the market and win the loyalty of many buyers. Competitive advantage results from all net differences in important product/ delivery attributes, not just one factor such as price or quality. Thus, a meaningful competitive advantage must be able to produce a market footprint of significant breadth and depth.

- **Breadth**: How many customers are attracted to the product above all others by the difference in product attributes? What volume do these customers purchase?
- **Depth:** How strong a preference has this difference generated? Would minor changes in the balance of attributes cause the customers to switch?

A Firm is said to have a capability gap when it is the only one that can perform the function responsible for the differentiated product/delivery attribute, or the competition requires maximum efforts at a high cost to perform the same. So defined, capability gaps fall into four categories(Coyne,1986):

A. Business system gaps

This arises when the Firm can perform individual functions more effectively than competitors and if competitors cannot easily match. The capability gap may be created due to superior engineering or technical skills leading to greater precision or reliability in the finished product.

B. Position gaps

This arises from historical decisions, actions, and circumstances of legacy management. Capability gaps could arise from earlier management's reputation, consumer awareness and trust, and order backlogs.

C. Regulatory/legal gaps

This may arise from the limitations imposed by Government on activities competitors can perform or the degree to which they can perform those activities. Patents, operating licenses, import quotas, and consumer safety laws can open significant capability gaps among competitors. Governments in many countries deliberately create an uneven playing field by favouring one company over its competitors through policy formulations and tax exemptions and, in some extreme cases, help its preferred candidate to establish a monopoly. Thus, it is not uncommon to see many business leaders spending huge resources to curry favour or buy influence from officials of Government.

D. Organization or managerial quality gaps

This arises from an organization's consistently innovating and adapting more quickly and effectively than its competitors. This flexibility may be the most critical capability gap in industries like computers or financial services, where the competitive environment is shifting rapidly. In other industries, the key capability gap may be an ability to out-innovate competitors, keeping them constantly on the defensive.

An essential condition for sustainability is that existing and potential competitors either cannot or will not take the actions required to close the capability gap. The advantage is not sustainable if competitors can and will fill the gap. A capability gap that competitors cannot close is preferable to one that relies on some restraint. Unfortunately, a producer cannot choose whether or not a particular capability gap meets the former. Consider the two cases more closely.

➢ *Case 1: Competitors cannot fill the gap*

This situation occurs when the capability is secured by specific entry and mobility barriers, such as a vital product patent or unique access to a critical raw material (for example, DeBeer's Consolidated Mines). Under this scenario, sustainable competitive advantage is assured until the barrier is eroded or eliminated. Barriers can erode or be eliminated over time unless they are inherent in the business.

➢ *Case 2: Competitors could close the capability gap but refrain from doing so*
This situation might occur for any one of four reasons.

- **Inadequate potential:** This situation may persist where the cost of closing the capability gap far outweighs the benefits, even if the possessor of the advantage did not retaliate. An example of situations where a payoff is not worth the required investment includes investing in the capacity to achieve "economies of scale" when the capacity required to achieve the required economy exceeds the likely additional demand in the industry.
- **Corresponding disadvantage:** Competitors may choose to leave the gap open where they believe that acting to close the capability gap will open gaps elsewhere that will more than offset the value of closing this gap. A "corresponding disadvantage" situation constitutes at least a temporarily sustainable advantage because, for the moment, an "end game" has been reached.
- **Fear of reprisal:** "Fear of reprisal" is probably among the most common strategic situations in business, but it must be considered unstable over time as competitors' situations and managements shift. Competitors may refrain from filling the capability gap for fear of retaliatory action by the Firm. In this case, the sustainability of the Firm's existing advantage depends on the competitors' continuing to exercise voluntary restraint. For example, Japanese steel makers voluntarily refrain from increasing their U.S. market share for fear that American producers can and will persuade the U.S. government to take harsh protectionist measures (Coyne, 1986).
- **Management inertia:** It may even benefit competitors to close the capability gap but fail because of management's poor assessment of the situation or lack of will, ability, or energy to take the required action. Honda dominated the British motorcycle industry because Norton Villiers Triumph failed to timely respond to a clear threat until it was too late.

In the four cases, the primary determinant of the length of time competitors will tolerate capability gaps is the relationship between the value of the advantage created by the gap and the cost (to each competitor) of closing it. *The worse the cost-to-benefit ratio, the longer the advantage is likely to be sustained* because more remarkable environmental changes are required before value would exceed the cost.

VIII. SUSTAINABLE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE (SCA) AND STRATEGY

Although an SCA is a powerful tool in creating a successful business strategy, it is vital to understand that:

- Holding a SCA does not guarantee financial success, especially if the market sector is not viable or the producer suffers severe operational problems.
- Producers can succeed even when competitors possess a SCA, mainly when the market is rapidly growing as long as real market growth over a given period exceeds the additional capacity advantaged competitors can bring on line during that time (due to, among others, organizational constraints, risk aversion), even weak competitors can thrive.
- Pursuing a sustainable competitive advantage may sometimes conflict with sound business strategy.

In practice, other strong competitors may also profitably coexist alongside the Firm with a sustainable competitive advantage if the:

- Firm's advantage is limited by a finite capacity significantly less than the size of the market. The limitation could be due to antitrust laws or limited access to superior raw materials, limited capacity in low-cost plants, or prohibitive transportation costs beyond certain distances.
- If the market share of the individual competitors is small relative to the market size. In this case, the number of strong competitors can expand for many years without directly competing by taking shares from weak competitors rather than each other.

IX. IMPACT OF TALENTS IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

Approximately three billion employees worldwide, 80% or 2.5 billion, work in emerging markets and developing countries (Berger, 2012). The expansion of International Firms into the emerging market economies to capitalize on the emerging opportunities is fraught with the challenge of sourcing and managing competent talents in addition to the challenges of other elements of Institutional voids, infrastructural gaps, political and cultural challenges etc. It is thus vital to understand how talents are sourced and managed across the entire organization because this ultimately determines the success or otherwise of International Firms in the emerging market economies.

International Firms need to develop a sustainable human resource strategy that will enable cost-effective, highly skilled employees to be available when required. For example, due to the increasing resource constraint and attrition rates in China as a result of competition for high-skilled talent, Lenovo, as part of its 'protect' strategy, established strategic relationships with local higher institutions and business schools for highly talented graduates to be trained as part of their skilled workforce and management team (Harrington, 2012), while the abundance of unskilled workers from around the cities is engaged to address the routine tasks in production and assembly.

Many business groups, such as Tata Group (India) and Koc Holding (Turkey), conduct training programmes to develop highly skilled employees to deal with such inefficiencies (Cavusgil, 2012). Under a group structure, as observed in Tata Group, the cost of training can be lowered by simply spreading it among group companies. Training and development of an internal talent pool enable the group to shift talent to where it is needed, access talent quickly and ultimately lower the cost of hiring from outside the group.

One of the characteristics of emerging market economies is that they enjoy rapid economic growth, which is not matched by the availability of a skilled workforce. The globalization of jobs has thrown up the challenge of local sourcing of skilful workers for International Firms from the limited talent pool. Emerging markets lack sufficient local managers with the necessary set of skills (Reiche, 2012) and thus is created intense competition for existing talents among International Firms and fast-growing local companies. Unlike in developed countries where there is a sufficient pool of talent with technical, organizational and technological skills and thus employers have the upper hand in determining the conditions of service, the converse is the case in developing economies where talents are scarce. The mobility of these talents creates human resource retention challenges

An institutional competency-based view of a firm's strategy postulates that the Firm's managerial, organizational and technological resources should operate coherently under institutional constraints to create complementary, firm-specific competencies that can produce a sustained competitive advantage (Oliver, 1997). The premise above of high-skilled human resource constraints in some emerging market countries may stimulate the need to hire expatriates to augment the shortage of skills and managerial competencies in the home market. This is especially critical when an organization takes on a more global strategy to engender international exposure, dynamic capabilities, and workforce diversity in its growth curve. Lenovo's efforts at attaining global relevance, improving product quality, and building brand equity necessitated a drive to incorporate foreign specialists into its home businesses so that all round improvements can start from the cradle and then be replicated in other economies.

Hiring expatriate employees would greatly benefit in setting up the systems and processes and aiding the embedding of the new organizational culture. They can also help to train the local employees on the critical systems for the global business and develop specific procedures with the locals for the particular market they are operating from. Expatriate hire could, however, be very costly for the organization when elevated positions and entitlements cost of deployment and demands are considered. It gets worse when the expatriate lacks culture and language congruence. Experience has shown that International Firms in emerging economies have a better chance of success when their expatriate employees can assimilate and adapt, within ethical boundaries, to the local culture and customs (Cavusgil, Ghauri, &Akcal, 2013).

International Firms must consider cultural and ethical dimensions in their hiring decisions to ensure seamless integration and relationship harmony. Hiring practices that work in one region may not work at all in another, and again, cultural understanding of the regions in which a firm is expanding can be considered a critical issue for success. International Firms' subsidiaries relying heavily on expatriates from the home office and failing to nurture and develop local talents would inevitably generate resentment and create unmet skill requirements as the company expands. This has been the case in the recent expansion of Chinese companies into South Africa and Zambia, where they transferred approximately 200,000 semi- and un-skilled labourers to avoid language, cultural, and cost concerns (Wilkinson, Wood and Demirbag, 2014).

Joerres (2011) argues that using expatriate employees harms organizations in emerging markets by stigmatizing the local workforce. Employees perceive a ceiling on advancement within the company. A reverse expatriate strategy where potential managers are drawn from the local workforce and trained abroad may be the recommended alternative. This approach facilitated the integration of local managers within the corporate culture, HR policies and marketing. The reverse expatriate approach also avoids the pitfalls of developing local competencies, as described by Li & Scullion (2010), which the authors deem problematic due to the time and energy required to acquire tacit knowledge of the emerging market.

Another approach leverages diaspora citizens of the emerging market to bridge the gap between locals and expatriates. These workers are generally skilled, fluent in the local language, and have a developed 'world view' from assignments abroad. The repatriation of this class of employees enables the Firm to bring developed world-class skills to an emerging market rapidly. Stevens et al. (2006) noted that even this strategy presents challenges, especially in the retention of repatriated workers, as they must still readjust to their new environment.

Whatever hiring strategy is adopted, it must be such that it facilitates the recruitment of effective leaders not necessarily based on whether the individuals are local or not, but on their competencies and established networks to ensure competitive advantage in the market.

X. IMPACT OF ETHICS IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

In today's reality, businesses are now firmly conducted both in the economic environment and in society's realm of perception, as companies are considered to embody the social environment (Holt &McNutty, 2008). Globalization and international expansion of corporations have given companies more visibility and, at the same time, are susceptible to reputational risk arising from the improper conduct of the Company or staff in host countries. The reputational risk facing companies worldwide has been exacerbated by the rapid advancement of internet technology which has provided a communication platform where people from all over the world can meet in a digital space without being constrained by time, space and location (Chen, 2014). This signals a shift in the balance of power in the consumer-producer relationship.

The long-term survival and competitiveness of business enterprises are now very much dependent on the compatibility of the consumers' interests and expectations with that of products/services and practices of the business enterprises, unlike in the past, where the focus was only on profit. The degree of perceived ethical disposition of international companies has become a determinant of the level of acceptance by society. Thus, ethics practice has become a source of competitive advantage among companies. International companies now have a solid incentive to carefully plan and implement responsibility and ethics initiatives to project positive global images.

Consequently, there has been an increasing effort at self-regulation by businesses and industry stakeholders to promote ethical practices and transparency within the organization and be more responsive to stakeholders' expectations in a business ecosystem. This realization has spawned a growing adoption of social marketing wherein companies are branding themselves as ethical, environmentally and socially responsible, thus distinguishing themselves from competitors and achieving competitive advantage.

The business practice of International Companies in foreign markets must be grounded in strong ethical practices. The realization of the long-term growth objective of an International company depends on the depth of integrity and honesty in relationship with the customers (internal and external), suppliers, service providers and society at large. There should be fairness in applying decision outcomes, procedures and treatment of individuals. International companies must strive to avoid issues concerning conflict of interest such as bribery and corruption. Most importantly, International Companies must be socially responsible, ensuring employees, customers, and society's health and safety.

For many companies, ethical grounds may be too slippery to stand upon when weighed down by unrealistic expectations from stakeholders, as was in the case of Canada's multinational giants, SNC-Lavalin Group Inc., who crossed the ethical line to win contracts abroad (Tedesco, 2015). The discovery of the infractions and resulting scandal continues to cost the company millions of dollars. While a no-compromise approach to corruption may be unrealistic, a no-tolerance approach is crucial and should be embraced. The difference between the two approaches is illustrated by the example of how Celtel operated in Zambia (Mullins & Rhodes, 2011). Being faced with tribal chiefs demanding "tributes" each time their lands are crossed even though patches were bought for towers, the Company negotiated to pay these tributes to the local school. The chief could take the credit in the community, but the money didn't go to someone's pocket but rather a worthy initiative. This demonstrated a compromise on strategy but not on principle. Regulators in the western economies have shown strong resolve to enforce ethical practices. They have unleashed stringent punishments on contravening international firms that erred either in the home country or in subsidiary operations.

GlaxoSmithKline, the pharmaceutical giant, was fined $ 3 billion after fraud was discovered in its promotion of drugs and for failing to report safety data (Rajagopalan, 2012). Wells Fargo Bank was fined $175 million over the discrimination against black and Hispanic borrowers by its independent brokers. HSBC, the largest bank in Britain and Europe, paid penalties totalling $4.8 billion from 35 settlements since 2000. The largest of these settlements was the $1.256 billion forfeited in a deferred prosecution agreement in 2002 for alleged money laundering and violation of economic sanctions. The alleged unethical activities concern HSBC's "global bank notes business" practice that leaves no paper trail and entails the movement of funds worldwide on clients' behalf to countries where they don't have a banking presence (Verschoor, 2018). American banking giant JPMorgan Chase was fined $264 million for violating the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act in an elaborate employment bribery scheme in China. The bank was discovered to have hired hundreds of mostly unqualified friends and relatives of potential bank customers in exchange for business patronage (Gallagher, 2016). The unethical business promotion strategy was camouflaged into a program called "Sons and Daughters", which the bank operated between 2006 and 2013.

Corruption is a global challenge but is more prevalent in developing economies. Corruption is insidious and contagious (Nieuwenboer & Kaptein, 2008), compelling more and more people to indulge in it for personal and business survival. International companies operating in developing countries face the challenge of dealing with widespread corruption in business practice and remaining ethical and competitive. International companies expanding into a foreign market need to get familiar with the perceptions and beliefs in different cultures about issues relating to ethics to understand the ethical disposition of individuals in business conduct and regulate, but without violating, standard business ethical codes (Ergeneli, 2005). Thus, the recommendation of a no-compromise approach to corruption by Dallas (2013) should be viewed within the cultural context of the Company's market.

The perception of what is bribery and what is gift differs with operating cultural climates. An example is Turkey, where even though unethical actions are not tolerated among employees, receiving gifts and taking "baksheesh" are tolerated. Almost two-thirds of the populace think that bribery is not acceptable yet see nothing wrong with accepting a gift or "baksheesh" (Ates, 2011, p.30). Research conducted by Ates on Turkish employees revealed that all citizens have internalized the principles of business ethics but have found application difficult in the workplace. The reasons include the absence of an "ethical climate in the workplace and conceptual ambiguity about some unethical behaviours in both citizens' and employees' perceptions" (Ates, 2012, p. 27).

Irwin (2012) explains that Chinese culture is traditionally influenced by Confucian values that stress stringent norms and etiquette, creating a blur between the private and work-life of workers. The concept of 'Guanxi' underpins social networking in business conduct and promotes personal relationships. Mianzi (personal pride) emphasizes seniority and discourages open disagreement with one's superior (Stratfor, 2009). For a western company looking to invest in China, these attributes of Chinese society can create the following challenges;

- Guanxi employees may be willing to share trade secrets with rival businesses in their social networks (Irwin, 2012).
- Gift exchanges to strengthen personal relationships and gain business favour, considered corruption in the West, are openly encouraged in China (Stratfor, 2012).

- Whistleblowing, important in fighting corruption in the West, may be frowned upon if it causes a loss of face to one's seniors (Irwin, 2012).

Dallas (2013) argues that foreign companies should not lower ethical standards on anti-corruption when investing in a country like China, where culture appears to promote what is frowned on as corrupt practices elsewhere. This claim resonates with the view that International companies can be forces for positive change as far as combating corruption in emerging markets is concerned (Mullins& Rhodes, 2011). By refusing to compromise, International companies can motivate governments' anti-corruption drives since they are interested in attracting FDI to create jobs/ improve the well-being of citizens (Riivari and Lamsa, 2013).

Guanxi is meant to build trust and demonstrates the Chinese focus on long-term benefits and commitment (Cavusgil, Ghauri&Akcal, 2013). In principle, it is suitable for Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and business sustainability. Still, the limitation in this collectivist culture is the absence of limits on the type and value of gifts to be exchanged. Another limitation is placing a more significant premium on guanxi relationships over other higher ethical considerations. The Chinese guanxi culture may not be the problem but the International companies coming to China to use the guanxi relationship to compromise to gain undue advantage. Thus, corruption can be reduced if International companies only give gifts within the bounds of ethics. An expanding international company recognizes that it would be incapable of forcing a change in the behaviour of individuals in a foreign market to align with its ethical disposition. It must thus first decide if and how it will operate within the cultural context of business ethics without compromising its own values. This ethical dilemma can be reduced by establishing a code of ethical conduct for company employees in emerging markets. This Code sets out the basic standard of conduct expected of all staff and the Company's policy on handling issues concerning conflict of interest. It is instructive that the need for this had long been recognized by the Chinese government, which in 2002 established the Code of Corporate Governance that requires firms to adopt best practice corporate governance structures (Irwin,2012).

Benefits of a strict ethical approach include the building of social capital and reputation with customers, vendors and communities even to the point of being able to demand higher prices than unethical competitors (Atlas, 2013) and reduced transaction cost (Tashman& Fort, 2009). Another consideration is that refusing to pay bribes upfront prevents the spiral that leads to unending demands. Atlas (2013) quotes Forbes research that showed the companies on the 2010 most ethical list delivered significantly better financial performance than the S&P 500.

It is in the long-term interests of companies to have zero tolerance for corruption. A strict ethical approach encourages innovation as a sustainable path to growth and facilitates wealth creation, employment generation and consumer satisfaction. The appeal of the resort to bribery by International companies is in its immediate gratification. In the long run, it is detrimental to the long-term growth of business, values and cohesion of the society. Finally, the costs of engaging in corrupt business practices potentially damage a company's reputation. The adverse effects of unnecessary payments to bribe officials far outweigh the benefits of maintaining an excellent corporate image.

XI. EMERGENT BUSINESS RISKS CHALLENGING COMPETITION

The global expansion of the business of a firm offers it with new opportunities to produce, distribute, market and sell its products and / services. The goal of any business expansion is to engender growth and increase profits by leveraging its skills and products over a wider market spectrum. The conduct of a business over a broader international market enables the firm to have healthy and diversified earnings portfolio (Dewhurst, Harris & Heywood, 2012) and allows it to obtain key resources economically. The global expansion of business according to Levitt (1983) should be driven by technology in order to achieve efficiency in operations and economies of scale in production which will lower the cost of operations.

Zahra, Ireland &Hitt (2000) observed the benefits of the international expansion of business to include enhancement of the firm’s stock of knowledge through learning based on interactions with local knowledge bases and exposure to different systems of innovation. This knowledge obtained from experiences in different market is pooled together to achieve scope of economies.There are however challenges to the international expansion of a firm’s business which needed to be well understood and addressed.

As mentioned earlier, an international firm faces country, political and currency risks as well as structural and employee capacity challenges. Recent developments such as the rise of protectionism in mature liberal markets, climate change, the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war have escalated global business risks. They have also challenged the two fundamental assumptions about business challenges and remedies hitherto discussed in most literature to wiz increasing primacy of markets and that much could be taken for granted about the global business ecosystem (Amankwah-Amoah, Khan & Wood,2021). Global companies have hitherto competed on the ability to manage these challenges by leveraging their internal attributes.

The impacts of the coronavirus pandemic over the last two years and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war have had a debilitating impact on the global business ecosystem, which the uncoordinated responses from different governments have exacerbated. First was the decimation of companies and fracturing of the global supply chains caused by the novel coronavirus pandemic beginning in late 2019. As the world was slowly recovering from the pandemic, the volatility of country and political risks calculation was brought to the fore by the ongoing Russia- Ukraine war.

XII. CORONAVIRUS-19 PANDEMIC

Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has been recognized as a major exogenous shock that has transformed the competitive landscape for both small and large firms (Wenzel, Stanske& Lieberman, 2020;Amankwah-Amoah, Khan & Wood, 2021). The coronavirus pandemic has dramatically and most profoundly changed our world. It has changed the way we live, shop, educate our children, receive healthcare services, and engage with others personally and professionally (McCausland,2020). In fact, there is scarcely an activity that has not been affected in some way. Accompanying the COVID-19 pandemic, with more than 549 million cases and over 6.34 million fatalities globally (Jauhri, 2022), are numerous cases of foreclosures, massive unemployment, and waves of business failures cutting across every sector, causing widespread economic distress. According to McKinsey's analysis of the aviation value chain in 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic inflicted financial devastation across the aviation value chain, most notably on airlines which incurred $168 billion in economic losses in 2020(Bouwer et al.,2022). All subsectors reported massive losses in 2020, except for freight forwarders and cargo airlines.

The global supply chain built decades ago during the push for globalization and which has been supporting companies' movement of manufacturing to cost-effective and efficient offshore locations was quickly disrupted in the early days of coronavirus lockdowns and quarantines. The inherent weakness of the global supply chain structure, which relies on only a handful of players in the chain, particularly considering the tensions with China and the global competition for these supplies, became glaringly apparent as countries scrambled for scarce personal protective equipment (PPE) and ventilators. The disruption of the global supply chains has sparked a rise in food and energy prices, causing global inflationary pressures. Experts have proposed different best paths forward for companies with global operations, including reshoring and bringing operations home, encouraging companies to open up and collaborate, and using data to help companies pivot more quickly (McCausland,2020).

Coronavirus has not ended globalization, but it has significantly changed it, with companies forced to adapt to survive and thrive during the pandemic. The coronavirus pandemic caused major disruptions in the supply chains of at least 80% of global companies by July 2020 (BofA,2020). As a possible response, many companies are looking at restructuring their supply chains, trying to balance resilience with efficiency and reduce costs. Despite higher cost implications, many stakeholders are looking at reshoring, moving portions of the supply chain to their home country and, failing that, to countries deemed friendly (Browning,2020).

A. *Silver Lining*

Despite the lives lost, economic challenges encountered, and significant life disruption occasioned by the coronavirus pandemic, there are unique benefits that it conferred. There was a rapid mobilization of scientists across nations who freely cooperated to develop a vaccine in record time. It is a rare collaboration that hopefully will be sustained to avert a global emergency. There was also the adoption of Artificial intelligence (AI) and advanced computing power to facilitate the unparalleled rapid development and testing of potential vaccine. We also witnessed the wave of innovation by entrepreneurs, small and large, who created and manufactured face masks, face shields, and parts for ventilators to help solve the PPE shortage using the revolutionary 3D printing innovation. Gaskell (2020) mentioned other innovations, including the installation of plexiglass in grocery stores, digital transformations in education and health care, and practical use of robots in hotels, restaurants and even in administering COVID-19 tests.

Covid-19 pandemic is a new challenge to businesses that we lack understanding of mitigants to the growth or existential risks it poses. Thus, many companies have had to drastically alter their operations to support social distancing or new consumer behaviour patterns (Gaskell,2020). Many companies have had to quickly adapt to the emerging business operating environment reinventing selves and reshaping their operations. One of the innovations to the business operating environment is remote work which was widely embraced. It was observed that working remotely fosters increased productivity, increases flexibility, contributes to cost savings around office overhead, reduces commuting time and enhances employees' experiences and career achievements. Most companies have adopted video conferencing for meetings due to the social distancing. Zoom, avideo conferencing company,has hugely profited with 40% growth in sales in 2020.

XIII. ONGOING RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

As the world was slowly recovering from the coronavirus pandemic with the gradual rolling back of many life and business limiting restrictions and expectations of global economic growth, the global economy was plunged into a different crisis with the invasion of Ukraine by Russia on 24 February 2022. The consequences of the invasion, which have been reverberating worldwide, are yet to unfold fully.

The Russia-Ukraine war worsens supply and demand tensions, harms consumer sentiment and threatens global economic growth. Both IMF and World Bank have lowered their global growth forecast for 2022, citing the pressure Russia's invasion of Ukraine has placed on the global economy (Ellyatt,2022). The downgrades to their forecasts had been made on the premise that supply shocks would intensify and commodity prices would rise dramatically.

The fact is that Russia is a significant supplier of oil, gas and metals and, along with Ukraine, of wheat and corn. The Ukraine–Russia region is a global producer of food, a major supplier of fertilizer and is responsible for roughly 30% of global exports of wheat and 65% of sunflower. Russia and Ukraine account for one-third of the world's wheat global supply. Over 50 countries are dependent on Ukraine and Russia for nearly 30% of their wheat import. Before the war, African countries import 44% of the wheat from Ukraine and Russia. Russia is a major exporter of fertilizer and Ukraine corn and sunflower oil. Since the war began, the reduction in the supplies of these commodities has sharply driven up their prices. Fertilizer prices are now three times higher than in 2021, affecting crop production globally. It is to be expected that in an interconnected market, a slight disruption in supply will impact the price, holding demand constant. . The impact is being felt more in developing countries where inflation rates are at a record level

Energy is one of the most important inputs for economic growth and development and is responsible for at least fifty per cent of the industrial growth in a modern economy while representing less than one-tenth of the cost of production (Barney &Franzi, 2002). Many production and consumption activities involve energy. "The use of energy drives economic productivity and industrial growth and is central to the operation of any modern economy" (Asghar,2008, pg 1).

Energy is a crucial source of economic growth because many production and consumption activities involve energy as a primary input. Energy is one of the most important inputs for economic development. From a physical viewpoint, the use of energy drives economic productivity and industrial growth and is central to the operation of any modern economy. Barney &Franzi (2002) argued that energy is responsible for at least half the industrial growth in a modern economy while representing less than one tenth of the cost of production.

The invasion of Ukraine by Russia has far-reaching consequences on the global energy system, "disrupting supply and demand patterns and fracturing long-standing trading relationships" (Birol, 2022). It has made volatile the price of energy for consumers and businesses, thus hurting households, businesses and the entire economies severely, particularly in developing countries. The impact of the energy crisis manifests in the increase in oil and gas prices and financial downturns. The world currently consumes 85 million barrels of oil daily in the manufacturing and transport sectors (Hauser,2009). To underscore the importance of oil, it accounts for energy deployed to move 97 per cent of the transportation sector (such as cars, subways, buses, railroads, ships and aeroplanes) in the USA.

An increase in energy prices will trigger an increase in production costs, leading to consumers paying more for the end product. Food transported from afar by trucks, cargo ships, or aeroplanes gets more expensive, which explains why IMF has warned of possible social unrest in developing countries if the rising energy cost is not tamed. Nearly every job directly or indirectly relies on oil. An oil crisis will lead to the loss of jobs, especially in industries that heavily rely on oil and in countries such as Nigeria, where only an average of seven hours of electricity per day is supplied from the national grid (Nigeria News Direct, 2020).

According to a report released on 13 April 2022 by the U.N. on Global Impact of war in Ukraine on food, energy and finance systems, 107 countries representing 1.7 billion people are severely exposed to the consequences of the Russia-Ukraine war and face rising food prices, rising energy prices and tougher financial conditions. Sixty-eight countries face all three risks, with 25 in Africa, 25 in Asia-pacific and 19 in Latin America. Egypt is the world largest importer of wheat, and Russia and Ukraine are its top suppliers. Supply has ceased, and Egypt's reserves will only last for three months (WION,2022). Tunisia's foreign debt account for 100% of its GDP, the trade deficit has widened to US$800 million, inflation is at 7% and fuel price is at a record high. Experts say rising prices is set to stoke an inevitable rise in civil unrest in Egypt, Tunisia and Lebanon. For Lebanon- the Switzerland of West Asia- the Beirut blast of 2020 destroyed its largest grain stores. Food prices increased by 11 times, the Lebanese Pound lost 90% of its value, and public debt grew to 360% of its GDP. This situation has been complicated by the war in Ukraine, where it imports 80% of its grain. Lebanon now rations wheat imported from Ukraine as war raises food security fears. There is a bread shortage and scarcity of sunflower oil. World Bank has approved US$150million food security loan for Lebanon.

In Latin America, the following countries are at risk of debt crises and face hyperinflation: Argentina, El Salvador, and Peru. Ghana, Ethiopia, Kenya, and South Africa could be the worst hit in sub-Saharan Africa. The debt level is soaring in Ghana, and interest payment is choking the economy. Kenya's debt has risen to US$70bn, representing 70% of its GDP. In South Africa, its debt has reached 80% of its GDP despite higher revenue. Turkey's debt is soaring, and its currency is sliding. Its debt has reached 54% of its GDP, and inflation has reached 70%. According to a senior World Bank economist,Marcello Estevão, over the next 12 months, as many as a dozen developing economies could prove unable to service their debts (Van Staden, 2022). This will be the largest debt crisis in a generation

XIV. DESTRUCTION OF THE COMPETITIVE LANDSCAPE

Since the invasion of Ukraine, there has been a rash of economic sanctions imposed on Russia by the USA,G7 and European Union bloc, including blocking the Central Bank of Russia's access to more than $400 billion in foreign-exchange reserves held abroad and the E.U.'s imposed sanctions on several Russian oligarchs and politicians. *Russia* became the world's most sanctioned country and is subject to more than 5,000 different targeted *sanctions*. Under pressure from investors and consumers, many Western companies have unwound their investments, closing stores and pausing sales in Russia. Today, over 1,000 Companies have curtailed their operations in Russia, with some remaining. A listing of the companies that publicly announced they are voluntarily curtailing operations in Russia has been compiled by Jeffrey Sonnenfeld and his team of experts, research fellows, and students at the Yale Chief Executive Leadership Institute. We shall review from the list some of the major companies that have abandoned their investments in Russia.

In the consumer goods and retail sector, Fast Retailing, the Japanese clothing company that operates Uniqlo has been forced to suspend operations despite its CEO initially saying otherwise. H&M has closed its 170 stores and Nike its 116 stores in Russia.In the energy sector, the war has forced B.P. into seeking to sell off its nearly 20% stake in Rosneft, a Russian state-controlled oil company. It wrote off about $25.5 billion on its nearly 20% holding in Rosneft and other ventures in the country. Shell has announced its plan to exit joint ventures with the Russian natural gas giant, Gazprom, a decision that will cost it $4 billion to $5 billion in the first quarter alone. In the finance sector, Citigroup, which has a staff strength of 3000 employees, is exiting Russia and has set aside $1.9 billion for potential loan losses related to the war in Ukraine. Goldman Sachs is winding down and has reported a loss of $200 million in the first quarter, BNY Mellon has projected a loss of $200 million in revenue in 2022 and JP Morgan Chase $1 billion over time as a consequence. Other financial institutions that have suspended operations in Russia include American Express, Visa, Western Union, MasterCard, Bank of America, Deutsche Bank and Zurich Insurance Group.

In the food sector, Carlsberg, the world's third-largest brewer, has announced its divestment from Russia, resulting in a charge of $1.4 billion, Heineken is following suit at the cost of $400 million, and McDonald with 850 restaurants, has exited Russia and wrote off $1.2 billion from its books. In the tech sector, Microsoft, Apple, Cogent, Ericsson, Intel, IBM, Google, and several others have suspended operations in Russia. In the travel and logistics sector, Marriot suspended its operations in Russia in June 2022, stating that restrictions imposed by the Western governments have made it impossible to continue to operate. Most major airlines have suspended operations, likewise DHL and FedEx. Airbus has stopped the supply of parts, maintenance and technical support services to Russian airlines.

These companies have been forced to suspend or exit the profitable Russian market by parent governments, investors and shareholders and even at a significant loss, thus dampening the ability to compete against peers. The actions taken could even lead to permanent loss of market that they have striven hard to acquire. For example, the exit of Nokia and Ericcson now leaves China's Huawei as the only top three global providers of 5G networks still active in the country. Huawei has opted not to suspend its operations but to move quickly to build super-fast 5G networks. Future research would need to be tailored toward helping global businesses deal with challenges such as this, where a friendly country suddenly becomes an international pariah since international politics and development seem to significantly intersect with global companies' operations.

XV. CONCLUSION

The survival and success of business entities depend on the ability to consistently compete for the patronage and continued loyalty of consumers for their products or services. The extent to which they are successful determines their market share. In a market populated by many players, Firms must thus create a product or offer a service that extraordinarily brings value and delivers this value to consumers cost-effectively to achieve competitive positioning. International Firms expand into foreign markets for various reasons, mainly to expand their markets and increase profits. The expansion is fraught with risks capable of constraining Firms' ability to achieve market expansion objectives unless these challenges are identified, understood and properly mitigated.

We have seen how the pandemic has decimated values created and nurtured over the years by global companies. We can even call the coronavirus pandemic an act of God since the world could not prevent its spread. That cannot explain the current war situation in Ukraine because the political actors' unwise decisions are responsible for the severe losses and existential challenges faced by international companies and the global population. The coronavirus pandemic and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war have thrown up competition as well as survival challenges that global firms have not demonstrated the capacity to mitigate adequately. It is hoped this will be the prime focus of future research.

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