

## ▼ Revolution and Evolution:

# An Examination of the Current Egyptian Retailing Landscape

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## ▼ Abstract

Governance, democracy and transparency are key elements for development in emerging countries because they reinforce each other and provide suitable environments for business practices and free trade. Egypt's economic reform program and exposure to global activities has led to a new lifestyle and more modern shopping habits in the country. These changes have helped to transition the Egyptian retailing sector from fragmentation, in which there are many individual and small retailers selling lower end items, toward retail concentration. Modern marketing systems require new political orientations as well. Egyptian youth have helped to shift the retailing system in Egypt through organized strikes. On January 25, 2011 the political environment changed when Egyptian youth toppled the authoritarian regime that ruled the country for thirty years. Facebook and other online communities facilitated the revolution which has been deemed, "The Facebook Revolution". These communities also created an impact in the Egyptian retail infrastructure. Now modern marketing and retailing practices are accompanying the political progress which will lead Egypt toward prosperity.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the current Egyptian retailing system and landscape. This paper provides insight into Egyptian consumers and the future of retailing in Egypt. Further analysis is provided within the context of how small independent retailers will compete with the larger newcomers. This paper addresses the Egyptian youth revolution as a new lifestyle that will change the retailing in Egypt.

## ▼ Introduction: Current Status

When there is economic progress accompanied with political reform a nation will have an opportunity to create prosperity. Egyptian youth, "the facebook generation," changed the Egyptian regime. When beginning to research the Egyptian retail landscape, the focus was on the Egyptian retail market shifting from a fragmented system, in which there are many individual and small retailers selling lower end items, to a concentrated retailing system. After the revolution, it is evident that the shift is not only economic but political as well. The Egyptian youth are changing the Egyptian lifestyle. These consumers prefer modern shopping habits and are helping to change the political regime to become more modern, democratic and transparent.

We believe the youth revolution will furnish the appropriate business and legal environment for modern trading and stability and will spur retail growth. The revolution in Egypt was accomplished without a formal leader or plan. Accompanying changes provide a promising future business climate. Although uncertain, the post revolution generation may be composed of many leaders (Uncertainty clouds jubilation in Egypt after Mubarak's departure, 2011). Transparency will assist the development of economic stability.

## ▼ Background

Egypt is the largest market in the Arab world. A population of more than 84 million citizens makes Egypt a lucrative market in the Middle East. About 42% of the population is under the age of twenty (Cairo Festival City hopes to capitalize on Egyptian retail sector, 2008). Cairo, Egypt's capital, has about 17 million residents. Alexandria, the second largest city, has over 4 million people. Egypt Retail Report forecasts the country's retail sales to grow from EGP147.80bn (US\$27.22bn) in 2010 to EGP208.37bn (US\$38.37bn) by 2014 (Egypt Retail Report Q4 2010). According to the Al-Futtaim Group, there will be an increase in per capita income by 7.2% between 2007-2012. This will lead to an increase in demand for luxury products and necessitates more modern retail technology. This shift will attract the attention of international brands. Egypt's GDP was US\$226 Billion in 2010. Between 2010 and 2014, GDP per capita, is predicted to rise by 63.9% to US\$4,463.

The Egyptian retail market is growing because of the large youth population who are accepting a more westernized lifestyle. This young generation in Egypt is educated, open-minded and technologically savvy.

The emergence of a more affluent middle class and the

trend toward accepting modern retailing concepts that match their lifestyles is also driving shopping behavior. In addition, car ownership in Egypt is increasing. The average car ownership is 23 cars per 1000 people, which shows a steady rate of growth (Business Monitor International, 2010). Egypt is ranked 13<sup>th</sup> in terms of the most attractive retail market worldwide. It is one of the most promising and fastest expanding markets in its region. In 2009 Egypt was ranked 15<sup>th</sup> in global retailing (Consumer survey reveals Egyptian retail purchasing habits, 2010). Thus, the economy is ripe for foreign investment.

## ▼ Fragmentation to Concentration

The move away from fragmentation helps to encourage international retail investment in Egypt. Retail internationalization occurs when a retail establishment transfers a retail concept (idea, physical presence) to another country, in this case Egypt. Internationalization of retailing is more complicated than manufacturing internationalization (Alexander, 1997; Burt, 1993; Burt and Carralero-Encinas, 2000; Dawson, 1994, 2000; McGoldrick, 2002; Pellegrini, 1999). Internationalization of retail activities is also different than exporting. International retailers must develop rapport with local suppliers and other members of the distribution network. This is in addition to understanding the culture and consumers of the new environment. Egypt is expected to witness a friendlier business environment which will better fit investors' preferences.

Several positive changes are occurring that make the retail landscape appealing and indicate a shift from fragmentation to concentration. First the growth rate is in an upward trend. In addition the youth population and rising middle class will seek more modern products. Finally the consumer base is poised for growth (Egypt: Retail sector to reach \$ 25.33 billion, 2011). Signs of retail growth in Egypt are evident. City Stars Egypt, the largest retail space in Egypt (with around 150,000 sq meters and a value around \$800 million) opened in 2004. The Dandy Mega Mall and Maadi City Center, both large retail centers, have opened in recent years. Many other planned shopping sites are under construction with a balanced tenet mix which appears to mimic the U.S. retail market.

## ▼ International Retail Growth

Much can be learned from one of the early entrants that did not experience success in Egypt. The Sainsbury grocery chain was initially lured to Egypt by the size of the market, workforce availability and the positive relations between the Egyptian and British governments. Sainsbury pulled out of the Egyptian market after two years in operation and incurred tremendous losses in Egypt of

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# Egyptian retailing

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over £100m. Before pulling out of Egypt in 2001, Sainsbury was operating 100 stores with 2000 employees (Sainsbury's pulls out of Egypt, 2001). Sainsbury's chairman, Sir Peter Davis, commented, "It's a developing market and we went in with a very ambitious programme. I think we tried to go in too far, too fast". The company blamed the poor trading environment and difficulties in working with the Egyptian government. It didn't help that local shopkeepers, during the Palestinian uprising, spread rumors that Sainsbury had Jewish connections. Muslim clerics joined in by stating that shopping at the retailer was a sin (Sainsbury's pulls out of Egypt, 2001).

We believe that Sainsbury did not have a strong business plan and the company did not understand the cultural and societal norms of the country. Because they were the first major retailer to introduce modern supermarket shopping, they failed to anticipate the consumer reaction. Up to that point consumers had not been exposed to modern supermarkets and lacked the education needed to understand the more sophisticated retail practices. According to El-Amir and Burt (2007), Sainsbury had technical superiority but failed to account for the needs of the people within the social context.

Today there are several international retailers located in Egypt including

- Aldo (footwear) which has four stores in Cairo and one in Alexandria.
- Bershka, located in 50 countries and the youngest brand of the Inditex group, is operating in Egypt selling fashion clothes, shoes and accessories to the 13 – 25 year old market (Bershka, 2011).
- Bianco, a trendy footwear brand from Denmark is currently operating in Egypt and has two outlets in El Obour City and City Stars Mall.
- The French Connection, a clothing retailer, chose Egypt as one of its Middle Eastern locations.
- H&M, located in Cairo.
- Radio Shack is the biggest electronics retail chain in Egypt. The first outlet was opened in Cairo in August of 1998.
- Zara and Mango, the Spanish apparel provider.
- Clarks, the UK specialty footwear and leather goods provider, opened recently in City Stars Mall.
- Esprit, located in Cairo.

Other retailers scheduled to open in Egypt include the UK Marks & Spencer which is expected to open in The Dandy Mega Mall (Consumer survey reveals Egyptian retail purchasing habits, 2010). IKEA, the Swedish furniture store, announced its opening in Cairo. This introduces big box specialty furniture retailing to Egypt.

Grocery chains are also experiencing success in Egypt. Carrefour, Spinneys and the locally owned Hyper One are opening stores (Egypt: Retail sector to reach \$ 25.33 billion, 2011). There is a potential for more retail expansion since the market is undersupplied (Economic Update Egypt: The rise of retail Egypt, 2011).

## ▼ Modernization

Large international retailers like Carrefour, Ahold, Tesco, Walmart and Metro have already begun operating in emerging economies with locations in Asia, South America, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. These retailers often locate where food retailing is dominated by family-owned stores and other small retailing formats (Goldman, Ramaswami and Krider, 2002). In some emerging countries modernization, especially in food retailing, is accepted while in others it is not. Many studies of emerging economies have indicated that modern retailing techniques may have failed as customers preferred a more traditional

format in food shopping (Goldman, 1981; Guerion, 1964; Kaynak, 1985). This may be related to the age of the customer base in those countries. In Egypt, preliminary indications are that the modernization of food retailing and the introduction of specialty retailers are being accepted.

Prior studies in developing countries showed that large supermarkets were accepted mainly by the wealthy. The time-starved upper classes prefer the one stop shopping that larger retail formats provide (Goldman, Ramaswami and Krider 2002). In the Egyptian retailing market, low income residents visit the larger food stores to benefit from the store's economies of scale which brings down the price of goods and services.

There are other trends toward modernization that make the Egyptian retail environment more attractive. The use of credit cards is greatly increasing Egyptian shoppers' purchasing power (D'Andrea, Marcotte and Morrison, 2010) by allowing people to frequent and spend more at new stores. E-commerce growth is expected to increase as Egyptian youth buying power increases. As customers gain access and knowledge about retailing, their demands for service

and quality also increase. This is in part due to increasing access to the Internet. Consumers are able to customize their orders according to their needs, obtain products that previously were not accessible and conduct price comparisons.

There is movement toward dual household earners in Egypt. Consequently middle income Egyptian families have more discretionary income than they have had in the past. Families are buying updated appliances such as bigger refrigerators. Credit card usage is up as consumers use different credit cards to shop. As stated previously, car ownership is on the rise which increases mobility and encourages purchases from supermarkets and superstores.

There are many obstacles to the modernization of retailing in Egypt. Currently in Egypt, new retail establishments are opening in crowded areas with no parking facilities. Out-of-stock situations are experienced daily in many stores. Typically, returning merchandise is not an easy or pleasant for customers. It is common to

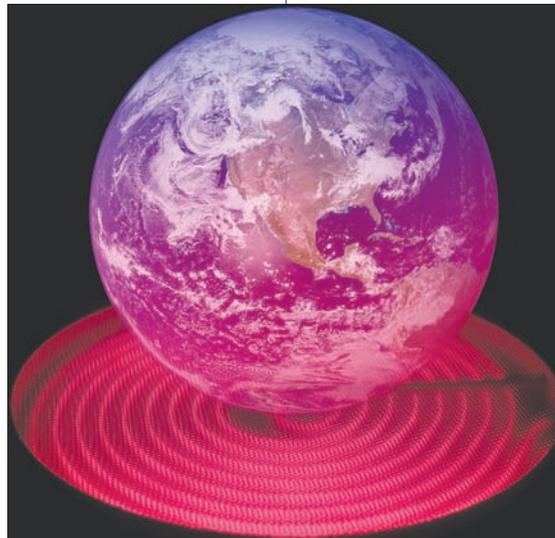
find customer service telephone numbers that are not working and if they are, customers are often placed on hold for extended periods of time. Consumers often receive conflicting messages from retailers, resulting in frustration. Serving two customers simultaneously is often practiced by retailers which further annoys customers (Hill, 2009). In addition, the inflation rate is about 10% in Egypt. This is expected to drop due to reform programs and political stabilization (Egypt: Retail sector to reach \$ 25.33 billion, 2011).

## ▼ Site Selection

Site selection is an important issue for the Egyptian retail market segment. Currently, larger retailers often find that it is best to open their stores in isolated locations to benefit from the space and the availability of cheaper land. Location should be addressed not only with the dimension of proximity to customers, but also from the perspective of proximity to other stores. Some retail types will benefit from locating nearby each other and other types may face challenges by locating too close to one another (Grewal, Levy, and Kumar, 2009).

In Cairo, although real estate is scarce, there is a trend toward larger stores (Aalto-Setälä, 2002). New cities are emerging to accommodate the wealthy Egyptians who prefer larger houses. The government is offering land for sale in cities where the affluent live. Most of the larger retailers select sites near these cities.

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Retailers have many opportunities in developing countries but they face many challenges as well. Maintaining customer satisfaction, offering safe credit transactions, and getting people to and from the stores are among many challenges faced in Egypt and other emerging markets (D'Andrea, Marcotte and Morrison, 2010). To attract the lower and middle income consumers who may not yet own cars, large food retailers which are located in isolated areas can be more successful by offering promotional cards with transportation discounts, or other offers that defray costs associated with travel to a retailer.

Again, marketing and retailing "tools" may help to increase store patronage. For example, retailers can develop affinity cards, or membership cards for their retail outlets. They may also use other techniques that can be inserted into the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) programs. The key is to develop customer loyalty. If a large retailer is close to their customers' neighborhoods then the loyalty cards may be attractive to them. Proximity to low and average income customers is needed because the costs associated with travel are prohibitive (Demoulin and Zidda, 2009).

## ▼ Pricing

Emerging market customers focus on essentials and the lowest priced products with acceptable quality even when it comes to luxury products. Often they purchase a lot from the cheapest outlets, very little from the best outlets, but they ignore the at-market retailers (D'Andrea, Marcotte and Morrison, 2010). Another important issue that should be addressed is the street and open air vendors who have a competitive advantage with lower prices and fresher food. These open air vendors are meeting customer demand in emerging economies. While superstores offer quality products, open air selling offers convenience and several grades of quality with a variety of prices from which to choose (D'Andrea, Aleman and Stengel, 2006).

Customers are willing to travel to the mall or larger retailers to buy cheaper products. This doesn't mean that time isn't important but it may indicate that price is more important than time to those consumers (Monga and Saini, 2009). Higher end shoppers may be willing to pay higher prices to save time. Thus, higher income groups may seek to optimize their shopping trips. This may motivate shoppers to visit larger retailers less often (Leszczyc, Sinha and Sahgal, 2004). Neighborhood stores are then used for smaller shopping trips when a customer has an immediate need.

## ▼ The Low Income Segment

In Egypt, like most of the other developing countries, low income consumers represent the bulk of purchasing power in the market. Food retailers like Carrefour started to capture market share by attracting the attention of lower income customers. A positive relationship between retail concentration and price has been found in several studies (Lamm 1981; Cotterill 1999). Others have found that concentration lowers price (Bucklin 1986; Aalto-Setälä, 2002).

Education is needed to teach consumers modern marketing methods. Most low income Egyptians don't differentiate between branded and non-branded packaged items, especially when it comes to food and electronics. The pricing of branded vs. non-branded products is not well understood. In emerging markets customers don't realize the full benefits of products; some do not even know how to assess different providers' offerings. Store employees also suffer from the same lack of knowledge (D'Andrea, Marcotte and Morrison, 2010).

Different strategies are being employed, especially in the food sector, where the emphasis is on price reduction in order to gain market share or market entry. Many Egyptian low income customers don't understand value-based quality or even the concept of paying more for customer service. Large retailers are able to offer assortment and variety with lower prices, but often at the expense of services and convenient locations (Leszczyc, Sinha and Sahgal, 2004). In developed nations, store quality is defined by location, price assortment, fast checkout, friendly and courteous service, weekly specials and pleasant shopping environments (Goldman, Ramaswami and Krider 2002). These concepts have not reached their potential when it comes to the Egyptian retail landscape.

Low income Egyptians often frequent larger stores based on their belief these stores provide entertainment. The Egyptians often socialize in these stores and

because they may have travelled far to get to the store, they will spend a good portion of the day at these stores. We suggest that retailers change the format of stores from selling basic necessities to becoming knowledge and learning centers that add to the experience of shopping. This will help the retailer connect with the lower income segments.

## ▼ Growth of Branded Products

Well-known private brands improve customer segmentation and sharpen the competitive advantages of firms. This also creates or increases customer loyalty. Generally private brands lower the store's prices and sometimes hurt the national brand (Grozniak and Heese, 2010).

Once multinational companies implemented marketing programs, Egyptians were attracted to new private brands available at the larger retailers and at a few independent retailers. The youth segment is attracted to fashion clothing advertisements produced by national brands such as Zara, Guess, and Mango, among others. Printed advertisements are placed in high quality magazines like "Egypt Today", "Kalam el nass" and "Kol el nass". Modern billboards are also being utilized (The Egyptian retail market, 2010).

In the past, smaller retailers carried generic grocery items. These unbranded products started to disappear from the market as the Egyptian economy began to develop. Within the economic reform context, large international retailers launched branded manufactured packaged products in the Egyptian market. Multinational brands developed a presence in the larger central shopping centers (The Egyptian retail market, 2010).

## ▼ Small Retailers Can Remain Relevant

In the past, small grocers and independent stores dominated the grocery market and were the primary source of products. Today the large store format dominates the U.S. and Europe as supermarkets and hypermarkets take the majority of market share. Although the trend is spreading, the variation among emerging market countries of the split of market share between small and big box retailers is large. Egypt is currently experiencing the growth of large supermarkets and the loss of domination by small retailers.

In the current Egyptian landscape, small retailers must adapt to the changes to remain relevant. There are several actions these retailers can take. One action is connecting with the local community to discover wants and needs. Small independent retailers can also develop niches. In doing so, they can better cater to customers and develop a competitive advantage. "On-the-Run", one of Egypt's successful convenience store retailers, has begun to expand in Egypt catering to the youth segment. Some rural and poor neighborhood retailers in Egypt are sustaining their customer base by providing informal credit lines where retailers record debts in a notebook. The customer pays their debt on a weekly or monthly basis. Informal credit is seen by these small neighborhood stores as a method of creating consumer loyalty (D'Andrea, Aleman, and Stengel, 2006).

For smaller retailers, convenient locations and customer patronage loyalty are competitive advantages which allow them to compete with larger retailers (Moyer, 1962). Egyptians tend to be loyal to small independent retailers based on the simplicity of products that they sell in addition to the "connection" people feel with these small traditional stores.

Relationship building is another way to establish loyalty. Establishing rapport with customers and delivering excellent customer service increases customers' switching costs (Adjei, Griffith and Noble, 2009). Customer Relationship Management can be used to better identify the needs of the current customer base and attract new customers. It is difficult to assess the impact of CRM programs in isolation of other relevant variables (Grewal and Levy, 2007). Nevertheless, CRM programs will help smaller retailers to compete as the landscape evolves.

Relationships with suppliers, and the quality of these ties, boost a retailer's value delivery network and improve customer satisfaction. Because the Egyptian market is currently fragmented, Egyptian retailers must find ways to create relationships with their suppliers that help take advantage of economies

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of scale, JIT inventory and other Western retailing practices. To compete with retail chains, independent retailers could collaborate and form cooperatives to increase their buying power with suppliers (Runyan and Droge, 2008).

## ▼ The Future

As can be seen there are many factors facilitating the movement from fragmentation toward concentration in the Egyptian retail environment. Egyptians are expecting increases in branded products and modernization. Access to the Internet has opened up additional retail opportunities. As the political and economic environments stabilize the attractiveness of the region will increase. Thus this shift toward a concentrated retailing system is predicted due to these changes.

We believe the landscape of the Egyptian retail market will attract more new investment from chain stores and big box retailers and that modernization of retailing practices will be key ingredients for success for Egyptian retailers. In order for small, independent retailers to stay competitive they must focus on developing niches and solidifying customer relationships. We posit that Egyptians are shifting from shopping trips that are utilitarian in nature to those that are experiential. Retailers must understand this and create products, programs and services with this in mind. Those retailers who provide an experience (i.e. entertainment, education, social connection, and networking) will perform better than those who do not.

## ▼ Conclusion

No one can guarantee a stable business climate in Egypt, although the peaceful revolution organized by Egypt's younger generation will most likely make Egypt an attractive market. New retailers have invested in Egypt prior to the revolution and we believe this trend will continue and expand as the infrastructure and political environments stabilize. Egyptian retailing will continue its movement toward concentration to appeal to the new lifestyle. An understanding of the cultural and socio-economic trends is important for success. Technology and new inventory management instruments will help both large and small retailers cope and address the environmental variables that impact them. For larger retailers, especially in the food sector, market penetration pricing strategies will pay off by attracting Egyptian customers who are price elastic.

We expect that the new political regime will have more transparency which in turn will attract more international retailers to Egypt. Revolution will help the evolution of retailing and hasten the move from fragmentation to concentration.

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