

Global Operation Management – Unilever

By Brain writes Experts

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Introduction

The branches of Unilever company stretch back to the end of the 19th century and this firm is among international top corporations with local office in U.K. Unilever is well-known for a number of home and personal products, like food and beverages, cleaning agents, and body and skincare products, and is available in more than 190 countries. Works of peer-reviewed literature, of particular reference are those written by Faria and Cunha (2022), which give the historical background and the strategizing techniques behind the eggs of a Unilever existed globally and were complex to run. Bearing in mind where the items are sourced is utmost central within the FMCG (Fast Moving Consumer Products) area of business. Unilever and other FMCG companies work in a complicated supply chain mantle that has to match the requirements of the customers, create value and cover all production costs as well as supply risks. Speaking of which, experienced scholars Bilovodska, Syhyda and Saher (2018) conclude that for players of FMCG industry to keep track of their competitive edge and become leaders on customer satisfaction the effective supply chain management is paramount. It thus underlines the critical role of a company in selecting its suppliers taking into consideration efficiency of the company and the place on the market. This report aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the factors that determine the procurement decisions of Unilever from the local and the international levels while operating under the FMCG business. The study is based on the use of appropriate research approaches in order to depict an understanding of the strategic considerations that affect the company sourcing strategies. The report as well discusses the implications of obtaining from Unilever on the operational performance efficacy, supply chain parameters, and the market position. We studied an exhaustive analysis to identify the best possible sources which could actually deliver Unilever with a competitive edge on FMCG market.

Theoretical Framework

The underlying concept of the theory behind the sourcing critique, in the FMCG setting, is a multifaceted setting of thoughts and academic theories. Consequently, sourcing is not only volunteering these aspects, it is also making sure everything is put together such as supply chain management, outsourcing strategies, inventory control, risk mitigation, and capacity planning are all together. Thus the concepts are interconnected and they are effectively used by such companies through for instance Karla Zhaina, who is an author of a study on FMCG (fast moving consumer goods) supply chain management (Kalodina, Kostytskyi, & Sakhawat, 2018). The comparative advantage theory is the philosophical framework among the intellectual concepts used in the process of sourcing business activities. Ricardo's theory facilitates this, admonishing colonial countries and corporations to concentrate on those goods or services in which they have an advantage over their competitors. In case of sourcing decisions, it promotes the use of labor and raw materials from for developing low-cost efficiency in production (Tien & Nhi, 2019).

The transaction cost theory together with the cost comparative advantage theory furnish the set of tools for making of cost estimations at the macro level. The theorem presented by Coase gave a new meaning with respect to market imperfections and transaction costs while explaining in detail strategic allocation of sourcing. Let's take a look at the case of Unilever. Transaction costs of this company, as it turns out, involve both direct costs of purchase and coordination, monitoring and agreement with external suppliers (Faria and Cunha, 2022). The resource-based view (RBV) principle moves outside the boundaries of only pure cost factor and also considers the internal resources, expertise, and skills that makes an organisation unique. Since the RBV presents this, Unilever, the other companies included, can maintain the advantage which is perennial by working on the unique and not substitutable resources they have in sourcing. This notion implies the

significance of strategic asset management and allocation of resources in order to create a sourcing excellence appreciated (De Arruda Pollice & Scarcelli, 2024). Finally, the containment theory sheds lights on the contextual factors that influence the sourcing choices. Based on the organizational theory, contingency theory argues that there is no single approach to sourcing, and the sourcing strategies should be adapted to the particular organization's context and environmental conditions. This means that Unilever's sourcing decisions will depend on market dynamics, regulatory frameworks, and technological advancements (Murphy & Murphy, 2018).

Factors Influencing Local Sourcing Decisions for Unilever

Unilever is a driving force of fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) segment and it is having a huge number of factors during making local sourcing choice such as the cost of goods, quality, and the standard of produce while it is very crucial to include the supply chain resilience. The mentioned factors hold a great importance in the context of the sourcing policies implemented at Unilever, and finding an appropriate balance when engaging in global and local sourcing operations. Using educational literature such as the was published by Bilovskaya, Syhida, and Saher (2018), I critically present why the factors considered when choosing an Unilever local site depend on certain determinants. The concern about spending become the primary restraint in choosing to what extent Unilever will source goods from the local producers. This includes salaries, transport costs, and taxes among many others. Such as labor charges incurred in either high or low-wage economy whose key factor of production is the labor of people. The comparative advantage theory lies at the heart of Unilever's decision of where to source raw materials, as this concept explains that it is wise to utilize the opinions between the costs of production in different regions. Consequently, though, labor may cheapen the resourcing to some locality but the other costs of transportation among other taxes could be greater than the savings. Logistic costs can be significant

when the company sources raw materials or finished goods from remote geographical locations, and these can obliterate cost advantage, making Unilever prefer local suppliers to streamline logistical costs (Fernando et al., 2019).

In addition, tariffs and taxes levied on imports are also critical to Unilever's sourcing decisions, particularly in markets with protectionist trade policies or complex regulatory environments. Among the factors affecting Unilever's local sourcing decisions compliance with local regulations deserve special attention, particularly in product quality and safety standard dimension. Anitah (2019) stresses that FMCG companies such as Unilever must comply with strict regulatory requirements set by local authorities to protect the consumer and legal risks. Local suppliers who adhere to regulatory standards are a viable option due to the fact that the failure to comply with regulatory standards can lead to reputational damage and financial penalties and this option is discussed with more details by Almutairi (2023). Quality and standards issues are crucial to Unilever local sourcing decisions, which signifies the company's deliverance of high-quality products to the consumers. According to Lawrence, Rasche, and Kenny (2019), adherence to local regulations also goes beyond legal obligations to include ethical and environmental guidelines. The sustainable sourcing initiatives by Unilever favour suppliers with dedication to environmental sustainability, ethical labor practice and social responsibility. Quality product assurance is another vital issue of local sourcing decisions of Unilever – deviations in quality negatively impact brand reputation and trust of consumers. Implementing strong quality control practices and working closely with local suppliers allows Unilever to maintain product quality levels and consistency across its product range (Sinulingga, 2019). In addition, supply chain resilience is identified as a crucial factor affecting Unilever's local sourcing choices, mainly in avoiding supply chain disruptions and shortening lead times. The use of local suppliers thing that needs to be done to

make the supply chain and resilient by reducing the vulnerabilities associated with geopolitical risks., natural calamities, or other unexpected events (Putri et al., 2022). With a highly diffuse supplier base and alliances of local suppliers, Unilever could obtain good leverage to be able to reduce single source risks and to respond to market dynamics more quickly. On the path of Unilever achieving the status of top-notch supplier satisfying consumer demand promptly and getting the upper hand over rivals in FMCG sphere, there are issues of lead time decrease and supply chain responsiveness improvement (Iglesias, et al., 2023).

Factors Influencing Global Sourcing Decisions for Unilever

The challenging aspect of the global purchasing factors of the Unilever, an FMCG MNC , is that there is many factors which involve in too many variables. Through the perspective factors do not just help to decide the sourcing of the organization, but they add advantage in the creation of the competitive position, market expansion and overall business success too. The unfolding of Unilever's international marketing strategy shall be boosted by the perception of multifactoral pressing issues of the global market studied critically, and relationships between them. Consequently, Unilever will spare the chance for immediate output response to the fluctuations of the global factors, and hence, be ready for the opportunities that may emerge. Utilizing the findings from academic writings including those of Murphy and Murphy (2018) and Hu and Zeng (2024), this paper more deeply explores the drivers of Unilever's global sourcing decisions. Economic of scale represents an important principle driving global sourcing decisions undertaken by Unilever that makes the company able to gain cost-efficiency and improve its competitive advantage. By means of bulk purchasing Unilever can expose favorable terms to the suppliers and maximize the efficiency of procurement cost through their global footprint (Lawrence, Rasche, & Kenny, 2019). Nevertheless, the journey to achieving economies of scale should be dead weighted by aspects of

flexibility and responsiveness to local markets characteristics. Standardization of processes also enhances economies of scale by allowing Unilever to standardize the production methods and synchronize its supply chain activities from different geographical regions (Mees-Buss, Welch, & Westney, 2019). However, standardization may bring other issues of accommodating local preferences and regulatory requirements and a balanced approach to global sourcing strategy.

First of all, resource and expertise access seem to be another critical determinant in Unilever's global sourcing decisions which are mainly about the use of technological capabilities and the access to a specialist labor forces. Technological innovations have an appreciable role in improving productivity in the supply chain and innovation in Unilever's global operations (Anitah, 2019). Unilever's investments in high-tech innovations of automation, data analytics, and artificial intelligence allow to optimize production processes, to improve forecasting accuracy, and to facilitate the vision of a continuous improvement. Such a talented labor force specialized in and competent in such areas as R&D, engineering, and marketing reinforces Unilever's global sourcing capabilities (Fernando et al., 2019). However, the global battle of talent and the requirement of regular investments in human capital development make the question of the best talent in the main markets hard. Another critical global sourcing determinant of Unilever is market growth and diversification strategies that enable the company to penetrate new markets and satisfy different consumer needs. To meet the diverse needs of consumers, Unilever must adopt a market-driven system of sourcing where products are tailored to meet the specific tastes and preferences of the local customer (Iglesias et al., 2023). This also necessitates sourcing of ingredients and materials from multiple areas to serve the differences in flavor, cultural needs, etiquettes and food styles. For Unilever, market entry involves strategic alliances that are created with local suppliers, distributors and retailers to overcome regulatory and cultural hurdles (Chandra & Jatmika, 2022).

However, entry barriers in the market, regulatory challenges and political risks will dissuade Unilever from expanding its market share in the developing countries.

Case Studies and Examples

The successful examples of local sourcing by Unilever demonstrate the company mission to use regional resources, to improve supply chain immunity and to establish community engagement. Lawrence, Rasche and Kenny (2019) noted that a case study providing a good example of this is the Unilever's "Project Shakti" initiative in India specifically targeting rural women who are provided with a business opportunity to distribute Unilever's products in the local communities. By sourcing products from local suppliers and utilizing a decentralized distribution network, Unilever's market reach has not only increased, but it has also created a socio-economic impact at the local level. The utilisation of local knowledge and networks also helped Unilever to tailor their products to meet the specific needs and preferences of various consumer segments, which led to brand loyalty and market penetration. Success cases of Unilever implementing global sourcing provide the company's capability in cost efficiencies, possession of specialized knowledge and entry to new markets. An example is the Unilever links with suppliers in the Southeast Asian region in order for them to have responsibly produced palm oil for their products (Anitah, 2019). This global sourcing initiative of Unilever has allowed them to have a continuous and dependable supply of palm oil and, most importantly, they have managed to solve the problems of deforestation and human rights abuses from most of the key producing areas. The partnership of Unilever with global partners promotes the dedication of the company to the responsible sourcing practices and environmental stewardship, which elevates the brand reputation and marketability.

However, local and global sourcing decisions and offset decisions themselves present a set of challenges that need to be handled with prudence, strategy and planning. Limitations in local

sourcing may include limited quality supplier availability, local regulations dynamics and supply chain disruptions. For example, Unilever faced sourcing issues in getting the required raw material from the local environment for its operations in regions with inadequate infrastructure and broken chains (Bilovodska, Syhyda, & Saher, 2018). Apart from that, compliance of the local standards and regulations is very laborious and time consuming especially where very strict regulatory frameworks prevail. Likewise, the global sourcing problems are increased with the political risks, rate fluctuations, and cultural differences. In the fast-paced world of international trade, companies have many options to acquire raw materials or parts from various sources worldwide. The Unilever global outsourcing blurs certain challenges, such as political unrest of the sourcing regions as well as the fluctuations in the exchange rate which can cause the purchase prices to rise, and finally, the cultural barriers of supplier interactions. Moreover, supply chain management which involves a global vendor base is only attainable if there exist effective risk management processes that afford companies the necessary protection against supply chain disruption and consequently, helps the enterprise run its operations efficiently. This narrative from Unilever, therefore, leads to the inferences that: first, quick mobility, responsiveness along with active risk management constitute the factors which are very critical in managing the complexity of the global sourcing dynamics.

Recommendations for Unilever

The recommendations for Unilever focus on the core issues of sourcing, which are the complexity of the local and the global matters. These questions are based on knowledge from the academic literature and the actual practices. Unilever should deploy a foundation of both local and global sourcing techniques so as to be able to reach the goals of cost efficiency, risk prevention and defining a customer market that is diverse enough. The target of the balance might be achieved with the help of Unilever if it employs the hybrid sourcing that involves both global and local

sourcing activities. Findings unveil that glocalists are the likeliest to adapt to global standardization and innovate their procurement strategies to suit local markets. As research by Mees-Buss, Welch, and Westney (2019) reveals, the key element of the present strategy is global sourcing modified to the local tastes and consumer preferences. This can be operationalized thanks to Unilever introducing local sourcing operations while taking advantage of a central control and coordination. Unilever can realize the synergistic equilibrium between local responsiveness and global efficiency by features of sourcing activities allocation such as cost considerations, supply chain resilience, and market proximity.

Utilization of the technology for an effective sourcing is a critical necessity for Unilever to improve supply chain transparency, simplify the procurement procedures and stimulate innovation. According to Anitah (2019), the academic literature highlights the transformative potential of technological innovations like artificial intelligence, data analytics, blockchain, and others due to which sourcing practices have been changing. In the international supply chain of Unilever it is necessary to invest in the modern technology to improve the demand forecast, optimize inventory and provide the product traceability. Still, Unilever could utilize digital platforms and teaming tools that would facilitate communication and collaboration with the suppliers, hence, operational efficiency and shorter lead times. Cost savings, process automation, and value creation opportunities will be delivered to Unilever from digital transformation projects in its global sourcing operations.

Investments in the supplier relationship and risk management are fundamental for Unilever to create resilience, promote innovation and minimize supply chain disruptions. The strategic supplier partnership role in creating competitive advantages and offsetting globalisation-related risks has received much attention in academic literature (Hu & Zeng, 2024). Unilever's supplier

relationship management should be communal where suppliers are not regarded as transactional entities but strategic partnerships. This long lasting relationship of trust, transparency, and value creation between two entities will help Unilever increase supplier loyalty, and innovation and enjoy priority in accessing important resources. Moreover, Unilever ought to strengthen the risk management system that should identify, evaluate and control risks throughout its global supplier base. It involves thorough risk assessments, regional diversification of sourcing, and the utilization of capacity plans that address geopolitical, economic, and natural changes. Supplier resilience and risk management would make Unilever's supply chain more resilient and business continuity in an environment that is more unpredictable and riskier globally.

Conclusion

The study pointed out the importance of having a situation at global and local source strategy. Unilever is facing the dilemma of which aspects to focus on to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of their supply chain considering the tradeoffs among reducing cost, supply chain resilience, and responsiveness to market needs. Unilever can embrace blended strategy that exploits the strong sides of both local and global sourcing systems to improve effectiveness in operations supply chain and correspond to the multiple consumer needs on various markets. On the other hand, technology analyzed spotlights the sensate part of technology invention and employment. Technology improves sourcing efficiency and all in all, provides the means for variety and innovation. Among digital transformation areas, the company can embrace AI, data analytics, and blockchain; such approaches can be used to improve procurement management, supply chain visibility, and reduction of risks that might occur in the course of operation. Unilever can get an edge in the FMCG sector, which is developing rapidly and adapting itself to the

transforming market dynamics driving this process thanks to the use of the most innovative technologies.

Moreover, addressing my recommendations for Unilever speaks to the importance of building supplier relationships and risk management strategies. Stronger supplier partnerships as well as the use of a sophisticated risk management approach are important realms in the arsenal of a business in order to build supply chain resilience and sustain business continuity despite any disruptions. Through measures like building supplier partnerships and using proactive risk management techniques, Unilever can help minimise the effects uncertain geopolitical, economic and environmental climates on its sourcing system. These investigation and analysis of the findings reach beyond Unilever to the general FMCG companies. Unilever, a multinational consumer goods giant, occupies a position which extends far beyond the confines of its business because its sourcing strategies have far reaching effects both in its own industry and beyond. Such an example as Unilever underlines the significance of lessons learned for the FMCG companies operating in this sector. The companies can, therefore, enrich their current sourcing practices using this experience and knowledge. Looking through the lens of supporting innovation, encouraging collaboration, and putting first sustainability, FMCG companies can propel forward the positive changes all of the values chain participants will benefit from. We clearly see that Unilever's sourcing strategies pointed that sustainability and global supply chain could be complex and diverse. Through the embracing of a multi-dimensional approach, optimizing both local needs and global efficiencies, and utilizing technology for innovations, UNILEVER can defeat the challenges within a highly contagious and dynamic global market economy and attain sustainable growth.

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