Monarch Business School
Doctoral Research Proposal

Promoting Sustainable Growth Through Digital Nation Branding in Central Africa

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- Final Draft For Consideration Of The Administration -

Promoting Sustainable Economic Growth and Development Through Digital Nation
Branding in Central Africa

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AfCFTA   African Continental Free Trade Area

AfDB   African Development Bank

AU   African Union

CEMAC   Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa

FDI   Foreign Direct Investments

GDP   Gross Domestic Product

GNI   Gross National Income

OECD   Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

UN   United Nations

UNCTAD   United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

WTTC   World Travel and Tourism Council

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ABSTRACT

The debate on economic growth and convergence triggered by the conclusions of Easterly and Levine (1997) about the "African growth tragedy" is still of importance. As Fafchamps (2000) noted, researchers may have been unsuccessful in determining factors enhancing sustainable growth in Africa. Interestingly, as decades of positive foreign direct investments ("FDI") impacts were combined with a pattern of economic growth without development, the interest in investigating differences in economic outcomes caused by non-economic factors was revived (Acemoglu, Johnson, & Robinson, 2002; De Soto, 2000; OECD, 2013). For Bardy, Drew and Tumenta (2012), since FDI does not always help to reduce imbalances resulting from international business relations, there is a need to also consider their social responsibilities and justice characteristics. Based on the research of Browning (2016), Fan (2006), Szondi (2008) and the conclusions of Fukuyama (2018), it is presumed that building a positive image and trust through nation branding may be an alternative way to attract more sustainable FDI and address the "African growth tragedy hypothesis". In addition to traditional tools used by governments to influence counterparties and manage the change of collective perception, digital channels, including the internet and social media, could be valuable instruments (Schroeder, 2018; Tuten & Mintu-Wimsatt, 2018; Straker, Wrigley, & Rosemann, 2015). The contemplated research investigates how an integrated nation branding ecosystem using modern instruments of influence may help to change the perception about Africa in general while enhancing sustainable FDI and ultimately fostering sustainable economic growth and development in central Africa in particular.

The contemplated research examines perception, influence and trust, sustainable FDI and nation branding in the context of central Africa. This will be achieved through a triangulated approach that comprises a literature review, content analysis and interviews of individuals from government, academia and senior managers from selected organisations. The contemplated research will inform the development of a new conceptual framework for digital nation branding that may positively foster sustainable economic growth and development within central Africa and beyond.

Keywords: *Sustainable Growth and Development, Nation Branding, Sustainable FDI, Social Justice, Perception, Influence and Trust, Digital Nation Branding, Central Africa.*

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Despite more than two centuries of questioning why macroeconomic arguments work for some regions and not for others, the path to effectively nurturing sustainable growth remains a mystery for economists (Helpman, 2004; Snowdon & Vane, 2005). Interestingly, decades of policy shifts aiming to find answers to African growth challenges have focused on non-contextual arguments or traditional macroeconomic actionism (Browning & Ferraz de Oliveira, 2017; Fafchamps, 2000; Fukuyama, 2018). With the continent still struggling to achieve its development aims (Deloitte, 2018; World Bank, 2018), there is a need to investigate alternatives perspectives and apply different instruments (Acemoglu, Johnson, & Robinson, 2002; OECD, 2013). The presented research aims to develop a framework based on perception, influence and trust for digital nation branding that should assist the promotion of sustainable FDI in fostering sustainable economic growth and development.

1.1 Imperative for Promoting Growth Through Sustainable FDI in Africa

With respect to the conclusion of Borensztein, De Gregorio and Lee (1998), it is believed that FDI positively influences economic growth. FDI enhance both entrepreneurship and productivity and, therefore, positively influence gross domestic product ("GDP") from an input and output perspective (AfDB, 2019; World Travel & Tourism Council, 2020; World Bank, 2018). The conclusions of Bardy, Drew and Tumenta (2012) on social responsibility attributes of FDI have led to questioning if classic FDI practices are not also contributing to the "African growth tragedy hypothesis". The observations of a pattern of growth without economic development

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(Acemoglu, Johnson, & Robinson, 2002; De Soto, 2000; OECD, 2013), strengthen the assumption of a need to add sustainable characteristics to FDI. It is assumed that the ratio of FDI to GDP corrected with sustainability rationales can be used to measure sustainable economic growth and development.

FDI flows influence African macroeconomics rationales considerably (Sengupta & Puri, 2018). Despite topping the worldwide ranking ratio of FDI to GDP (Ernst & Young, 2019), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development ("UNCTAD") argues that Africa needs to achieve an ever-higher ratio to reach an economic growth momentum (UNCTAD, 2020). Notwithstanding the validity of these arguments, it is presumed that African development objectives can only be achieved by attracting more qualitative FDI that will not only triggering growth but also help to reduce socio-economic imbalances in the long run.

Past researchers posited that socio-economic and policy-linked aspects highlighted minimal insights into the low FDI in Africa (Gupta & Singh, 2016; Taran, Mironiuc, & Huian, 2016). Others questioned the role of cultural dimensions (Du, Lu , & Tao, 2012; Guiso, Sapienza, & Zingales, 2009; López-Duarte, Vidal-Suárez, & González-Diaz, 2015). Lemi and Asefa (2003) presumed that information asymmetries and risk perceptions might adversely impact investors decisions on sustainably doing business in Africa. Following Sichei and Kinyondo (2012), it is believed that the inability to attract sustainable FDI is related to a negative image and perceptiveness. Therefore, there is a need to examine the status-quo on African business perceptiveness and afterwards its ways of influencing partners and building trust.

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1.2 Examining Perception Consequences on Doing Business in Africa

Generally, decisions to do business are made under uncertainty (Lemi & Asefa, 2003). Beliefs, perceptions and, more generally, culture play an important role in the overall decision-making process (Gaganis, Hasan, Papadimitri, & Tasiou, 2018). Attempting to reduce uncertainty and mitigate risk by easing access to accurate information, creating a positive image, confidence, and trust throughout successive narratives and perceptions can help develop long-term oriented business relations.

Kamdem (2000) and Matiza and Oni (2013) claim that African social phenomena are poorly investigated. As perception is about how information captured through sensory experiences and propositions are acknowledged and interpreted by individuals (Pastin, 1983), unfamiliar ecosystems will be more vulnerable to biases and likely be perceived as riskier. The lack of accessibility of accurate information may result in a biased perception of the African business environment that explain the qualitative challenges and short-term orientation of its FDI flows.

The image ascribed to Africa remains primarily associated with poverty, instability, fragility, corruption and charity (Anholt, 2007; OECD, 2013; Osei & Gbadamosi, 2011). This prevailing negative image contributes to asymmetric information about the continent and strengthening investor perceptiveness on risk. Blair, Kung, Shieh and Chen, (2014) and Browning and Ferraz de Oliveira (2017) emphasise the importance of building a positive image to attract investors in a sustainable way. It is believed that nation branding framework and digital channels can help the continent to better influence its partners and better address its current challenges.

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1.3 Digital Influence and Nation Branding Challenges in Africa

According to Pella (2015), colonial and post-colonial times have weakened the position of Africa in the international community. It is assumed that African nations shall rely on a strong voice or agency with soft powers to influence and change its ascribed image. Channel supporting change of social perception and easing influence may better help to diffuse a positive African narrative. Utilising digital networks to exercise influence through nation branding could assist in improving the perceptions of risk in Africa.

Research supports the faster and more efficient achievement of diverse goals through digital channels to promote investments (Bollen, Mao, & Zeng , 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Serrano-Puche, 2015; Siganos, Vagenas-Nanos, & Verwijmeren, 2014; Simunjak & Caliandro, 2019). Similarly, Mohan and Lampert (2013) observed that a non-institutional digital approach might be highly effective for weak states. Digital instruments and channels used by institutions and businesses such as digital diplomacy, e-lobbyism, e-agency, branding, social media, digital marketing, and even digital influencers may change the perception and construct positive branding. The proposed framework is based on traditional tools of influence and a modern branding ecosystem may facilitate the deployment of digital nation branding arrangements to nurture sustainable FDI and ultimately promote sustainable growth.

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2.0 THE PROVISIONAL RESEARCH QUESTION

With the aforementioned discussion in mind, the following provisional research question has been developed:

The Provisional Research Question:

"What are the characteristics of a new conceptional framework utilising nation branding and digital channels to promote sustainable FDI and ultimately foster greater economic development in central Africa?"

3.0 THE RESEARCH RELEVANCE

Previous discourse argued that attempts based only on quantitative instruments have proven insufficient in addressing the "African growth tragedy hypothesis". The image ascribed to the continent is believed to negatively affect the risk perception of current and potential business partners (Papadopoulos & Hamzaoui-Essoussi, 2015; UNCTAD, 2019), with a decrease in FDI volume and quality. The contemplated research investigates how to influence business partners, build trust and develop a digital nation branding strategy to better support a change in perception, promote sustainable FDI and ultimately enhance economic growth and development.

The contemplated research may improve the deployment of nation branding frameworks by considering the opportunities offered by a digital ecosystem in diffusing and redefining nation branding, FDI and sustainable economic growth and

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development theories in central Africa. The research may, in turn, be applied to a similar situation facing other countries and regions.
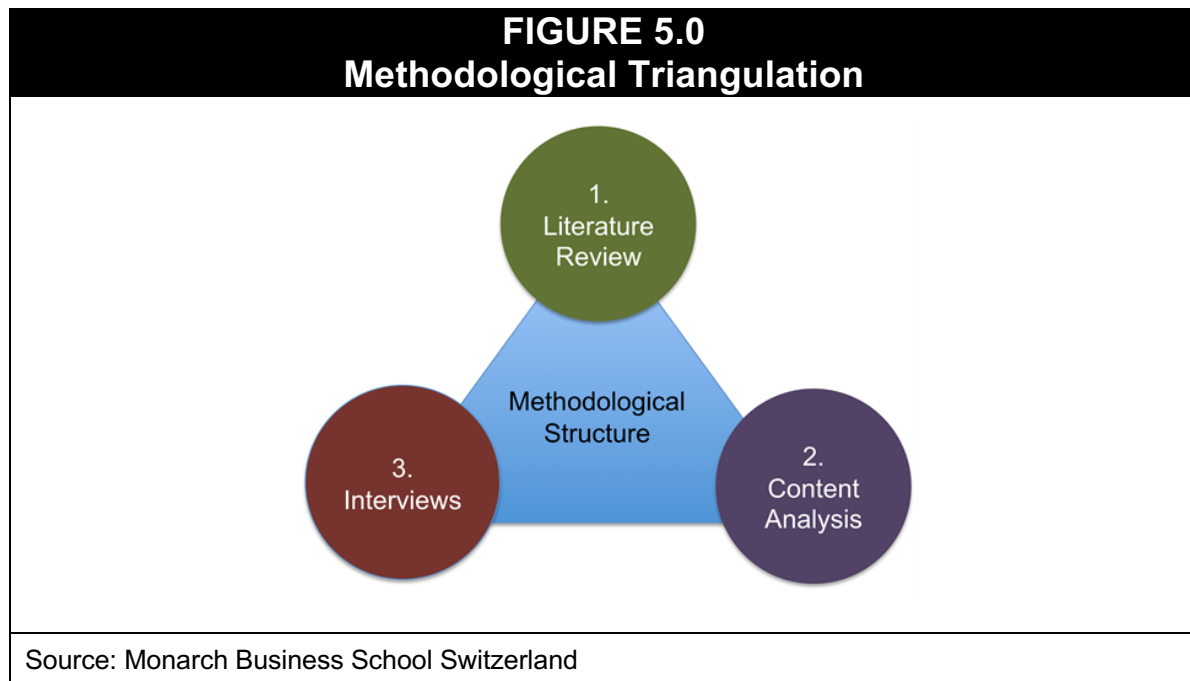
4.0 CONTRIBUTION TO EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

A search on terminologies linked to the contemplated research presents minimal academic studies related to digital nation branding and the promotion of sustainable economic growth and development in central Africa. There seems to be a lack of scholarly research in the research focus areas. The contemplated research will contribute to the field in an applied manner by developing a model or framework to deploy a digital nation branding system in promoting sustainable FDI. The hope is to help promote sustainable economic growth and development and contribute to finding solutions to the "African growth tragedy hypothesis".

5.0 THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Figure 5.0 shows the aim of the contemplated research as responding to the main research question by way of a triangulation of research data, being: 1. literature review of existing seminal academic authors (desk research); 2. content analysis of existing corporate data (desk research), and; 3. interviews with primary stakeholders in the industry (field research).

The contemplated research will use a qualitative methodological approach to data collection. Moustakas (1994) posited this approach to be the most helpful approach for exploring knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours and communication needs.

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FIGURE 5.0
Methodological Triangulation

Source: Monarch Business School Switzerland

5.1 Stakeholder Schema & Participants

Throughout the contemplated research, a level of analysis methodology will be maintained that focuses on the critical considerations facing the groups as illustrated within Table 5.1.

TABLE 5.1
Level of Analysis & Stakeholder Schema

Level	Type	Group 1	Group 2	Stakeholders
MACRO	Societal	10	5	(Representatives of) State, Government Agencies, NGOs, International/ Regional Organizations, Embassies, Chambers of Commerce and Industries etc.
MESO	Organizational/ Institutional	40	20	Senior Business Executives, Banks, Diplomats, University Deans, Institution Managers, Senior Lobbyists, Web Influencer Executives etc.
MICRO	Individual	0	0	Entrepreneurs, Business Lobbyists, Investments Bankers, single investors & Influencers.
Total Respondents		50	25	

Source: Adapted from Monarch Business School Switzerland

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The field research component consists of semi-structured interviews and is obtained in two parts. The interviews will primarily comprise the Macro and Meso sub-groups. Participants at the meso level will be individuals considered knowledgeable in the study domain with assumed managerial and leadership roles for a minimum of five years. At the Macro level, participants will be individuals assumed to represent states or organisations and have subordinates that belong to macro level. An additional cursory examination of a handful of interviews at the Micro-level in order to provide greater context to the research findings may be added if time permits.

5.2 Phenomenological Research

The qualitative research process will be based upon a phenomenological methodology of the lived experiences of the participants. This approach will permit the construction of a universal meaning of the experience and a better understanding of the phenomenon. Since the research aims to resolve a knowledge gap, arriving at a description of the nature of the phenomenon is paramount. According to Moustakas (1994), the phenomenological methodology that enables capturing the essence of a phenomenon is considered to be most closely aligned with the objectives of the research.

5.3 Research Process Flow

The research will follow the Monarch 10-Step Standard Research Process Flow as illustrated in Figure 5.3 and described below.

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FIGURE 5.3
Monarch 10-Step Standard Research Process Flow

Source: Monarch Business School Switzerland
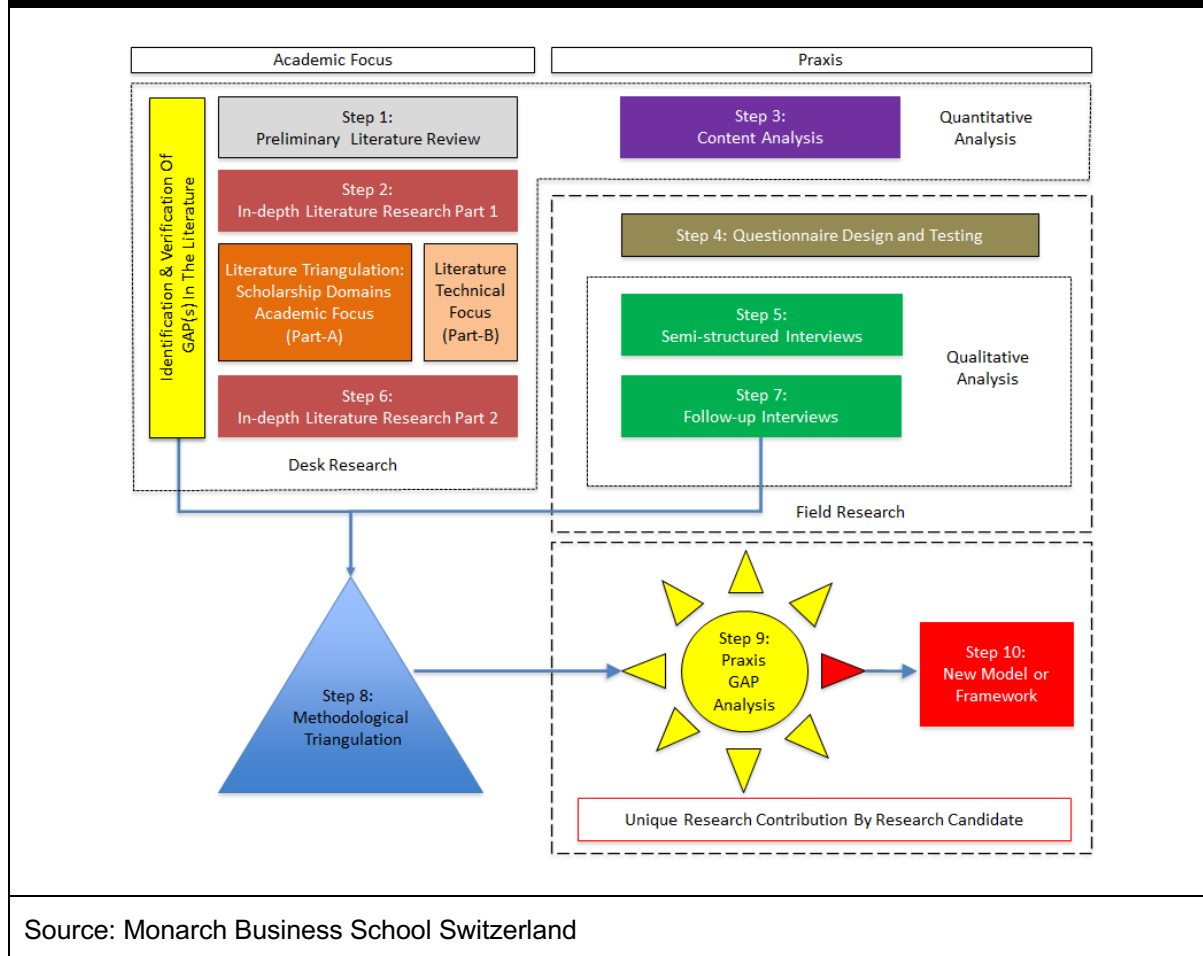
Step 1: Preliminary Literature Review. The research begins with a survey and review of the seminal works of authors within the academic and quasi-academic scholarship domains identified in Section 6.0, including influence and perception theories, nation branding theories, digital marketing theories and FDI theories. The preliminary literature review provides a framework to the contemplated research, identifies key concepts and theories, and develops a better understanding of the nexus of the academic and quasi-academic scholarship domains.

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Step 2: In-Depth Literature Review – Part 1. An in-depth review and critique of the works of seminal academic authors and quasi-academic works within the three above-mentioned academic scholarship domains will be completed to provide a solid academic foundation to the contemplated research. The "Gap in the Literature" will be presented and clearly identified in relation to the Provisional Research Question.

Step 3: Content Analysis. An analysis based on data obtained from annual reports, white papers, supporting economics documents and other data sources will be examined as well as information found in professional journals, published manuscripts and documents.

Step 4: Questionnaire Design & Testing. The interview questionnaire development will be informed by the review of the academic literature and technical documents. The interview questionnaire will be tested with several volunteers in advance of the interviews to perfect the document from a flow and timing standpoint and ensure that questions are clear, concise and have a direct bearing on the focus of the contemplated research.

Step 5: Semi-Structured Interview Process. All interview participants are expected to be knowledgeable with respect to the contemplated research. A total of 50 face-to-face interviews will be conducted with participants representing a sample from each selected stakeholder group, see Section 5.1. Interviews are expected to be 30-45 minutes in length and will be recorded electronically or manually. Telephone or Skype interviews will be used if face-to-face interviews are not possible.

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Step 6: In-Depth Literature Review – Part 2. A second in-depth literature review will be completed to add more specificity and accuracy to the research analysis. The Part 2 literature review will also be informed by the interview responses from Step 5.

Step 7: Follow-Up Interviews. To achieve a more specific view informed by the first interviews and the second literature review, a sub-set of 25 respondents representing a sample from each selected stakeholder group selected from the first-round interview sample will participate in follow-up interviews. The timing and interview protocols will be similar to those listed in Step 5.

Steps 8 and 9: Triangulation of the Data and Gap Analysis. A triangulation of the research data informed by the literature review, content analysis and interview responses will be completed. This will assist in determining whether the existing academic knowledge is congruent with the practical application in the field. The result of this analysis should determine whether a Praxis Gap exists between the academic (theoretical) and the practical (applied) domains.

Step 10: Development of New Conceptual Model or Framework. Building on the Gap Analysis completed in Step 9, an analysis of the existing models and frameworks within the academic domain will be considered. This analysis will evaluate whether the frameworks or models sufficiently address the requirement for practical application in the industry or whether they should be improved or modified.

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5.4 The Data Analysis

The qualitative research data will be analysed using MaxQDA software. Questionnaires will be pre-tested to ensure the accuracy and relevance of the questions. Interviews will be face-to-face, audio-recorded and are expected to be 30-45 minutes in length. The objective is to gain an in-depth understanding of the imagery, perceptions, values, beliefs, habits and in-work behaviours of state representatives, dignities and senior business executives, bankers, entrepreneurs, and diplomats. Telephone interviews will be used in the event that physical interviewing is not possible due to time constraints or geographical considerations. Interviews will be conducted in English, French and German. English translations will be made available.
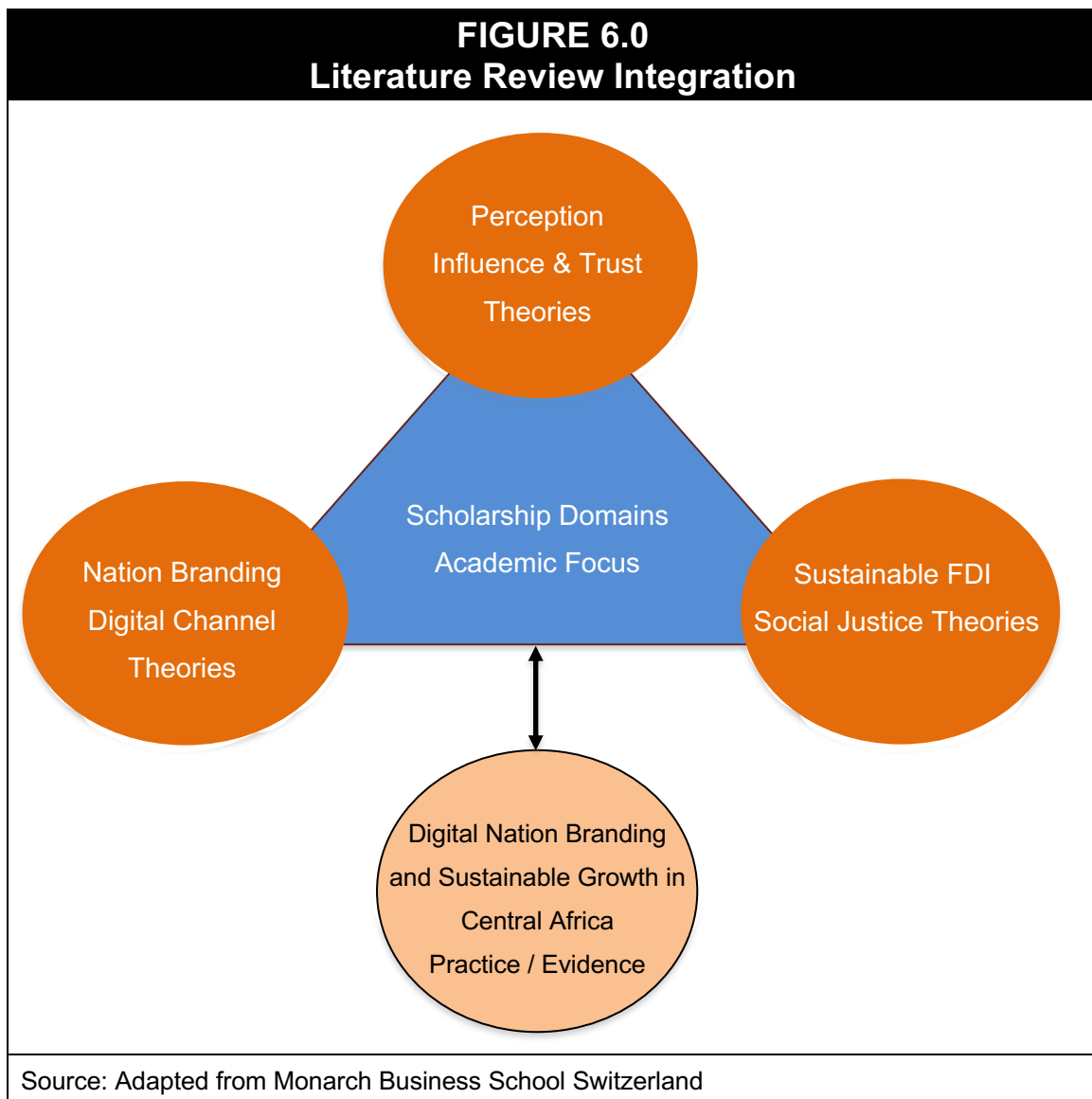
5.5 Ethical Considerations

Informed consent and the continuing voluntary nature of participation will be required for the research. Anonymity will be granted to participants, and responses will be kept confidential. No vulnerable population will be involved in the study, i.e., minors, non-literate individuals or individuals with a disability.

6.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical framework will be structured based on an integrative literature review approach. The selection of this distinctive form of research will assist in generating new knowledge on the phenomenon. As shown in Figure 6 below, the literature review will investigate the following research domains and frameworks:

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1. Perception, Influence and Trust Theories;

2. Nation Branding and Digital ChannelsTheories ;

3. Sustainable FDI and Social Justice Theories, and;

4. Digital Nation Branding and Sustainable FDI in Central Africa–Quasi Academic.

FIGURE 6.0
Literature Review Integration

Perception Influence & Trust Theories

Scholarship Domains Academic Focus

Nation Branding Digital Channel Theories

Sustainable FDI Social Justice Theories

Digital Nation Branding and Sustainable Growth in Central Africa Practice / Evidence

Source: Adapted from Monarch Business School Switzerland

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There appears to be limited research on the effectiveness of nation branding in promoting sustainable growth using digital marketing strategies. Generating new knowledge and conceptualising a new framework to describe this phenomenon is critical. The literature review will allow navigation through modern academic perspectives of perception and influence, nation branding, digital marketing and FDI theories using thematic and historical approaches.

This review strives to extract important determinants and dealings of a contextualized digital marketing framework for nation branding system deployment in promoting sustainable growth in central Africa. An analysis of the intersection of the four domains of knowledge, the nexus of the research, is critical to the understanding of the phenomenon. The fields mentioned above present a reinforcing relationship, and it is believed that the interaction of the research theories may uncover new interdependencies and knowledge.

6.1 Perception, Influence and Trust Theories

Perception, influence and trust theories develop within an ecosystem wherein both self-perception and peer-perceptions interact. It is believed that these theories follow the philosophical schools of thought of both constructivism and functionalism. In the context of this research a particular focus will be made on their digital construction.

Perception Theories: The concept of the "looking-glass self" developed by Charles Cooley gives a constructivist view of perceivability based on social interactions (Siljanovska & Stojcevska, 2019). It is assumed that organisational settings, social

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perception and the environment of an individuum influence his self-perception and decision making. This view was supported by Adams, Bell and Griffin (2007), who argued that social biases, stereotypes, or labelling might influence the behaviour, handling, and beliefs of less powerful groups.

The contemplated research will review perception theories with regards to their philosophical and phenomenological dimensions (Alston, 1990); psychological aspects (Molden & Dweck, 2006); links to ideas, thoughts and imagery (Cocking, 1991; Fodor, 1975; Glasgow, 1993); perspective on risk (Wildavsky & Dake, 1990; Wilkinson, 2001); and digital attributes (Sharma, Ranjan, & Ujlayan, 2019).

Influence Theories. Institutional and non-institutional digital strategies are robust instruments that may supplement traditional influence that weak states may use to achieve specific goals. The promotion of sustainable growth through digital nation branding goes beyond the institutional sphere of influence to reach the general public domain. Hence, institutional soft-influence instruments such as diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, agency, or lobbyism need to be supplemented by digital tools and channels to reach a single individual or organisation quickly. Philosophical, psychological and institutional influence theories with a focus on digital channels and frameworks will be achieved.

The contemplated research will explore the following traditional and digital influence theories: Social, style, belief and influence (Goldsmith, 2015; Steffen & Eagly, 1985; van Prooijen & Jostmann, 2013); Public, cultural, and digital diplomacy and influence (Atkinson, 2010; Bos & Melissen, 2019; Fisher, 2013; Hall, 2015; Barghoorn, 1976; Nye, 2011; Finn, 2003; Pamment, 2016; Iosifidis & Wheeler, 2016); Agency, digital

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agency, narrative and influence (Breed & Prentki, 2018; Goller, 2017; Knoller, 2010; Passey, et al., 2018; van Enschot, Boogaard, Koenitz, & Roth, 2019); Lobbyism and influence (Carro & Di Mario, 2020; Lane, 1949; Lichy, 2021; Showalter & Fleisher, 2021); Marketing and digital (Backaler, 2018; Barone, Miyazaki, & Taylor, 2000; Moreno & Koff, 2016); and social media and digital influencers (Claeys, Charry, & Tessitore, 2019; Lindsay, Kaykas-Wolff, & Mathwick, 2015; Oliveira, Barbosa, & Sousa, 2020; Poulopoulos, Vassilakis, Antoniou, Lepouras, & Wallace, 2018).

Trust Theories: The philosophical discourse on trust is extensive as it involves various terminologies such as assurance, confidence, hope, credit, interest, care, dependence (Gonzalez, 2017). In the context of business relations, economic growth and development, trust theories mainly address issues on risk, motivations, trustworthiness and morals. The concept of "participant stance" developed by Holton (1994, p. 4) stresses the responsibility of the trustee toward its actions and trustor readiness of experiencing betrayal. John (1999, p. 68) investigated the "will-based" account wherein both trustor and trustee relations are based on goodwill. Hardin (2002) went further by focussing on the concept of "encapsulated interests" or self-interest and risk assessment between partners. Beyond this macro-level perspective on trust, distrust and trustworthiness, social capital has been perceived as being determinant when it comes to supporting economic growth and development mechanisms (Kovalčíková & Lačný, 2016; Zak & Knack, 2001). The conclusions of the work of Brouwer (2014) has shown theoretical linkages between social constructivist variables of trust such as accountability, credential, interest or performance and diverse macroeconomic phenomenon. It is believed that trust

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theories need to be investigated with regards to motives based theories (Jones, 1996; Hardin, 2006; Harding, 2011), non-motives-based theories (D'Cruz, 2019; Hawley, 2019; Holton, 1994; Krishnamurthy, 2015; Potter, 2020; Scheman, 2020; Simon, 2020) and social capital theories (Woolcock, 2001; Zak & Knack, 2001).

6.2 Nation Branding and Digital Channels Theories

Nation branding is a way of communicating that states may use to influence the perception of a national image that people have and promote specific agendas. The early works on propaganda (Lasswell, 1936); development communication (Lerner, 1958); public relations (Bernays, 1923) and public opinion (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944; Lippmann, 1925) are essential in analysing how the development of institutional communication was used to influence people's beliefs. In the digital era of today, digital diplomacy, digital channels, and even digital marketing have gained importance.

The global digitalisation trend has made it much easier for states to gain or lose trust and image (Mogensen, 2015; Vanacker & Belmas, 2009; Wang, 2006). Indeed, the rise of social media networks, extended public communication and social constructs have found states and citizens in positions never before foresee. For example, diplomacy is becoming a general public domain impacted by diverse digital theories (Atkinson, 2010; Bos & Melissen, 2019; Fisher, 2013; Hall, 2015). Digital platforms, networks and channels are now used to achieve foreign policy or image promotion (Adesina, 2016; Manor & Segev, 2015; Manor, 2019; Simunjak & Caliandro, 2019; Zeitzoff, 2017).

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It is believed that nations need to develop strategic branding approaches to avoid reputation losses, manage their images and promote international business for their respective communities (Anholt, 2005; Olins, 2002; Risen, 2005; Szondi, 2007). These strategies remain grounded on the following specific dimensions: (1) identities and culture (Olins, 1999); (2) image and reputation (Anholt, 2010; Fan, 2006; Gudjonsson, 2005; Kaneva, 2011); (3) competitiveness (Anholt, 2007; Lee, 2009); (4) economic and socio-cultural aspects (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2006); and (5) national and international relations (Szondi, 2007).

The contemplated research will build upon the above existing digitalisation ecosystem and nation branding foundations to focus on: (1) nation branding communication concepts (Kavoura, 2014); (2) nation branding in public and cultural policy (Browning & Ferraz de Oliveira, 2017; Varga, 2013); (3) nation branding and diplomacy (Papadopoulos, 1993; 2004; Szondi, 2008); (4) nation branding and diaspora (Dinnie, 2011); (5) nation branding and social media (Harris, 2013; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), and; (6) nation branding, development and FDI (Browning, 2016; Florek & Conejo, 2007).

6.2 Sustainable FDI and Social Justice Theories

Sustainable FDI Theories: The multiplicity of theories linked to FDI has not made easy any attempt to find a consensus as to their aggregation. Following Kindleberger (1969), who assumed that most people would agree that if perfect markets were given, FDI would no longer exist, Denisia (2010) categorised FDI as either perfect or

imperfect markets. Nayak and Choudhury (2014) went further by classifying FDI theories into six granular categories based on market motives behind investors moves. The contemplated research takes another approach by trying to understand better why investors engage in imperfect market behaviour in Africa, exploring post-event long-term outcomes, and investigating sustainable and socially responsible alternatives.

Africa has not had a flattering image for investment (UNCTAD, 2020). The perception of investors on doing business in African is that of high risk, fragile institutions, instability, self-serving driven agency-elite and the mistrust that the elite have on foreign capital (Loots & Kabundi, 2012). It is therefore not surprising if most African theories of foreign direct investments focus on trust and perceptions (Moss, Ramachandran, & Shah, 2004); stability (Ajide & Eregha, 2015); the determinants (Asiedu, 2006; Onyeiwu & Shrestha, 2004); trade openness (Kandiero & Chitiga, 2006); and policies (Fofana, 2014; Morrisset, 2000). It is believed that in this ecosystem of mistrust, investors are mainly searching for high returns and fast-track disinvestments. However, this way of doing business may contribute to more imbalances, inequalities and less social responsibility and limit sustainable growth capabilities.

Social Justice Theories: The reduction of economic imbalances and the endeavour for more socio-responsible behaviours while doing business are parts of a broader philosophical and policy-driven discourse on socio-economic fairness and inclusion integrated into social justice theories. As Van de Bos (2003) emphasises, despite

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subjective judgements on what justice is, social justice is a balanced and fair distribution of wealth, privileges and opportunities among all members of society. For Hage, Ring and Lantz (2011), such a balanced distribution may sustainably enhance socio-economic development. The contemplated research focuses on promoting sustainable growth and economic development through digital nation branding by token of sustainable FDI. Therefore, there is a need to examine the existing gap and linkages between sustainable FDI, social-just behaviours and sustainable economic growth and development. It is believed that reviewing:

1. The seminal works on international trade and FDI such as these of Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Raymond Vernon, Maxwell McLeod, Stephen Hymer, Peter Buckley, Mark Casson and John Dunning;

2. The works on the social justice of Jatava, R. Dhammendu; Francis Herbert Bradley; Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar; Friedrich von Hayek ; John Rawls; Jean-Paul Sartre; Eva Clark, and;

3. The conclusion of selected works on FDI, sustainable growth and social justice of Appel & Loyle (2012), Bardy, Drew & Tumenta (2012), Golub, Kauffmann & Yates (2011), Golubeva (2017), Jushi, Hysa et al (2021), Kardos (2014) and Moran, Graham & Blomstrom (2015) may help to better acknowledge existing linkages or gaps among these theories.

6.4 Digital Nation Branding and FDI in Central Africa - Quasi Academic

Asongu and Odhiambo (2019) and Fofana (2014) summarise the macroeconomic, political and social challenges of doing business in Africa. Ongo Nkoa (2014) and

Ongo Nkoa & Song (2018) stress the importance of FDI in enhancing growth in central Africa. FDI inflows in the tourism sector contributed to approximately 2.2% of the African GDP growth (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2020) and positively impacted the ratio of FDI to GDP of North African states (AfDB, 2020). Interestingly, the observed rise in sustainable FDI flow was triggered by digital marketing channels and nation branding frameworks. Indeed, the World Travel & Tourism Council ("WTTC") (2020) observed that digital marketing arrangements help improve sustainable FDI in the tourism sector in North Africa.

Mkwizu (2019) claims that, "The increasing numbers of international tourist arrivals provide opportunities for Africa to manage marketing strategies in the digital era, including digital marketing" (p. 6). However, compared to their North African or South African peers, central African countries are doing less in nation branding and digital channels. They are also at the bottom of the African digital exposure ranking (Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2021). Moreover, the proportion of FDI from the tourism sector in the region GDP is equally lower (AfDB, 2019). The contemplated research suggests a need to investigate linkages between internet exposure, nation branding, digital channels effectiveness, sustainable FDI and ultimately sustainable economic growth and development in central Africa.

1.5   Literature Review Synthesis

The contemplated research strives to utilise an integrated nation branding and digital channels ecosystem to promote sustainable growth in central Africa. The preliminary literature review shows that:

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1. While both the volume and the quality of FDI flows may be used as a metric to capture sustainable growth, Africa still suffers from a limited economic growth and development that policy-driven instruments have so far not helped to address adequately;

2. The continent suffers from negative perceptions and needs to take action to influence its partners and counterparties, and;

3. As Girma (2016) argues, similar to corporations, nations can apply a digital approach and strategy to construct a more positive national image and build trust. The contemplated research endeavours to build upon the above three observations to investigate possible characteristics that will help to develop a new conceptual framework that better describes digital nation branding strategies required to promote sustainable growth in central Africa and beyond.

7.0 RESEARCH PLAN

The field research interview process is to be completed over a 3-month period between February and September 2023, after which the data will be analysed and the manuscript will be completed. Each face-to-face or digital interview will last a maximum of forty-five (45) minutes at a location and time that is amenable to the participants. Interviews will be conducted in Europe and Africa. The participants will be selected through clustered and snowball sampling.

8.0 RESEARCH TIMELINE

The contemplated research is expected to conclude over a 36-month period. Table 8.0 illustrates the duration of each task anticipated within the research process. Although every effort will be made to implement the steps within the research timeline, variation in the plan may occur due to circumstances beyond the control of the researcher.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="15" align="center">TABLE 8.0
Research Timeline</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3"></td><td colspan="4" align="center">Year 1</td><td colspan="4" align="center">Year 2</td><td colspan="4" align="center">Year 3</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3"></td><td>Q1</td><td>Q2</td><td>Q3</td><td>Q4</td><td>Q1</td><td>Q2</td><td>Q3</td><td>Q4</td><td>Q1</td><td>Q2</td><td>Q3</td><td>Q4</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="6">PART A</td><td colspan="2">Initial Literature Search</td><td>█</td><td>█</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Main Literature Search - Part 1</td><td></td><td></td><td>█</td><td>█</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Research Plan</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>█</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Section 1 - Background</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>█</td><td>█</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Section 2 - Supporting Literature</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>█</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Content Analysis</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>█</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2" bgcolor="yellow"></td><td colspan="12" align="center">Official Submission of Chapters 1, 2, 3 and Slide Presentation To Obtain Authorisation To Continue On To Field Research</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="6">PART B</td><td colspan="2">Interviews Part 1</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>█</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Main Literature Search - Part 2</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>█</td><td>█</td><td>█</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Interviews Part 2</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>█</td><td>█</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Section 3 - Synthesis</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>█</td><td>█</td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Section 4 - Recommendations</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>█</td><td>█</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Manuscript Perfecting & Submission</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>█</td><td>█</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="15">Source: Adapted from Monarch Business School Switzerland</td></tr>
</table>

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9.0 RESEARCH BUDGET

The research will be privately funded. No additional resources or funding will be requested from UGSM-Monarch Business School Switzerland. No funds will be received from any public body in carrying out the contemplated research. The total budget of the research exhibited in Table 9.0 is approximately 12,500 Euros. The budget is presently fully funded and research may begin immediately upon approval.

TABLE 9.0 Research Budget	
	In Euros
Books and articles purchases	1,500
Digital recorder and software purchases	500
Travel and accommodation expenses	5,000
Conferences, workshops & webinars	2,500
Article publications	2,500
Manuscript publication	500
TOTAL	12,500

10.0 RESEARCH PROPOSAL APPROVAL

The contemplated research has been approved by the Administration and the

Candidate may commence the research immediately. The Candidate is not to

deviate from the proposed research plan unless expressly confirmed by both the

Supervisor and the Administration in written form.

_____

Approved by The Administration on
20-Sept-2021 in Zug-Switzerland
By: Dr. Jeffrey Henderson, Ph.D.

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