

# Standardisation versus adaptation in international marketing of Polish companies operating in foreign markets: The case of Maspex

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The article examines the application of standardisation, adaptation, and glocalisation strategies in international marketing, with Maspex Group serving as a case study. It analyses how Polish firms, exemplified by Maspex, navigate the challenges of foreign market expansion through these strategic approaches and evaluates their implications for organisational performance and brand perception.

**Research Design & Methods:** We employed a case study methodology combined with a literature review. Data sources included corporate reports, promotional materials, and academic publications. We critically analysed key dimensions of international marketing, *i.e.*, product, promotion, distribution, and pricing, and to assess strategic choices.

**Findings:** Maspex Group effectively combines standardisation (e.g., brand messaging) with adaptation (e.g., localized promotional campaigns), implementing a glocalised approach. This strategy enhances brand recognition while meeting local consumer needs.

**Implications & Recommendations:** Polish firms aiming for internationalisation should adopt a flexible glocalisation strategy, balancing efficiency through standardisation and responsiveness through adaptation. Investments in digital tools and cultural insights are critical for success.

**Contribution & Value Added:** This article contributes to the field of international marketing by presenting a practical case of how a Polish company has successfully navigated the balance between standardisation and adaptation, offering actionable insights for firms in similar contexts.

**Article type:** research article

**Keywords:** standardisation; adaptation; glocalisation; international marketing strategies; Maspex

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## INTRODUCTION

Internationalized businesses (international firms, multinational companies, transnational corporations, global companies), to grow their businesses, aim to increase the profitability or sales of their products in foreign markets. The usual problem they face is the saturated markets where they are already located. Overcoming the problems of saturation of existing markets involves expanding their operations into foreign markets. In the literature, we distinguished push and pull factors in global marketing in relation to the processes of enterprises' internationalisation.

Generally, scholars consider push factors to be negative (Evans *et al.*, 2008). For instance, a company may discover that it has already covered its domestic market, so it will have to enter a new market. However, push factors are not necessarily negative. For instance, a domestic government may promote the domestic industry to export globally and provide tax benefits or assistance in doing

so. We may attribute push forces to resources, management knowledge, the company's culture, and environmental factors.

Typically, scholars consider pull factors to be positive or accidental drivers of internationalisation. For instance, a new international market may have a growing middle class that possesses a significant amount of spending power. A company can exploit this potential opportunity. Pull factors include the market's size, economic and social conditions, and the foreign market's traits.

In the international marketing literature, when a business decides to start marketing products abroad, the fundamental strategic decision is the use of appropriate marketing tools. Businesses must decide whether they are pursuing a single (unified) marketing strategy in each market or trying to adapt strategies to the unique specifics of local or regional markets. Finding this relationship between standardisation and adaptation is the biggest challenge for business managers (Hollensen, 2011).

In the age of globalisation, many businesses find global markets to be remarkably similar. Given this aspect, various marketers and researchers recommend the use of a universal, standardized strategy. On the other hand, others argue that precisely because of globalisation, businesses should become more flexible. They should try to adapt to the customer and be a consumer-oriented companies. We cannot forget that there are differences in consumer behaviour both between and within individual markets. These differences result from specific combinations of collective and individual parameters in individual markets (such as emotionality/restraint, social status, type of persuasive/direct communication, rationality or lack thereof in advertising, *etc.*).

This article investigates the strategic approaches of Polish companies in foreign markets, with a specific emphasis on the interplay between standardisation, glocalisation, and adaptation in international marketing. By investigating Maspex, one of the fastest-growing Polish brands, we sought to enhance our understanding of the strategies adopted by Polish firms to address these challenges and evaluate the significance of glocalisation as a factor contributing to their success in global markets. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on Maspex, a brand that has not been extensively studied in the context of international marketing strategies. By analysing how Maspex addresses the tensions between standardisation, glocalisation and adaptation, we provide new insights into the strategic decision-making processes of Polish firms operating in global markets.

Due to the exploratory nature of this research, we formulated the following research questions:

- RQ1:** What are the key elements of the Maspex Group's international marketing strategy, with particular emphasis on the roles of standardisation, adaptation, and glocalisation?
- RQ2:** How does the Maspex Group reconcile the need for global consistency with the demands for local adaptation in its marketing strategies across diverse regional markets?

The article is structured as follows. Following a brief introduction, we will elaborate on the theoretical background and prior research related to international marketing strategies. Next, we will present the research methodology employed in this study. The findings section will discuss the analysis of Maspex's marketing strategies. The article concludes with a summary of the main findings and their implications.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In the recent history of world trade, we have observed the rapid development of globalisation processes and the increasing liberalisation of trade policies, the increasing stability of monetary transactions, the emergence of regional production centres, the increase in flow due to the relatively peaceful conditions in the world, ending with the development of transport, the development of technologies and communication channels (Keegan, 1999; Czinkota & Ronkainen, 2001; Lee & Kusumah, 2019). All these factors have led to increased competition, with the participation of many companies of different sizes and national origins (Craig & Douglas, 1996). The result of these issues was the constant question of how to compete effectively and efficiently in new business environments. A particular aspect of the research was how to enter a foreign market, which involved implementing marketing strategies, *i.e.*, whether to standardize or adapt to new markets (Theodosiou & Leonidou, 2003).

The literature offers two opposite approaches, namely standardisation (globalisation) and adaptation (localisation) (Wach, 2014). Of course, there is also a mixed approach called glocalisation (Głodowska *et al.*, 2023). Researchers who support the importance of the standardisation approach see the development of globalisation in the world as an opportunity to increase market similarity, greater technological uniformity and greater convergence of consumer needs, tastes, and preferences (Levitt, 1983; Ohmae, 1985). Standardisation is facilitated by the development of international communication channels, the emergence of global market segments (Levitt, 1983; Douglas, 1986; Yip *et al.*, 1988; Theodosiou & Leonidou, 2003), or significant development of internet and e-commerce platforms. According to them, the perception of a marketing strategy as a standardisation strategy should bring benefits in creating a uniform brand image or reducing difficulties related to the control of international operations (Coskun Samli & Jacobs, 1994).

Researchers in favour of the adaptation approach say that despite current globalisation trends, gaps between nations persist in aspects such as consumer needs, usage opportunities, purchasing power, commercial infrastructure, culture, traditions, laws and regulations, and technological development, which require adapting a company's marketing strategies to the context of each foreign market (Terpstra & Sarathy, 2000; Szromnik, 2019). Moreover, these researchers argue that the standardisation strategy is a new form of short-sighted marketing strategy and is an oversimplification of reality for marketing orientation (Boddewyn *et al.*, 1986; Wind, 1986; Douglas & Wind, 1987). Most importantly, they emphasize that the overriding goal of companies is not to minimise costs through standardisation, but to achieve long-term profitability by increasing sales by better exploiting the diverse needs of consumers in different countries (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1990; Rosen, 1990; Whitelock & Pimblett, 1997).

There is another group of researchers who propose a third type of strategy: glocalisation (Wach, 2014; Głodowska *et al.*, 2023). According to them, we cannot consider standardisation or adaptation in isolation. The choice between standardisation and adaptation of a marketing strategy is specific to a given situation and should result from a systematic consideration of the uncontrolled and independent variables prevailing in a given market at a given time and the appropriateness of the chosen marketing strategy.

The standardisation/adaptation value of an international marketing strategy must depend on its impact on the company's performance in international markets. Therefore, the challenge for an international corporation is to determine which elements of a strategy can or should be standardized or adapted, under what circumstances and to what extent (Quelch & Hoff, 1986; Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987; Jain, 1989; Cavusgil & Zou, 1994; Theodosiou & Leonidou, 2003).

We may draw interesting conclusions from the analysis of Obadia and Vida (2024), who undertook the analysis of prior research on adaptation and standardisation approaches (Table 1).

An analysis of the table shows that promotion studies are fraught with many problems. The most important include the emphasis on standardisation and adaptation. Furthermore, the scales used to measure promotion adaptation/standardisation are not consistent between studies, and the majority of them are misspecified.

The lack of distinction between delegated and integrated export methods is particularly detrimental to studies. Indeed, the 'size' of a company's mode of entry into the foreign market (low or high commitment) has a significant impact on the development of its marketing strategy.

However, scholars dedicated to marketing exports typically disregard SMEs as being smaller than MNCs, and they fail to evaluate their marketing strategies based on their size and common export methods. A demonstration of this issue is located in the scales employed to evaluate SMEs' marketing strategies regarding exports, which are identical to those employed by larger corporations (*e.g.*, Lages & Montgomery, 2004). However, qualitative research findings indicate that the nature of the international marketing mix depends on the exporter size (Jiménez-Asenjo & Filipescu, 2019). As a result, we can deduce that previous studies have not considered the international strategy of marketing properly.

**Table 1. Research on adaptation and standardisation approaches**

Study	Sample	Marketing strategy	Results
Albaum & Tse (2001)	183 Hong Kong exporters	Adaptation	Competitive advantage (NS)
Cavusgil & Zou (1994)	79 US exporters	Adaptation	Export performance (-)
Fuchs & Köstner (2016)	115 Austrian exporters	Adaptation	Sales growth (NS); profitability (NS); achievement of strategic goals (NS); overall success (NS)
Hultman <i>et al.</i> (2011)	336 Swedish exporters	Adaptation	Export performance (NS)
Lages & Montgomery (2004)	413 Portuguese exporters	Adaptation	Export performance (NS)
Shoham (1999)	98 Israeli exporters	Standardisation	Export performance (-)
Shoham (2021)	Meta-analysis: 17 articles published between 1970 and 2000	Standardisation	Export performance (NS)
Schilke <i>et al.</i> (2009)	489 business units of US MNCs	Standardisation	Standardisation → performance (+)
Sousa & Lengler (2009)	201 Brazilian exporters	Adaptation	Export performance (+)
Westjohn & Magnusson (2017)	203 US exporters	Adaptation	Export performance (+)
Zou <i>et al.</i> (1997)	51 Colombian exporters	Standardisation	Export intensity (NS)

Notes: (NS) – no significant dependence; (+) – confirmed dependence; (-) – rejected dependence.

Source: own study based on Obadia and Vida (2024).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We based the methodological framework on a combination of a critical literature review and a case study approach, focusing on the international marketing strategy of Maspex, a leading Central and Eastern European food and beverage company. We aimed to examine how the company balances standardisation, adaptation, and glocalisation in its marketing strategy across diverse markets. The critical literature review involves analysing existing theoretical and empirical studies on international marketing strategies, particularly the dimensions of product, promotion, distribution, pricing, and branding. We selected sources from peer-reviewed journals, books, and industry reports, emphasizing frameworks and models relevant to multinational corporations operating in culturally diverse regions. This review provides the theoretical foundation for understanding how firms can effectively navigate the global-local dichotomy in marketing.

We chose the case study method to provide an in-depth examination of Maspex's strategic practices. This approach allows for a detailed exploration of the company's operations in different markets, drawing on publicly available data, including corporate reports, marketing materials, and secondary analyses from industry experts. The choice of Maspex as a case study is justified by its significant presence in over 80 countries and its unique approach to marketing in culturally similar yet economically diverse markets, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. Data collection involved compiling information from Maspex's official website, press releases, advertising campaigns, and academic publications that analyse the company's strategy. We focused on identifying patterns of standardisation, adaptation, and glocalisation across Maspex's marketing mix dimensions (product, promotion, place, price) and other strategic aspects such as production and branding.

We synthesised findings from the literature review and case study to develop a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between global and local strategies in Maspex's international marketing efforts. This mixed-method approach ensures both theoretical rigour and practical relevance, offering insights into best practices for companies navigating similar challenges in international markets.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Grupa Maspex sp. z o.o. (afterwards Maspex) was founded in 1990 on the wave of economic enthusiasm that occurred after 1989 in Poland. In the first years of operation, it engaged in the manufacturing and distribution of instant coffee and cocoa products. After three years, it started its own production under the Ekland, Puchatek and Filutki brands. In 1995, it took over the ownership of the Kubuś brand. They started exporting their products to Central and Eastern European markets. By 1999, it opened its foreign branches in the Czech Republic, Romania, Slovakia, and Hungary. In 1999, it took over the Tymbark and Cremona brands, and after 2000, it entered the Bulgarian, Ukrainian, and Russian markets. By 2008, it had acquired numerous foreign companies: Hungarian Plusssz Vitamin, Olympos, Apenta, Czech Walmark, Bulgarian Queen's, Romanian Arnos and Russian Mark IV (sold in 2021) and continued to make acquisitions in Poland (*e.g.*, Lubella). After the crisis in 2009, Maspex bought the Tiger brand, Romanian Salatini and Capollini and the Polish pasta producer Malma. In 2015, Agros Nova (owner of the Łowicz, Kotlin, Włocławek, Krakus, Tarczyn, and DrWitt brands) joined the Maspex's portfolio. After 2016, Maspex bought Rio Bucovina (Romanian producer of mineral water), Aquarex AD (Bulgarian producer of mineral water), and since 2019, it has had a license for tea drinks Nestea. In 2022 and 2023, it acquired CEDC and Jan Becher, which own well-known high-percentage alcohols throughout Europe (Maspex, 2024).

Analysing Maspex's marketing strategy, we can clearly state that its strategy is to build brands with strong consumer awareness in local markets and conduct acquisitions that increase the range of branded products.

Maspex is one of the most innovative companies on the market in this part of Europe. The Maspex Group has launched the 'Hummingbird Effect' strategy until 2030. This strategy is that innovation in one field causes change in other fields together, leading to breakthroughs, and positive changes for people and the planet. Such behaviours are very important in terms of eco-innovation, corporate social responsibility (CSR) and environmental protection. The development of companies in this area is extremely beneficial for potential consumers (Hajdukiewicz & Pera, 2024; Proszowska *et al.*, 2024). Maspex Group pays special attention to people – employees, co-workers and, above all, customers and consumers (Maspex, 2024). It is the human aspect in their politics and functioning – also in the aspect of marketing – that can lead to fulfilling the conditions of the marketing mix and emphasizing the importance of 'People.'

Another goal of the marketing mix is to emphasize the importance of price and products. When analysing the reports and information to investors of Maspex Group, it is easy to see the importance of a common policy of manufacturers and retailers in improving the quality and volume of sales. A milestone of Maspex Group was the introduction of innovation regarding the analysis of sales data or data from stores and the exchange of this data through the cooperation of manufacturers and retailers. It is worth highlighting here that until recently, retail was not ready for such a transparent approach to the analysis of sales data. However, Maspex's ready-made solutions and their transmission to retailers improve the communication with Maspex Group. With this analysis, there is room to implement the pricing policy and adapt it to the optimal price management in such a way that it is possible to assess the appropriate final price level acceptable to the customer (Maspex, 2024).

We should also mention that Maspex uses artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities to create Smart Kitchen Planner (SKP), whose task is to collect all user data and, thanks to machine learning technology, SKP recommends personalized recipes for users. Maspex's AI systems are constantly learning and, based on user interactions, lead to greater accuracy and relevance of the collected data.

Another solution using AI is an intelligent tool that automates the process of creating planograms, which recommends the optimal arrangement of products on the store shelf for the category (the appropriate place; advanced merchandising) based on various data sources – qualitative (market, consumer, shopper) and quantitative.

Regarding the promotion approach (another example of 7Ps), Maspex emphasizes the importance of three factors: knowledge about customers and products offered, research and analysis of shopper trends, and process and analysis of the effectiveness of the entire group.

Regarding the first factor, Maspex Group plans and creates trade marketing actions using knowledge about customers, including the possibilities, requirements, and retailers' abilities to implement marketing activities. Once this data is collected, the Maspex group has specialists among its employees in individual brands, and each of them specialises in a specific (brand-specific) target group. An important factor contributing to the success of the company is the ability to meet customer requirements and respond quickly to actions taken by competitors and business partners (Kolasińska-Morawska *et al.*, 2019). Given the above, Maspex Group's marketing campaigns are tailored to the needs of the market.

The second factor, important for the Maspex Group, is the analysis of shopper trends. Maspex has its own research panel, M-Lab, which uses the services of external research institutes (*e.g.*, Nielsen, trade press, or GFK, an international public opinion research company) and, as mentioned above, its own databases using AI. Thanks to these treatments, Maspex can optimize the efficiency of the entire group.

When preparing promotional campaigns, Maspex considers many factors, including those that depend on the specifics of the industry and the particular customer. Production planning, co-packing planning and subsequent planning with the store and sales structures are essential for the entire process. In this way, Maspex joins the group of global brands that benefit from the concept of glocalisation of the marketing mix, which draws attention to the importance of globalisation processes in valuing location – thus tailoring advertising to local, specific markets (Hollensen, 2020).

In the product domain, Maspex implements a strategy that combines standardisation and adaptation, depending on the characteristics of the target market. Maspex does not uniformly offer its entire product portfolio across all markets. For instance, instant cocoa products are absent from the Czech and Slovak markets, and DrWitt beverages are not available in Hungary. Similarly, Bucovina water is exclusively sold in Romania, while alcoholic beverages such as Bacherovka are present in the Czech Republic, and Figo is available only in Romania and the Czech Republic. Even when a brand is present in multiple markets, its product variations may differ. A notable example is the Kubu juice line in Hungary, where the flavour selection is narrower compared to Poland. Packaging formats also vary significantly by region. In the Czech Republic, many Kubik products are offered in cans, while Puchatek cocoa in Poland is sold in a distinctive 600-gram package or PET bottles, the latter also available exclusively in Poland and Romania. Products marketed under the same brand and packaging may exhibit different ingredient compositions across countries. For example, the lemon-flavoured DrWitt isotonic drink has 16 kcal and 3.9g of carbohydrates per 100g in Poland, while the same product in the Czech Republic and Slovakia contains 21 kcal and 5g of carbohydrates. Even greater differences are evident in products tailored to local preferences, such as Kubuś in Poland, Kubu in Hungary, and Kubik in the Czech Republic, where caloric content and sugar levels can vary by as much as 50%. Despite these adaptations, Maspex maintains standardisation for certain products, such as Żubrówka vodka, marketed in identical form and under the same brand name across various markets. However, even such standardized offerings are not universally available, as evidenced by the absence of Żubrówka in Hungary (Maspex, 2024).

Maspex demonstrates standardisation in its consistent brand messaging, focusing on values such as quality and product trust, which hold particular significance in culturally similar Central and Eastern European markets. Adaptive elements include tailoring advertising language and product names. However, campaign characters and mascots, such as Kubuś, remain consistent throughout the region. An example of combining these approaches is the Tymbark Junior Cup, a national school youth football tournament held in Poland and Romania. These events promote the Tymbark brand in a manner that is similar yet adjusted to the local market's specifics. Such initiatives highlight Maspex's ability to build a unified brand image while addressing local preferences and needs. However, not all brands maintain dedicated websites in every market. For instance, DrWitt lacks a standalone website in Romania, and the Brumi brand does not have one in Hungary. This reflects a tailored approach to digital marketing and brand promotion based on regional priorities.

In distribution, the company pursues standardisation through centralized logistics and partnerships with international retail chains. However, adaptation is evident in cases such as products that are produced and distributed locally, such as Rio Bukovina water, bottled and sold exclusively in Romania. This approach reduces logistics costs and enhances the product offering's relevance to specific markets.

Maspex's pricing policy relies on the analysis of sales data and the adjustment of prices to local market conditions. By leveraging modern data analysis technologies, the company optimises pricing strategies, considering consumers' purchasing power and the competitive landscape in different markets. This approach ensures a balance between product affordability and profitability (Maspex, 2024).

**Table 2. International marketing strategy of Maspex**

Dimension of a strategy	Standardisation	Adaptation	Glocalisation
<i>Marketing mix of 4Ps</i>			
Product	Żubrówka vodka, Tiger energy drink	Diverse product portfolios: (e.g., Puchatek (Brumi) cocoa: available in Romania, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Ukraine, not offered in Czech Republic, Slovakia and Bulgaria), regional product availability (e.g., Bucovina water in Romania, Figo beverages in Romania and Czechia, Bacherovka only in Czechia).	Different product compositions (e.g., DrWitt isotonic drinks, varied packaging (e.g., Kubík in cans in Czechia, Puchatek cocoa in PET bottles only in Poland/Romania, different ingredients in the products under the same brand (e.g., lemon-flavored DrWitt isotonic drink).
Promotion	Consistent brand messaging focusing on quality and trust	Language adaptations and localized ad campaigns, localized websites or lack thereof (e.g., DrWitt in Romania, Brumi in Hungary).	Unified campaigns with local adaptations (e.g., Tymbark Junior Cup in Poland and Romania).
Place and distribution channels	Centralized logistics, collaboration with international retail chains	Localized production and distribution (e.g., Rio Bukovina in Romania).	Local adaptations in retail collaborations, targeting specific regional retail chains where necessary.
Price	General pricing principles based on data analysis	Price adjustments based on local market conditions.	Adjusted balance between affordability and profitability while maintaining brand equity.
<i>Other aspects of marketing strategy</i>			
Production	Centralized for most products	Local production (e.g., Rio Bukovina water in Romania)	–
Branding	Unified branding for global products	Localized product names and branding elements (e.g., Kubuś in Poland, Kubu in Hungary, Kubík in Czechia).	Consistent use of mascots and brand visuals with tailored messaging for specific cultural preferences.

Source: own study.

In reference to the principles of merchandising, Maspex emphasizes the importance of applying standardisation to the packaging graphics and adaptation to the brand name. Maspex does not rely solely on its own beliefs in the packaging design process but on knowledge from the research mentioned above (Maspex, 2024).

## CONCLUSIONS

Maspex serves as a compelling example of how combining traditional flavours with innovative, customized solutions can address the diverse preferences of consumers across various markets. The company's strategy demonstrates that success in international marketing depends on leveraging a dynamic marketing mix rather than adhering strictly to either standardisation or adaptation. By continuously investing in creative and unconventional visual elements, Maspex not only distinguishes its products but also aligns them with rapidly evolving consumer expectations. This flexibility in responding to market needs highlights the importance of balancing global consistency with local relevance in achieving business excellence.

From a theoretical perspective, this analysis contributes to the ongoing debate on standardisation versus adaptation by emphasizing the situational nature of the decision-making process. It supports the

notion that no single strategy guarantees success; instead, the effectiveness of a marketing approach depends on contextual factors such as market conditions, cultural differences, and consumer behaviour.

On a practical level, Maspex's case underscores the importance of innovation in product development, packaging, and promotion as key drivers of competitive advantage. The company's focus on combining visual appeal with meaningful storytelling through its product labels offers actionable insights for practitioners aiming to enhance brand differentiation.

This study has several limitations. Firstly, it focuses primarily on a single company's marketing strategy, which may limit the findings' generalizability to other industries or markets. Secondly, the analysis does not quantitatively measure the effectiveness of Maspex's strategies in terms of specific performance metrics, such as sales growth or market share. Lastly, the dynamic nature of consumer preferences and market trends means that the strategies highlighted here may require constant re-evaluation.

Future research could explore comparative studies across industries to identify common patterns and differences in the use of standardisation and adaptation. Moreover, scholars could employ quantitative approaches to measure the direct impact of various elements of the marketing mix on consumer perception and business outcomes. Longitudinal studies examining how companies adapt their strategies over time in response to shifting market conditions could also provide deeper insights into the interplay between global and local marketing practices.

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### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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