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Bridging international borders: Brand identity beyond its home origins.

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ABSTRACT
This article aims to show that brand identity is in constant evolution while simultaneously offering a real perspective in terms of creation, development, and brand management based on the transfer of its core values to its customers. This analysis presents the origins of this concept and its initial anthropomorphic focus to a more complex brand identity co-creation process which takes part between a company and its stakeholders in foreign countries. With data collected from three countries namely China, Ivory Coast and South Africa, the study makes use of a quantitative bivariate correlation and ANOVA analysis to appraise the strength, direction and validity of the associations between the various metrics of brand identity and customer satisfaction in foreign markets. The study finds that brand identity, adaptation and use of social media have positive, statistically significant association with the level of customer satisfaction which is demmed to be valid and stable as the commensurate analysis of variance reveal insignificant F-statistics. As such, the study concludes and recommends that a paradigm shift in management is sufficient to enhance a company's competitive positioning in a foreign market. This, in turn, allows it to bridge international borders as it assimilates to different local business environments and promote the co-creation of its brand's identity, ethics, and core values.

KEYWORDS
Brand identity; Brand management; Co-creation; Communication Strategies; Positioning; Stakeholders; Consumer behavior

1 Introduction

Nowadays, customers preferences in brands are justified by much more than a simple choice of image and colors printed on a product label. In the late 1940's, companies began to acquire commercial awareness pertaining to the embryonic development of brand identity and its key role in client fidelization (Ambroise, 2006). Rapidly, researchers began to focus their efforts on the true meaning of brands, and their implication in brand popularity. Further studies on this concept explored the psychological and anthropological implications of brands throughout culture and the daily lives of individuals. Over time, it was demonstrated that brands had become cultural ankers engrained in lifestyle philosophies (Ambroise, 2006). The relationship which has formed itself between customers and brands is ever stronger to a point where one couldn't imagine certain routine activities without its go-to branded piece of equipment. Brands have multiplied to a speed which is hard to keep-up with, yet they stand out everywhere one goes whether it be on TV,

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scrolling through social media pages, or simply during one's daily-commute. Consequently, it is in this perspective that many studies have been conducted to analyze and understand the relationship between consumers and brands and the extent to which this link affects consumer behavior. Not only has it been established that individuals form an almost intimate relationship with brands, but they continuously contribute to furthering the definition of one's self. In this postmodern era where markets are intimately interconnected, popular home brands find themselves constantly transposed into new environments with many more companies also striving to bridge their own borders. As such, the purpose of this article is to demonstrate that brand identity remains at the forefront of marketing and managerial strategies as it is mutates itself to successfully gain new clientele abroad.

Firstly, brand identity as the key concept of this article will be detailed in the literature review, from its historical emergence to its supporting theories. Secondly, the case study of this research including its methodology will be introduced to demonstrate the adaptability of the popular fastfood chain Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) in different cultural settings. Consequently, the research findings will highlight the role of brand identity in bridging international borders as shown by this comparative case study and its sampling originating from three distinct countries; China, Ivory Coast and South Africa. This section will then discuss different brand identity marketing strategies along with the incontournable tool which is now social media. Lastly, the research limits as well as the prospective future approaches will be examined before concluding this reflection.

2 Literature Review

2.1 From self-concept to brand identity

Brands can be described according to three different characteristics: physical attributes, functional characteristics and the "character traits" associated with the brand, in other words, the brand's identity (Plummer, 1984 cited by Ambroise, 2006). For many years, research and reflection on brands focused mainly on their symbolism in the broad sense. Gradually, it was shown that brands were a way for consumers to assert their identity and develop their self-concept which can be defined as "the set of thoughts and feelings that an individual has about himself" (Rosenberg, 1979 cited by Sirgy, 1982). Thus, material possessions serve to cultivate and develop a sense of individuality, and this extends to all objects or living things that people control, are attached to, or wish to have. In reality, objects allow the individual, like other social referents, to confront his self-concept with himself and with the external world (Ambroise, 2006).

In 1967, in the context of marketing, Grubh and Grathwohl developed a theoretical approach according to which "the consumer's buying behavior is determined by the interaction between the buyer's personality and the image of the product purchased". In other words, possessions are essential for building and preserving individual identity. In the continuity of this first theoretical approach, Sirgy (1982) developed the theory of congruence which postulates that the individual acts and/or consumes according to the idea he has of himself. In concrete terms, each individual tends to emphasize his sense of self and behaves in a coherent manner according to the image of the person they would like to be thus confirming that individuals transfer their identity to the objects they possess. Through this transition, consumers also transfer their identity to the products and brands they consume vis-à-vis oneself and others (Helk, 1988; Schutz-Klein et al., 1995 cited by Ambroise. 2006). This brand identity connection is conceptualized as the identity link that exists between consumers and brands (Fournier, 1998).

2.2 The role of symbolism within brand identity

Beyond a simple transfer of meaning, it seems that consumers personify and humanize products and especially brands (Fournier, 1998). Indeed, it is now accepted that brands have a symbolic meaning because they carry a certain number of messages, promises, values, and cultural references. Considered as real vectors of communication, brands have progressively become individualities to which consumers attribute a real character, even a real identity. Nowadays one can think of the evocation of the Starbucks brand which refers directly to quality coffee, to a productive environment, and to dynamic customers. The male perfume *Gentleman* of Givenchy, on the other hand, evokes a virile, masculine and confident type of man. From an operational point of view, brand images have been personified for a long time, notably by advertisers who monetize the incarnation of brands by spokespersons or icons who often facilitate this humanization. Thus, Puma has been reinvigorated by the image of the sprinter, Usain Bolt; while coffee drinkers have been dazzled by the manly portrait of George Clooney in his multiple Nespresso ads, etc. These examples confirm the idea that brands have an identity, a singular character which allows the appreciation of this new concept's relevance.

Additional theories have emphasized that humans have the need to "anthropomorphize" objects to facilitate their interactions with the immaterial world. As a result, consumers have no difficulty assigning an identity to brands, yet it is then essentially the marketing actions that create a certain interactivity between the brand and its consumers, notably through communication methods (D'Astous et al., 2002). Consequently, it is possible to imagine that all marketing actions are perceived, analyzed and then integrated by consumers as behaviors and character traits emanating from the brand (Ambroise, 2006; Fournier, 1998). Practitioners heavily rely on human characteristics associated with the typical brand user, on the image constructed by the company and on celebrity endorsements. They also rely on product attributes, symbols, logos and slogans to develop brand identity associations (Ambroise, 2006).

2.3 Aaker's Human Personality Scale

In 1997, Aaker proposed the first brand personality scale which demonstrates that the transposition of human personalities is based on a pyramidal approach similar to those developed in the field of personality psychology. Her research applied a five-dimensional structure (Big Fire theory) to the personality of a number of brands from different industries. This scale focuses on emotions as the preemptor of customers' decision to purchase given brands. In other words, the recognition and associations that emanate from the brand's marketing tactics create customer loyalty in those who associate themselves to the personality traits emphasized. As shown below, a structure corresponding to the identity of the brands and also comprising five dimensions was obtained in the form of personality traits which were sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness (Aaker, 1997).

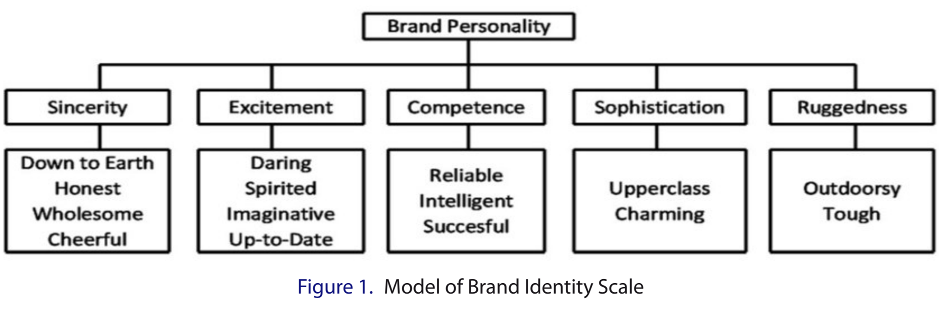

Figure 1. Model of Brand Identity Scale

It is worth mentioning that even if this scale has allowed this new field of research on brand personality to progress through a totally pioneering and widely recognized scale, these findings have however been subject to numerous criticisms. Among other things, the legitimacy of applying to brands qualifiers previously selected human personality traits has been heavily questionned. Indeed, as Wee (2004) points out, most of the work done on brand identity is based on the transposition of human personality theories to the field of brands yet humans have their own unique characteristics which are not necessarily transposable to brands.

2.4 Keller's (2001) Brand Equity Model (CBBE)

Taking the latter into consideration, Keller's Brand Equity Model is worth briefly describing as it depicts a shift in companies' efforts to encompass a more complex approach to the attainment of customer satisfaction and happiness through brand consumption. Rather, it focuses on the construction of a strong relationship and resonance between brands and its clientele (Keller, 2001).

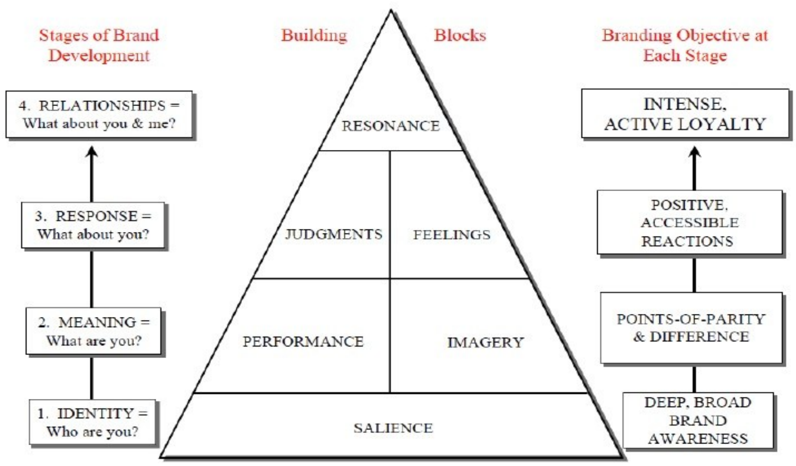

Figure 2. Model of Customer based brand equity (CBBE)

Built as a pyramid, the base of this model represents brand identity which merely stands to define how customers view the brand and how it distingues itself from others. In this case, the attraction is based off of marketing tactics and successful ad campaigns. Brand meaning is the following level of the model where a more extensive definition of one's products takes place for its targeted audience. This is when customers become acquainted with the brand's performance (quality) and general appearance. Thirdly, once the product has been purchased, this is the stage at which its customers find out if the brand lives up to its standards. It is also a key moment where customers, if happy with their goods, can become brand advocates. Equality so, if dissatisfied, this will have a negative impact as the brand will likely be openly criticized. Companies need to maintain a close relationship with their clientele to better address jugments (Keller, 2001). Lastly, brand resonance at the summit of the pyramid, is achieved once a strong relationship of trust and connection is built with satisfied customers. Strangers sharing the same taste in brands can find resonance in the fact of enteracting with others who share similar preference in brands. This creates further brand opportunities where companies can capitalize on its customer's loyalty and attitude toward its products (Keller, 2001).

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study makes use of a case study approach vis-à-vis the qualitative and quantitative methods to appraise the role of brand identity in bridging geographical borders. The case study focusses on Kentucky Fried Chicken famously known by its acronym KFC. The appraisal zeroes in on the brand's identy beyond its home origin.

3.2 Source of Data and Analysis Tool

The data has been collected from three countries namely China, Ivory Coast and South Africa through the use of a self-administering Google form questionnaire that was sent out to 91 respondents. Out of the 91 respondents, 89 completed forms were received; 32 from China, 28 from Ivory Coast and 29 from South Africa. This represents a 98 percent response rate.

To comprehensively appraise the various metrics of brand identity and how they are bridging the international borders in the case of KFC, the study conjures three Indicators,: brand identity index, adaptation index and social media index. In essence, these are proxies for the independent variables for further analysis. The dependent variable in this current study is the level of consumer satisfaction. The responses are ranked by the respondent on a 7-point likert scale with 1 meaning they strongly disagree, 2 for disagree, 3 for somewhat disagree, 4 for neutral, 5 for somewhat agree, 6 for agree and 7 for strongly agree.

The study makes use of IBM SPSS 28 to run a quantitative analysis on the responses provided by the various questions on KFC's brand identity in the respective countries. The compiled data is as recent as January 2023.

4 Research findings

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The table below depicts some of the key descriptive statistics concerning the place of residence and gender of the participants in the case study.

As alluded to, the data was collected from three countries; China, Ivory Coast and South Africa with 35.96 percent, 31.46 percent and 32.58 percent respectively. These respondents made up for a

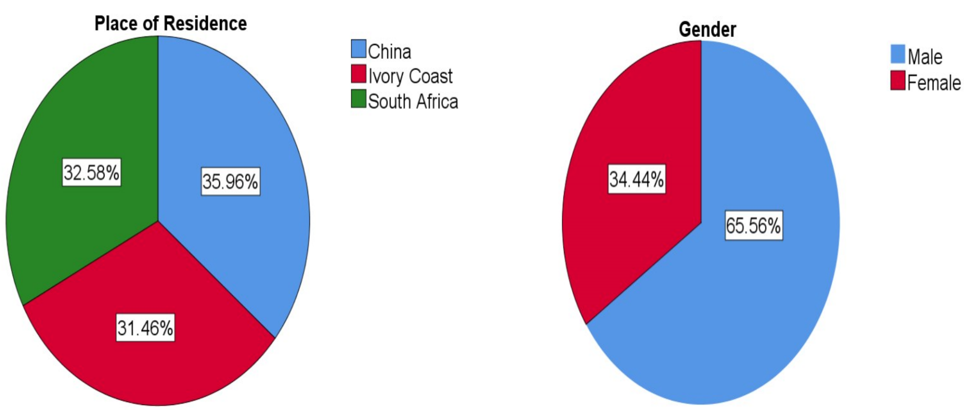

Figure 3. Descpritive Statistics

65.56 percent of male representation and 34.44 percent representation for females in the total sampled population.

As table 1 below shows, more than 88 perecent of the respondents were aged under 35 years which gives us an impression that mostly middle aged and young age cohorts are the target market of such a fastfood franchise. This is furher substantiated by the observation that more than 65 percent of the population had attained a bachelors or masters degree which is characteristic of the young and middle age cohorts of any population.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive	Group	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Age	Less than 25	27	30.0	30.0
	25 - 35	53	58.9	88.9
	35 - 45	9	10.0	98.9
	Over 45	1	1.1	100.0
	Total	90	100.0	
Education	No Education	2	2.2	2.2
	High School	9	10.0	12.2
	Bachelor's Degree	34	37.8	50.0
	Master's Degree	28	31.1	81.1
	Postgraduate	17	18.9	100.0
	Total	90	100.0	
Recent KFC Visit	Yes	69	76.7	76.7
	No	21	23.3	100.0
	Total	90	100.0	

Table 1 further shows that more than 75 percent of the sampled population had a recent visit to a KFC restaurant in the 6-months prior to the data collection which presents a sufficient background to validate the consensus. Consequently, this adds relevance and representation to the answers synthesized from the received questionnaires.

4.2 Brand identity within new markets

The stage model of internationalization brand development based on reknown brands (Samsung Electronics, Hyundai, etc.) states that brand development evolves in four progressive stages “ 1) pre-international: corporate potential at home, 2) global lead market carrying capacity, 3) international branding and market successions and 4) local climax” (Yaw Kusi et al., 2021). In other words, an important brand presence and popularity within its home origin is the basis on which companies rely prior to moving into foreign markets. Furthermore, appropriate brand development contributes to reducing customer uncertainty and can facilitate this transposition of one’s brand on an international scale (Efrat and Asseraf, 2019 cited by Yaw Kusi et al., 2021). To overcome the emerging uncertainties of entering new markets, brand identity must therefore evolve to create new attachments between customers and brands as what is deemed popular in the country of origin may vary entirely in different cultural settings.

To bridge these cultural gaps, management teams must thrive to satisfy a broader range of needs through their brand identity approaches to attain and maintain a loyal clientele across borders (Keller, 2001). This is also referred to as bridging the psychic distance which “forms itself between the home country of a product and target markets, this is a critical aspect of management operations” (Yaw Kusi et al., 2021). Results from the case study of KFC in the three countries of China, Ivory Coast and South Africa reveal that customers level of satisfaction with the brand’s identity is commensurate with a positive brand positioning. In the case of China, as depicted in table 4.2, consumers’ level of satisfaction is associated with a positive change in brand identity (+0.598).

As for Ivory Coast, the positive association is even stronger at +0.639 and the same can be noticed for South Africa with +0.527 as shown in tables 4.4 and 4.6 respectively. Pertinent to point out that all the associations are statistically significant at 0.05.

An analysis of variance between and within the various metrics for brand identity reveal that F-statistic of 1.338 is statistically insignificant at 0.05 as shown in table 4.3. This then means that there exists insignificant variation between the various metrics denoting brand identity as a variable in the case of China. As such, it means the aforementioned results of positive association between level of satisfaction and brand identity is valid and reliable for interpretation. The same could be said for Ivory Coast and South Africa with F-statistics of 1.774 and 1.388 as shown in tables 4.5 and 4.7 respectively.

Studies have further defined psychic distance as a phenomenon which makes difficult the understanding of foreign environments based on a combination of various factors such as language, education, business practices, culture, government structure, etc. Nonethless, "research has suggested that the perception of an individual is the more relevant factor in determining the psychic distance" (Evans and Mavondo, 2002; Zhao, Luo and Suh, 2004 cited by Yaw Kusi et al., 2021). Consequently, communication and marketing means — social media, strategic networking, and pairing with other companies — become key in understanding the psychic distance to further understand and expose the needs of the customers a company wishes to target while promoting its values incorporated within the firm's brand composition (Roggeveen et al., 2021; Yaw Kusi et al., 2021). Instead of focusing on the previous association of anthropomorphic traits to their market goods, brand identity must stand to fulfill more global needs encountered: quality of life, stress reduction, comfort, durability, liability, etc. (Yaw Kusi et al., 2021). As such, brand identity development remains a constant operational necessity to "acquire brand legitimacy, customer commitment, awareness, and market intelligence" (Yaw Kusi et al., 2021).

4.3 Adapting one's brand identity marketing strategy abroad

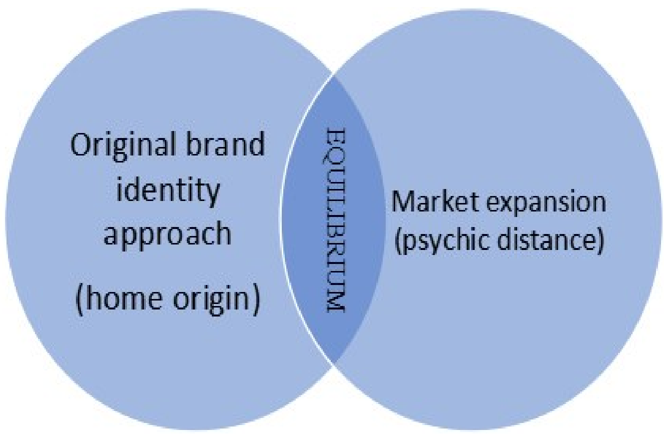

Figure 4. Example of a globalized market strategy

As stated previously, firms stand to gain further by strategizing to meet general needs that find themselves in most countries yet demonstrate themselves differently. One of the marketing tactics used to achieve this goal is namely called ethnic brand identity. The latter consists in demonstrating the uniqueness of one's products through its history and its origin to further enhance the image of quality emanating from it (Chatzopoulou and Navazhylava, 2022). As far as brand identity is concerned, this creative marketing offering tends to "leverage local merchandise to reflect the area, making [the] merchandise akin to art, offering sustainable merchandise [and/or] high fashion product assortment" (Roggeveen et al., 2021). One can here picture the authenticity of drinking Italian wine, or wearing Italian leather shoes all the while picturing the quality which lies behind these chosen products. The key points of this strategy rely on story- telling, meaning, and purpose to reinforce a strong brand identity (VMSD Reader, 2020 cited by Chatzopoulou and Navazhylava, 2022). Strategies which are utilized to attain such innovative merchandising include the use of themes, reflecting brand story, playfulness, exclusivity and virtual retailing (Roggeveen et al., 2021). This being said, ethnicity as part of a brand's identity also stands to be criticized as falling into cultural stereotypes or cultural appropriation. Consequently, thorough market insight fostered by customer proximity and feedback is needed on how to successfully integrate this component into a company's branding strategies (Elliot, Cherian, & Casakin, 2013; Licsandru & Cui, 2019 cited by Chatzopoulou and Navazhylava, 2022).

It has been demonstrated, in recent studies on brand identity, that young generations of consumers expect businesses to care about more than profits, they expect empathy, transparency, and more importantly authenticity from their chosen brands (Mohsin, 2022). Today's clients tend to adhere to companies who promote purposeful values within their brand identity; standards and ethics that encompass more than simply furthering the definition of one's self-identity. KFC has made it part of its adaptative strategy to use key elements dear to each host country's culture such as the translation of its menu into local languages like Chinese in China and French in Ivory Coast. KFC has also ensured staff diversity by adding to its labour pool through the employment of local staff. The company has also integrated environmentally friendly messages as part of its advertisement strategy abroad. To that end, the adaptative index shows positive and significant association with level of customer satisfaction for China (+0.496) and South Africa (+0.395). However, the results show that for Ivory Coast the association (+0.151) is statistically insignificant at 0.05. The analysis of variance reveals that all the above-mentioned Indicators, are coined from metrics that possess insignificant variation thus making the positive associations conceived above to be worthwhile, stable and valid for interpretation.

Without necessarily delving into ethnic brand identity which could be wrongly understood in certain cultural contexts, companies can aim to satisfy general needs by attaining a deep understanding of the psychic distance present. This will then allow the firm's marketing teams to find an equilibrium (balance) between it's initial brand identity and its new environment in order to successfully branch out (Yaw Kusi et al., 2021). By utilizing one's popular brand identity in its home origin, a company can aim to expand its market through virtual communities and adequate social networking to firstly acquire significant understanding of its new target clientele. Indeed, companies determined to pierce through the uncertainties linked to bridging new markets must display creativity and innovation while seeking a high level of authenticity to successfully branch out into global trends. In light of what precedes, it seems that the key to defining one's brand identity find itself between ethnicity, authenticity, and adaptability. One can therefore think of KFC as it has internationalized its signature americanized fast food yet it also incorporates various national dishes according to the location of its franchises across the world. In China, KFC offers an array chinese delicacies whereas its Malay branches offer dishes such as *Nasi Lemak*. This example illustrates how the balance between these aforementioned brand identity approches, in other words, the equilibrium between these is potentially a solution for companies willing to export themselves abroad and could also lead to advantages in market acquisition.

4.4 Social media: the nowadays go-to method

Operational managers currently face major challenges linked to the adaptation of their brands in a context of accelerated market revolution. Moreover, the success of a brand also depends on the closeness it is able to establish and maintain with its multiple stakeholders including, but not limited to its customers. As sustained by Voyer et al. (2017), "scholars are challenging traditional conceptualizations of marketing as a narrow and organization- or customer-centric activity and increasingly acknowledging that focusing on the firm/consumer does not adequately capture reality". Indeed, it appears that in this postmodern era, adequate positioning and communication strategies are key in creating a two-way communication between stakeholders and management which collectively contribute to the creation of identity-related brand content (Voyer et al., 2017). In other words, to sustain one's brand identity values, the sum of a company's stakeholders serve to positively, or negatively transmit a brand's ethos. This collective phenomenon is enhanced through social media as the main tool to gain and maintain market acquisition. Not only does this communication tool serve to interact with customers by creating a communication pathway, but it also allows the creation of brand communities where interactions foster valuable insight about a company's product perception and reputation. Equally so, if utilized adequately by its management, such intel positively facilitates a company's integration into foreign markets (Yaw Kusi et al., 2021).

Results from the case study of KFC shows that the franchise's use of social media in foreign markets has facilitated its assimilation and competitive edge. Most respondents agreed and some strongly agreed that KFC uses social media to advertise its products, that social media is a relatively strong tool that helps keep KFC's competitiveness in the marketplace and that KFC makes use of local celebrities and social influencers to change public perception on its products. Hence, the index for social media use shows statistically significant association with the level of consumer satisfaction for all the three countries. The variation between and within the aforesaid metrics of the index retain insignificant F-statistics thus deeming the associations as valid and stable.

Moreover, social media remains a powerful communication and marketing tool. By adhering to specific brands, a consumer can find brand communities online which distinguish himself from his environment by creating a place of shared likings which then emphasize the relationship with a group using the same brand (Coelho et al., 2018; Grebosz-Krawczyk et al., 2021). Belonging to a brand's virtual communities "serves to express the consumer's identity, but also creates interpersonal bonds with others based on a sense of shared history and memories" (Grebosz-Krawczyk et al., 2021). This plays into social media being refered to as a « hybrid promotion tool » where nostalgic marketing practices are used as efficient digital advertisement which also allows the creation of social groups revolving around the brand (Voyer et al., 2017). The latter also involves consumers in the co-creation of brand value which is a postmodern era typical trend where companies network with their followers creating personalized interactions and where social media management teams can transmit their brand identity values (Coelho et al., 2018). By involving customers in brand co-creation, this plays into the stakeholder theory which states that companies have multiple relationships with its stakeholders which all have different objectives, rights and responsabilities directly influencing the firm's performance (Voyer et al., 2017). As such, a brand's stakeholders directly impact its image and popularity.

Given this delicate context, "negotiating corporate brand identity is a critical mediating activity that involves the continuous exchange with the brand community" (Essamri et al., 2019). This implies careful selection of one's partners to fully grasp their core values to ensure their compatibility with one's own ethics. This also applies to a company's choice in brand ambassadors and influencers which take up an important virtual role (Centeno & Wang, 2017; Smith et al., 2018). The fame of these brand ambassadors lead to a greater brand recognition, credibility and add notoriety to affiliated brands all the while reaching across borders to customers of different cultural backgrounds (Centeno & Wang, 2017; Smith et al., 2018). Influencers, on the other hand, have the proven ability to promote brands while using two-way interactive communication channels with their followers. Nevertheless, as beneficial as they may be to a brand's promotion, certain mediatized actions, behaviours and words may lead to their rapid demise as they can easily cross a company's determined brand identity and negatively impact its performance. As such, the stakeholders co-creation process should be carefully monitored by management and partnerships should frequently be revised as values may change overtime (Smith et al., 2018). Furthermore, the co-creation process also requires understanding of the sociocultural influences of the brand community on brand identity meaning (Coelho et al., 2018; Essamri et al., 2019). This suggests that co-creative activities should be carefully led and understood by brand managers as certain consumer-generated content may positively or negatively impact the intended meaning of brands (Essamri et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the proficient use of social media to its full-fledged hybrid potential could bridge the gaps created by psychic distance during the implantation in foreign markets.

5 Conclusion and future prospects

This article has aimed to demonstrate that brand identity is at the forefront of managerial strategies for companies, such as the KFC case study that thrive to internationalize themselves. Bridging international borders brings in a whole new set of difficulties linked to the definition of one's brand identity in new markets. Without succumbing to ethnic brand identity strategies, firms can rather focus on innovation and creativity leading to a higher level of authenticity. It appears that a way to defining one's brand identity finds itself between ethnicity, authenticity, and adaptability. The balance between these, in other words, the equilibrium between these approaches is a potential answer for companies willing to export themselves abroad and could also lead to advantages in market acquisition. Furthermore, these methods can be enhanced by adequate marketing strategies to maintain a close proximity to a company's target clientele as a two-way communication pathway (Voyer et al., 2017) via social media which can reduce psychic distance. Additionally, it has been demonstrated that the success of a brand also depends on the closeness it is able to establish and maintain with its multiple stakeholders including, but not limited to its customers. Nonetheless, proficient use of social media which is also refered to as a « hybrid promotion tool » emphasizes nostalgic marketing practices while being an efficient digital advertisement (Voyer et al., 2017). It has been demonstrated that transmiting one's brand identity through virtual brand communities involves consumers in the co-creation of brand value which also represents a managerial method into successfully gaining and maintaining new clientele abroad (Coelho et al., 2018). Companies that network with their followers have the strategic advantage of personalized interactions where social media platforms allows them to easily transmit their brand identity values while assessing customer feedback. In light of this article, if brand identity itself lacks a unanimous definition, one could say that "a brand is a story. It's a feeling. A perception. But most importantly, a brand is what your business shapes it to be" (Mohsin, 2022).

The qualitative information on brand identity is extensive yet as observed through the consultation of recently published literature on this concept it remains without a unanimous definition which indicates that interpretation varies from an author to an other depending on their own literature review (Gaustad et al. 2019). This increases the challenges of making adequate comparisons on the essence of brand identity itself especially in a context of globalized markets. Additionally, it is noted that the development of brand identity as a phenomenon has rare existing studies on the subject of the brand standardization. As such, it could be interesting to further study the dynamism and changing patterns of the business environment that nurtures the rapidity of brand identity development in international markets (Yaw Kusi et al., 2021).

As highlighted in this article, uncertainties of rapidly changing markets lead to important strategy changes within operational management teams which can also mean the alteration of one's brand identity which can come at a high price resulting in the loss or gain of clientele (Gaustad et al. 2019). This phenomenon has yet to be further studied to demonstrate the concrete impacts on one's clientele during these changes as well as the positive and negative consequences of brand identity alterations. As brand identity is defined as a continually evolving constellation of meanings, constructed through a dialectical process among a multitude of stakeholders in relation to their individual and collective identities, the relevance of the co-creation process in brand building also remains under-theorised. (Essamri et al., 2019).

Moreover, to attain adequate answers to the research question of this article, future approaches should emcompass the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on brand identity which has startled a pilar of what was otherwise known as typical customer behaviour. As Mohsin (2022) states, nowadays shopping is now qualifitied "[as] an omnichannel, nonlinear journey across the digital shelf" and is therefore somewhat unpredictable. Indeed, the pandemic has added an element of complexity to an already delicate task; that of maintaining the essence of one's brand identity while successfully bridging new international markets. Through sudden business closures, customers had no other option than to result to online shopping to satisfy their needs. Companies that were able to easily adapt in time to benefit from this mutation of traditional consumerism were at a vantage point when it came to their own success. As such, studies focused on the result of such changes on the brand identity co-creation process, the necessary resources and methods along with their outcomes would stand to depict a more accurate portrait of brand identity as to if it remains a powerful tool to its management.

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Appendix

Table 2 Correlations (China)

		I was satisfied by the good quality service at KFC.	Brand Identity Expectation	Adaptation Index	Social Media Index
I was satisfied by the good quality service at KFC.	Pearson Correlation	1	.598**	.496**	.374*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.004	.035
	N	32	32	32	32
Brand Identity Index	Pearson Correlation	.598**	1	.882**	.628**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	32	32	32	32
Adaptation Index	Pearson Correlation	.496**	.882**	1	.564**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.000		.001
	N	32	32	32	32
Social Media Index	Pearson Correlation	.374*	.628**	.564**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.035	.000	.001	
	N	32	32	32	32

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 ANOVA (China)

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Brand Identity Index	Between Groups	33.286	14	2.378	1.338	.281
	Within Groups	30.214	17	1.777		
	Total	63.500	31			
Adaptation Index	Between Groups	35.617	12	2.968	2.022	.082
	Within Groups	27.883	19	1.468		
	Total	63.500	31			
Social Media Index	Between Groups	40.283	15	2.686	1.851	.117
	Within Groups	23.217	16	1.451		
	Total	63.500	31			

Table 4 Correlations (Ivory Coast)

		I was satisfied by the good quality service at KFC.	Brand Identity Expectation	Adaptation Index	Social Media Index
I was satisfied by the good quality service at KFC.	Pearson Correlation	1	.639**	.151	.377*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.444	.048
	N	28	28	28	28
Brand Identity Index	Pearson Correlation	.639**	1	.582**	.639**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.001	.000
	N	28	28	28	28
Adaptation Index	Pearson Correlation	.151	.582**	1	.494**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.444	.001		.008
	N	28	28	28	28
Social Media Index	Pearson Correlation	.377*	.639**	.494**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.048	.000	.008	
	N	28	28	28	28

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 5. ANOVA (Ivory Coast)

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Brand Identity Index	Between Groups	30.224	15	2.015	1.774	.161
	Within Groups	13.633	12	1.136		
	Total	43.857	27			
Adaptation Index	Between Groups	17.774	11	1.616	.991	.492
	Within Groups	26.083	16	1.630		
	Total	43.857	27			
Social Media Index	Between Groups	28.024	13	2.156	1.906	.122
	Within Groups	15.833	14	1.131		
	Total	43.857	27			

Table 6. Correlations (South Africa)

		I was satisfied by the good quality service at KFC.	Brand Identity Expectation	Adaptation Index	Social Media Index
was satisfied by the good uality service at KFC.	Pearson Correlation	1	.527**	.395*	.476*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.003	.034	.010
	N	29	29	29	28
rand Identity Index	Pearson Correlation	.527**	1	.593**	.332
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003		.001	.085
	N	29	29	29	28
daptation Index	Pearson Correlation	.395*	.593**	1	.420*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.034	.001		.026
	N	29	29	29	28
ocial Media Index	Pearson Correlation	.476*	.332	.420*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.010	.085	.026	
	N	28	28	28	28

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 7 ANOVA (South Africa)

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Brand Identity Index	Between Groups	22.290	15	1.486	1.388	.279
	Within Groups	13.917	13	1.071		
	Total	36.207	28			
Adaptation Index	Between Groups	12.707	10	1.271	.973	.498
	Within Groups	23.500	18	1.306		
	Total	36.207	28			
Social Media Index	Between Groups	24.783	16	1.549	2.012	.121
	Within Groups	8.467	11	.770		
	Total	33.250	27			