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Cover story: Africa's best brands

Despite a professed love for Africa, Africans look beyond the continent for their preferred brands. The number of African brands in our Top 100 has fallen to an all time low, from an already low base. **Thebe Ikalafeng, Tshepang Makofane** *and* **Innocentia Liphoko** *break down this year's ranking.*

African consumers look east and west for favourite brands

Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president, famously said: "we face neither East nor West; we face forward," to assert an independent, forward-looking African identity rooted in self-determination rather than allegiance to the western or eastern blocs. According to the African Development Bank, Africa's real GDP is projected to grow by 4.2% in 2025. A growing middle class is shaping new patterns of consumption, connectivity, and aspiration.

But when it comes to one of the key levers of the economy – the brands we admire and consume – for the past 15 years, since this ranking has been developed, Africa has had its gaze firmly east and west.

Despite a growth in confidence in the continent, the share of African brands in our 2025 *Brand Africa 100: Africa's Best Brands* ranking has crashed to a historic low of 11%, down from a peak of 25% a decade ago and from 14% last year.

This year we expanded our survey to explore which western and eastern nations are the most influential in Africa – beyond just admiration. We did this using a computation of foreign direct investment (FDI) into Africa and brand admiration across all the seven categories covered in the study – including media, finance and other categories that we also measured.

If only brand admiration is considered, the top three non-African nations are the US, with 34 unique brand mentions, China with 13, and the UK with 10. If all nations, including African, are considered just on brand mentions, South Africa and Nigeria lead Africa with 14 each.

Once FDI is also incorporated in our computation, the influence doesn't change – the US (#1), China (#2) and the UK (#3) lead in influence in Africa. But when we then used a weighted average, considering GDP size, the tables are upended. The UK takes the top spot; Finland, punching above its weight, comes in at #3; and the US drops to #10 and China to #15.

With South Africa, now a member of the BRICS bloc of countries, presiding over the G20 this year, we wanted also to look at which bloc Africans associated with at a brand and consumer level. While African brands make up only 11% of the Top 100, brands with G20 countries of origin comprise 81%, and BRICS+ brands account for 20% of the Top 100. Companies such as China's Transsion Holdings, parent company of mobile phone maker Tecno, have upwards of 50% market share of the African smartphone market.

Irrespective of which metrics are used in the rankings, there's no denying the influence of the west and east. The decline in Africa's share of the Top 100 shows that western and Asian nations remain the most influential of those investing in Africa and shoring up their soft power through brands and FDI. And this matters; because the more Africa consumes foreign brands, the more it exports jobs and profits, and the larger the gap between makers and consumers. The continent needs to make more and market better. The markets exist.

Doing good for Africa

In an increasingly fractured and isolationist world, we expanded our survey to understand which brands were seen to contribute positively to the continent.

South Africa's MTN and the ubiquitous US brand Coca-Cola are the most admired African and international brads perceived to be doing good for society and the environment. Their numerous community-led initiatives appear to be paying off. The United Nations, which itself is struggling with budgetary cuts

Opposite: Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke" campaign in Kenya, marking a return after a 13-year hiatus.

African brands now make up just 11% of the Top 100 – down from 25% a decade ago – despite growing confidence in the continent

and attacks from some of the bigger member states, still has a strong standing in Africa and is the most admired non-profit institution contributing to positive change in society and the environment.

As has been the pattern for a decade now, Dangote and MTN lead the rankings as the most admired African brands both when consumers are prompted (*see page 18*) and in spontaneous recall (*see page 21*).

Traditional banks still dominate

Despite growth and rapid adoption of mobile money platforms and fintechs, traditional banking platforms dominate the list of the most admired financial services brands, accounting for 92%. In stark contrast to the continent's leadership in fintech, China's Opay and the USA's Visa are the only financial services brands in the rankings that are not banks rooted in physical branches.

Standard Bank, Africa's largest bank by capital and assets with a large African footprint, leads our most admired financial brand ahead of other African banking giants. This is an encouraging evolution over the last 15 years. Having African-owned banks that can fund the continent's development is key. Those who control the levers of finance control the levers of development and, until recently, the size and reputation of African banks was on the whole weak. This has changed for the better.

Can the younger generation change Africa's branding landscape?

Africa is the world's youngest continent, with over 70% of its population under the age of 35 and a median age of under 20. One would assume that brand preferences would be markedly different between the young and the older generations. Not quite. In the 2025 *Brand Africa 100: Africa's Best Brands*, preferences across generational lines are more alike than one might have assumed. Nike, the #1 overall brand for the past eight years, is the leading brand for Generation Z (18 – 28 years) and millennials (29 – 44 years), while Samsung, the #3 overall brand in Africa, takes the top spot among the older Generation X (45 – 60) and baby boomers (61+). Among African brands, there's even more consensus across generations in their preferences for the African giants MTN and Dangote. Generation X, Generation Z and baby boomers prefer MTN and millennials prefer Dangote.

George Orwell is supposed to have said: "every generation imagines itself to be more intelligent than the one before it, and wiser than the one that comes after it." But, when it comes to brand preferences, the generations are little different.

The benchmark global brands Nike and Samsung, and African brands MTN and Dangote, successfully appeal across generations and have clearly mastered the arts of staying relevant over time and of delivering on their word. They evolve without losing their core identity, becoming not just products, but touchstones in people's lives through the generations, and yardsticks of success and lifestyle.

Let's take a look at the leading African brands. For example, for a South African baby boomer (61+), MTN, which last year celebrated its 30th anniversary, may represent a symbolic shift from the isolation of apartheid into a new era of connection, democracy, and hope. For a Nigerian Gen Xer (45–60), MTN may recall the excitement of being among its first 50,000 subscribers in Nigeria. For Gen Z (18–29), MTN might be synonymous with social media and freedom of speech, thanks to the "social bundles" that power TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube access.

Dangote holds the number one spot among millennials (29–44) – a generation that witnessed the rise of influencer culture and resonates with the demand for personality-driven brands.

For them Dangote is synonymous with its founder, Aliko Dangote, a figure who has graced the covers of magazines and been named Africa's leading businessman. Pop culture has not escaped his influence: Dangote is name-dropped in at least 20 Nigerian songs, including Burna Boy's *Dangote*, which has garnered over 26 million views on YouTube. This is a testament to the power of personal branding and the role of cultural figures in shaping brand perception.

The relevance of great brands is built not only on products or services but on emotional and cultural resonance, and MTN and Dangote, like Nike, are the reference brands in Africa.

Another category that stands out is luxury brands. Though their authentic goods are not accessible everywhere in the continent, their visibility and reverence by media celebrities has propelled their admiration among the younger generations, Generation Z and millennials. Gucci ranks 6th for both generations and Louis Vuitton at 9th for Gen Z.

Despite a global slowdown in the luxury market, with *Vogue Business* reporting a loss of 50 million consumers of luxury last year due to declining demand in China and the US, Africa is showing signs of growth. The continent's aspirational values still resonate strongly and it doesn't appear to be changing.

According to Luxity's *State of the Luxury Market in Africa* report, luxury retail trading density has risen by 8%, outperforming the global average. Young African consumers are increasingly drawn to luxury, redefining what aspiration looks like on the continent.

Despite generational differences in worldview or adoption of technology, brand preferences reflect a surprising alignment among generations. While each generation may consider itself savvier than the next or previous, their brand choices suggest otherwise.

Shaping the African narrative

Africa's leading media brand, the broadcaster DStv, has received regulatory approval to be acquired by French-based Canal+. DStv has always been present in our various rankings. It was the only African media brand that challenged the dominance of global behemoths such as the BBC (UK), CNN (USA) or Al Jazeera (Qatar). The new owners have guaranteed a similar strategy and investments in the African content. But one may ask: which other regional media groups can provide a true African voice with the continent's interests at heart? Africa's story is in perilous territory. Africa's narrative or identity – how it is seen, remembered, or represented – is not often in the continent's hands.

Time for a reset

Africans can no longer keep professing a love for Africa but voting elsewhere with their money. Unless

Africa needs to invest in the youthful entrepreneurial spirit and our competitive advantage. We have a distinctive cultural capital and have shown leadership in areas such as fintech that can forge a new way forward

the downward pattern shifts, we face an addiction to foreign brands, which in turn impacts our aspirations, how we think and what we consume. Africa needs to invest in the youthful entrepreneurial spirit and our competitive advantage. We have a distinctive cultural capital and have shown leadership in areas such as fintech that can forge a new way forward.

It's time to reset the agenda. And unless initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area gain traction to help create large markets for our locally made products, African companies will be left out of the explosion of brands that will move freely across the borders.

This is not an agenda against non-African brands, but a call to lift the game for African brands. The next chapter in Africa's brand story – its identity, image and competitiveness – may very well belong to those who combine heritage, distinction, enterprise and resilience. ■

Cover story: Africa's best brands

Most admired brands in Africa: the Top 100

2025 Rank	2024 Rank	Brand Africa 100	Category	Country	Change
1	1	NIKE	Sports & Fitness	USA	0
2	2	ADIDAS	Sports & Fitness	Germany	0
3	3	SAMSUNG	Electronics/Computers	South Korea	0
4	4	COCA-COLA	Non-alcoholic Beverages	USA	0
5	5	APPLE	Electronics/Computers	USA	0
6	6	GUCCI	Luxury	Italy	0
7	10	PUMA	Sports & Fitness	Germany	3
8	7	TOYOTA	Auto-Manufacturers	Japan	-1
9	9	ZARA	Apparel Retail	Spain	0
10	11	MTN	Telecommunications	South Africa	1
11	8	TECNO	Electronics/Computers	China	-3
12	13	NESTLÉ	Consumer, non-cyclical	Switzerland	1
13	17	MERCEDES-BENZ	Auto-Manufacturers	Germany	4
14	14	PEPSI	Non-alcoholic Beverages	USA	0
15	16	LOUIS VUITTON	Luxury	France	1
16	15	LG	Electronics/Computers	South Korea	-1
17	37	TESLA	Auto-Manufacturers	USA	20
18	18	GOOGLE	Technology	USA	0
19	12	VODAFONE	Telecommunications	UK	-7
20	21	AMAZON	Technology	USA	1
21	24	BMW	Auto-Manufacturers	Germany	3
22	33	CHRISTIAN DIOR	Luxury	France	11
23	29	CHANEL	Luxury	France	6
24	20	AIRTEL	Telecommunications	India	-4
25	28	DANGOTE	Consumer, non-cyclical	Nigeria	3
26	51	AZAM GROUP	Consumer, non-cyclical	Tanzania	25
27	32	JORDAN	Sports & Fitness	USA	5
28	34	UNILEVER	Consumer, non-cyclical	UK	6
29	45	XIAOMI	Electronics/Computers	China	16
30	23	NOKIA	Electronics/Computers	Finland	-7
31	42	LACOSTE	Luxury	France	11
32	25	INFINIX	Electronics/Computers	China	-7
33	46	HEWLETT PACKARD/HP	Electronics/Computers	USA	13
34	38	MICROSOFT	Technology	USA	4
35	26	SONY	Electronics/Computers	Japan	-9
36	41	DSTV	Media	South Africa	5
37	36	GLO/GLOBACOM	Telecommunications	Nigeria	-1
38	52	JUMIA	Technology	Nigeria	14
39	27	HUAWEI	Electronics/Computers	China	-12
40	30	TRADE KINGS	Consumer, non-cyclical	Zambia	-10
41	39	NIVEA	Personal Care	Germany	-2
42	43	ETHIOPIAN AIRLINES	Aviation	Ethiopia	1
43	35	KFC	Fastfood/Restaurant	USA	-8
44	44	HISENSE	Electronics/Computers	China	0
45	48	FANTA	Non-alcoholic Beverages	USA	3
46	47	GUINNESS	Alcoholic Beverages	Ireland	1
47	54	VERSACE	Luxury	Italy	7
48	56	BLUE BAND	Consumer, non-cyclical	UK	8
49	19	ORANGE	Telecommunications	France	-30
50	75	FACEBOOK	Technology	USA	25

2025 Rank	2024 Rank	Brand Africa 100	Category	Country	Change
51	53	**FORD**	Auto-Manufacturers	USA	2
52	61	**INDOMIE NOODLES**	Consumer, non-cyclical	Indonesia	9
53	65	**SHEIN**	Retail	China	12
54	86	**VOLKSWAGEN**	Auto-Manufacturers	Germany	32
55	82	**PRADA**	Luxury	Italy	27
56	New	**BERSHKA**	Apparel Retail	Spain	-
57	58	**OPPO MOBILE**	Electronics/Computers	China	1
58	49	**RALPH LAUREN/POLO**	Luxury	USA	-9
59	67	**HONDA**	Auto-Manufacturers	Japan	8
60	59	**COLGATE**	Personal Care	USA	-1
61	31	**ITEL**	Electronics/Computers	China	-30
62	55	**MCDONALD'S**	Fastfood/Restaurant	USA	-7
63	50	**REEBOK**	Sports & Fitness	UK	-13
64	77	**NETFLIX**	Technology	USA	13
65	98	**DELL**	Electronics/Computers	USA	33
66	87	**FENDI**	Luxury	Italy	21
67	New	**L'ORÉAL**	Personal Care	France	-
68	New	**YANGO**	Technology	Russia	-
69	New	**CADBURY**	Consumer, non-cyclical	UK	-
70	73	**ALIBABA/EXPRESS**	Technology	China	3
71	92	**BALENCIAGA**	Luxury	Spain	21
72	84	**NISSAN/DACIA**	Auto-Manufacturers	Japan	12
73	81	**ORAIMO**	Electronics/Computers	China	8
74	New	**CLOSE UP**	Personal Care	UK	-
75	68	**SHOPRITE/CHECKERS**	Retail	South Africa	-7
76	New	**NEW BALANCE**	Sports & Fitness	USA	-
77	40	**LC WAIKIKI**	Retail	Turkey	-37
78	88	**LENOVO**	Electronics/Computers	China	10
79	64	**BATHU**	Apparel	South Africa	-15
80	New	**DOLCE & GABANA**	Luxury	Italy	-
81	60	**TOTAL ENERGIES**	Energy	France	-21
82	66	**HEINEKEN**	Consumer, non-cyclical	USA	-16
83	New	**RED BULL**	Non-alcoholic Beverages	Austria	-
84	78	**TOSHIBA**	Electronics/Computers	Japan	-6
85	22	**H&M**	Apparel Retail	Sweden	-63
86	71	**LAND ROVER/RANGE ROVER**	Auto-Manufacturers	UK	-15
87	69	**OMO**	Consumer, non-cyclical	UK	-18
88	New	**DOVE**	Personal Care	USA	-
89	New	**KIABI**	Apparel Retail	France	na
90	94	**WOOLWORTHS**	Retail	South Africa	4
91	New	**VANS**	Apparel	USA	-
92	New	**LEVI'S**	Apparel	USA	-
93	89	**ORAL-B**	Personal Care	USA	-4
94	New	**SOFTCARE**	Personal Care	China	-
95	New	**VIVA**	Consumer, non-cyclical	UK	-
96	74	**PHILIPS**	Electronics/Computers	Netherlands	-22
97	83	**CALVIN KLEIN**	Apparel	USA	-14
98	70	**ROLEX**	Luxury	Switzerland	-28
99	New	**PULL&BEAR**	Apparel Retail	Spain	-
100	91	**VASELINE/BLUE SEAL**	Personal Care	USA	-9

African Business *reflects on four African brands and a country that have defined what it means to be a top brand while remaining relevant and successful in challenging circumstances.* **Kwame Appiah** *reports.*

Hall of fame: How five African brands have accrued power, presence and popularity

Since 2011 Brand Africa has published an annual list of the 100 most admired brands in Africa, initially in the *Mail and Guardian* and, since 2013, in partnership with *African Business*. The list, eagerly anticipated in the continent's C-suites, has shown which companies have held commercial and cultural sway and become more than providers of goods and services for the continent. Much has changed in the time that the list has been published. The African consumer has grown more connected, aspirational, and brand-conscious. Meanwhile, technology has unlocked new opportunities across sectors and markets.

Above: the enduring local success, the African Five Hall of Fame brands

This year's rankings, once again, paint a clear picture of the overwhelming dominance of foreign brands on the continent, demonstrating deep-rooted patterns in consumer behaviour, and the immense brand power wielded by multinational corporation. Despite this, a handful of indigenous companies have stood the test of time and consistently demonstrated that it is possible to build enduring African brands that retain the trust and loyalty of African consumers.

Five African champions

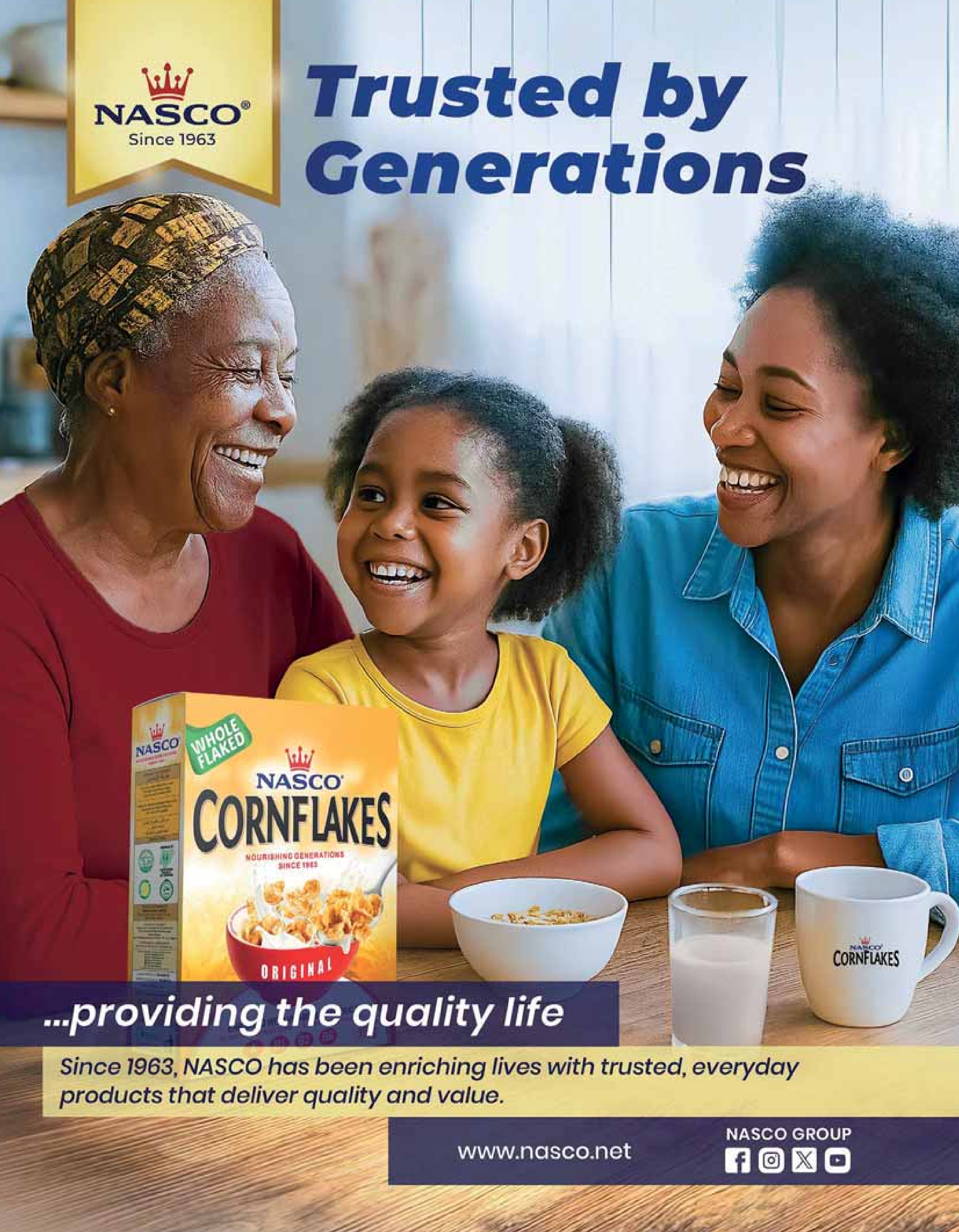
One of these companies is MTN, which rose one spot to become the top African brand overall, and climbed one spot to rank 10th among the Top 100 Global Brands. The South Africa-headquartered telecoms operator also retained its position as the number one telecoms brand in Africa, ahead of regional rivals Airtel (ranked 24th) and Glo (ranked 37th). With over 290 million subscribers across 21 African markets, the company's market penetration is undeniable and unrivalled in most of the markets it operates in. It also operates the continent's largest mobile money platform, MoMo, with over 70 million users and an annual transaction volume nearing $200bn.

Another strong performer is Ethiopian Airlines, which rose to 42nd overall in the rankings, up from 43rd in 2024. The firm maintained its status as the continent's top aviation brand and the only African carrier to feature in the Top 100. The airline's hub-and-spoke model, centred around Addis Ababa, connects over 60 African cities to more than 130 destinations worldwide. With $7.02bn in profits in the fiscal year ending June 2024, the airline is among the top 20 globally by revenue. Its profits were boosted by a 30% increase in passenger numbers in the same year, despite a challenging travel environment and reported delays in deliveries of new aircraft.

Dangote Group, Africa's largest industrial conglomerate, continues to cement its position as a continental industrial leader. In this year's rankings, it rose three spots globally to 25th and despite being overtaken by MTN as Africa's top brand overall, Dangote retained its position as the number one African industrial brand, ahead of rivals such as Azam Group and Trade Kings. The continued rise of Dangote can be attributed to its growing output in cement production. The company has expanded its

Most admired African brands *(aided recall)*

2025 rank	2024 rank	Brand	Category	Country of origin	Change
1	2	**Dangote**	Consumer, non-cyclical	Nigeria	1
2	1	**MTN**	Telecommunication	South Africa	-1
3	8	**Azam Group**	Media	Tanzania	5
4	3	**DSTV**	Media	South Africa	-1
5	6	**Maxhosa**	Apparel	South Africa	1
6	4	**Ethiopian Airlines**	Aviation	Ethiopia	-2
7	-	**Innoson Motors**	Auto Manufacturers	Nigeria	-
8	7	**Glo/Globacom**	Telecommunication	Nigeria	-1
9	-	**Hamoud Boualem**	Non-alcoholic Beverages	Algeria	-
10	-	**Jumia**	Retail	Nigeria	-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footprint and now has an operational presence in ten countries and a market presence in eight more. Just as important is its expansion beyond cement and petroleum into fertilisers and food processing and tentative steps towards clean energy and petrochemicals.

Perhaps the most iconic fintech innovator to come out of the continent, mPesa, is represented by part-parent Vodafone, ranked 19th. mPesa, owned by Safaricom, which in turn is a joint venture between Vodacom (a subsidiary of Vodafone) and the Kenyan government, processed close to $300bn in transactions in 2024. Having brought financial inclusion to over 40 million unbanked people, mPesa's impact and value is not in any doubt.

South Africa is the African country that has also consistently led the way in country branding. It is admired across Africa both as an economic powerhouse and also as a centre of excellence when it comes to tourism and education. It hosts international events, including in sport and fashion. This year the country will host the G20 meetings. South Africa continues to set the benchmark in many fields even if other countries on the continent, such as Rwanda, are working hard to create a clear identity and strengthen their appeal, in Africa and globally, in areas such as sports and tourism, as well as tech and industry.

The success of each of these brands was built on being able to deliver services and, in the case of Dangote, goods to millions of Africans. For MTN and mPesa, in particular, these were services that, prior to their introduction, were out of the reach of millions – millions for whom they are today a feature of their daily lives, perhaps already taken for granted.

Dangote and Ethiopian Airlines, on the other hand, have proven that it is entirely possible for African providers to deliver what in the past may have been the domain of companies originating out of Europe, America or Asia. By doing so, these companies are not just serving customers and retaining wealth within the continent, they are adding to continental pride and to the confidence of entrepreneurs big and small that it can be done in Africa by Africans.

Brand power is built on trust. In a continent where political instability, weak infrastructure, and inconsistent governance can deter investment and

Brand Insights: QA

MTN is today one of the most ubiquitous brands in Africa. Nompilo Morafo, Group Chief Sustainability and Corporate Affairs Officer, tells us how the MTN brand has evolved over time to stay relevant while putting products and people at the heart of its strategy.

What do you see as the key defining moments that defined MTN's early success?

We marked 30 years in the business last year. Among key defining moments were the start of our first commercial operations in South Africa on 1 June 1994 – at the same time as the birth of President Nelson Mandela's democracy. With a small team of 20, MTN started building a network just as those who had fought for freedom started building a nation.

From the outset the demand for mobile telephony was much greater than anticipated and that set the tone for what was to come.

In 1996 we launched Pay as You Go services, dramatically opening up the market. With no contracts and no credit checks, even those without bank accounts could now have cellphones.

In 1998, we created MTN International and our international expansion started in Rwanda, Uganda and eSwatini, followed by Cameroon in 2000 and Nigeria in 2001. In that same year we launched the MTN Foundation to manage social investment projects. This was indeed a defining moment as it underscored our commitment to creating shared value, recognising that our success was intricately linked to the wellbeing of our communities.

With voice revenues declining, how is MTN repositioning itself as a leader in fintech, payments, and digital services?

As mobile markets mature, growth in demand for voice services is typically outpaced by the acceleration in demand for data services. MTN Group's financials bear this out. In 2024, voice revenue accounted for 31% of total MTN Group service revenue across our 16 markets. Data revenue contributed 39%. But in some of our markets voice revenue is still growing, albeit at a slower rate.

We are driven to extend digital and financial inclusion across Africa. We now offer MTN Mobile Money (MoMo) in 14 of our 16 markets, where we have more than 62m MoMo users. In Q1 2025 our fintech platform recorded 5.5bn transactions valued at $95.3bn. In the same period, we processed $1.4bn in remittances. Every transaction, every transfer and every tap helps people forge their own paths. They also clearly show the repositioning of MTN over time.

How is the MTN brand evolving to stay relevant to the digital generation?

From the outset MTN was a brand leading the communications revolution sweeping the world and South Africa, and that would soon sweep across more of Africa. In recent years our brand has consistently been ranked as the most valuable African brand. In 2022 we refreshed our brand identity to keep it relevant and inspiring. The exciting demographic opportunity of the fast-growing, youthful populations in our markets is a key part of our investment case, hence our focus on keeping the brand fresh and relevant to our customers, both existing and prospective subscribers.

Most admired African brands *(spontaneous recall)*

2025 rank	2024 rank	Brand	Category	Country of origin	Change
1	1	**MTN**	Telecommunications	South Africa	0
2	2	**Dangote**	Consumer, non-cyclical	Nigeria	0
3	7	**Azam group**	Consumer, non-cyclical	Tanzania	4
4	5	**DSTV**	Media	South Africa	1
5	4	**Glo/Globacom**	Telecommunications	Nigeria	-1
6	8	**Jumia**	Technology	Nigeria	2
7	3	**Trade Kings**	Consumer, non-cyclical	Zambia	-4
8	6	**Ethiopian Airlines**	Aviation	Ethiopia	-2
9	10	**Shoprite/Checkers**	Retail	South Africa	1
10	9	**Bathu**	Apparel	South Africa	-1

consumer confidence, these four brands have bucked the trend and provided stability and consistency in the face of myriad challenges. MTN's enduring presence, even in high-risk environments, has made it synonymous with connectivity, despite geopolitical battles and regulatory wrangles.

Similarly, Dangote has been able to meet growing demand for cement and weathered some rough storms on its way to reducing West Africa's dependency on imported fuel via its huge new Nigerian refinery.

Ethiopian Airlines, for its part, has been able to build a profitable and globally competitive airline with a reputation for punctuality, safety and professionalism, becoming a national and even pan-African symbol of excellence. With mPesa, Safaricom was able to build consumer trust by offering a reliable, user-friendly and cost-effective solution that answered a profound need.

Building beyond borders

Each of these companies also draws much of its power from its ability to expand beyond its original borders. Naturally, this is most true for Ethiopian Airlines and MTN, which by the nature of their services are natural and even necessary cross-border propositions. While its tremendous reach has made MTN the most valuable African brand, Ethiopian Airlines has made Addis Ababa the continent's leading aviation hub, connecting eastern, western, northern and southern Africa in a way few could have imagined just two decades ago.

While Dangote is dominant in its home market, with brands across different "verticals" or market sectors, it has become much more than a Nigerian story. Its cement is available in an increasing number of countries and, once fully operational, its refinery is expected to impact the supply chain in finished petroleum products well beyond the borders of Nigeria. Just as significantly, Alikote Dangote, its founder and leader, has a towering presence and reputation as the continent's leading industrialist, with the ear of presidents and the admiration of consumers.

While less pan-African than the others, mPesa is also expanding into other eastern African countries and scored a major coup when it began operating in Ethiopia in August 2023, ten months after Safaricom launched its voice and data offering in the continent's fifth largest economy. But mPesa's biggest achievement is positioning the continent as one that can lead in innovation. The continent still leads the world in terms of mobile money.

Given the challenging environment, few African companies are able to achieve sustained profitability and build resilience the way these four have. Last year, MTN's earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation was an impressive 70.1bn rand ($3.9bn), with revenue from its telecom services growing by 13.8%, driven by increases in data (21.9%) and fintech (28.5%) revenues. Mobile money users across its 19 markets of operation now exceed 60 million, which presents significant revenue opportunities. Under its Ambition 2025 strategy, which focuses on scalable digital platforms, network modernisation and regulatory agility, MTN is expected to have built further resilience, making it an even more formidable corporate presence in the continent.

For the same period, the Dangote Cement's revenue grew by 62.2% owing, it said, to "buoyant volume growth from Nigeria in addition to price increases in selected operations in line with inflationary realities.". The group's net profit rose by 10.5% to 503.2bn naira ($317m), while operating profit jumped to 1.15 trillion naira ($724bn).

Ethiopian Airlines remains the most profitable airline on the continent, leveraging economies of scale, fleet ownership and an operational model that covers maintenance, training, catering, and logistics to diversify its offerings and insure itself against volatilities. According to results published by its parent company Safaricom in November 2024, mPesa's revenue grew by 16.6% year-on-year to KShs77.2bn ($598m).

Innovation keeps top brands a step ahead

Key to resilience is innovation and reinvention, especially in industries that are amenable to disruption and in which new entrants are lionised. MTN itself was once a major disruptor, opening up GSM connections and, eventually, financial inclusion to millions in Africa. Three decades later, MTN continues to innovate and keep up with much younger competitors.

In response to the "super-app" trend, it launched Ayoba in 2019, integrating messaging, payments, and content in a single app that now has over 30 million users. It has also rolled out 5G mobile services in South Africa, Nigeria, and Ghana. In 2024 it inked a deal with Mastercard that will further boost financial inclusion with, among other things, a virtual card for MTN mobile money users.

MTN's consistent innovation has resulted in its multi-generational appeal. In the 2025 Top Brands rankings, it ranks first among Gen Z (18-28) users and second among millennial (29-44) consumers. Gen X (45-60) and boomers (above 61) both made it their top choice, evidence of the brand's ability to cut through various age brackets and offer solutions that address the particular needs of the various demographics.

Ethiopian Airlines' success is, perhaps more than anything else, a result of its ability to adjust to the market and redefine its offerings in response to customer needs and global and regional events.

For example, it adapted to the pandemic by expanding its cargo and logistics services, increasing its destinations to 74, as it helped move medical supplies around, a much-needed service at the time. The airline also has cross-generational appeal, ranking 8th among Gen Z; 9th among millennials and third with Gen Xers.

For Dangote, its diversification into petroleum, food processing and petrochemicals means that it will become even more familiar to consumers not directly engaged with its core offering of cement. However, it already has a solid reputation as a homegrown industrial giant with the capability, as it replaces imported products with the outputs of its refinery, to act as an economic stabiliser not just in Nigeria, but the West African region. Interestingly, while it ranks second among Gen Z and Gen Xers; and 1st among Millennials, it is only the third most trusted brand among boomers, perhaps reflecting which generation is more likely to be engaged in activities that require Dangote's products.

As the brand that is most often held up as an exemplar of African innovation, mPesa has much to live up to. With 51 million users, KSh35.9 trillion ($278bn) in annual transactions and a growing presence in East Africa, mPesa clearly remains a significant player in the market. It is no longer merely a payments application, but a provider of loans and other micro-financial services, playing a critical role in the lives of millions, especially those in underbanked and vulnerable communities.

The United Nations has lauded its impact on poverty reduction and it has inspired similar innovations in places as far flung as India and Brazil, proving that African innovation can shape global trends. It is worthy of note that mPesa's success has yet to be

Brand Africa top media brands

2025	2024	Brand	Category	Country
1	1	**BBC**	UK	Europe
2	2	**DStv**	South Africa	Africa
3	3	**CNN**	USA	North America
4	3	**Al Jazeera**	Qatar	Asia
5	6	**Netflix**	USA	North America
6	-	**Azam Media**	Tanzania	Africa
7	-	**Citizen TV**	Kenya	Africa
8	-	**EBS TV**	Ethiopia	Africa
9	9	**Nation Media/NTV**	Kenya	Africa
10	10	**MBC Group**	Saudi Arabia	Asia

replicated at a similar scale, despite the rise of fintech across the continent. That may be due to the fact that its rise was a result of a perfect combination of enabling factors. And while other mobile money platforms have been launched, few have had the advantage of that perfect storm of timing, trust, distribution, and simplicity. mPesa's legacy, it may turn out, is beyond technological, its behavioural: it changed how people relate to money and made it possible for others in its wake to become more acceptable to a previously sceptical consumer base.

Giving the consumers what they want

The enduring success of this quartet however offers an indication of the ingredients of brand success in Africa. Each of them was able to scale by offering accessible solutions to a pressing consumer demand, sometimes even before the consumers had fully identified that need. For MTN, it was connecting people across regions; Dangote offered local replacements for costly imports; Ethiopian Airlines reconfigured continental aviation with its hub and spoke model; and mPesa brought financial services to millions of unbanked people. They also invested in infrastructure, built trust with consumers and engaged with governments and regulators to shape the ecosystems in which they operate. With the rise of social media, artificial intelligence, digital communities and activist consumers, the next generation of major African brands will be forged in an entirely different landscape.

Brand power will not flow merely from excellence in delivery of goods and services, but from perceived authenticity and shared values with consumers.

Younger consumers are choosing to bestow their custom on brands with whom they have an affinity. Companies must therefore learn to listen, to respond nimbly to criticism, to stand for something other than profits, and to build narratives that travel across languages, borders, and platforms. To thrive, companies will need to transition from being services and goods providers to becoming storytellers, enablers and partners in progress. ■

Brand Insights: QA

For our Top Brand 15th anniversary, *African Business* put some questions to the brand and communications team at Dangote to understand how one man's dream created a brand that today has become synonymous with industrial transformation.

Aliko Dangote has become an avatar for African industrialisation. How has the Dangote Group leveraged this personal brand in pursuing its objectives across various sectors on the continent?

The Group has leveraged on his personal brand via strategic investments and philanthropic initiatives. The Dangote personal brand is strong and is consistent with domestic manufacturing and trade. Therefore, Dangote Group is generally accepted across Africa for direct investment. The Group is Africa's biggest cement manufacturer and operates the largest single train petroleum refinery.

What does it mean for Dangote to be seen not just as a business, but as a force for continental transformation?

Construction of cement plants across Africa has fuelled job creation and has led to growth across the continent. Dangote Group has eased job movement across Africa as staff are transferred across countries. We remain a large contributor of tax. Cross border investments have helped to transfer the industrial capacity of host countries through technology transfer, adoption and adaptation.

In Nigeria, all the technical staff for the construction of the petroleum refinery and fertiliser were recruited and trained from ground zero as there were no existing plants with skills to poach from.

How has the group navigated the structural challenges the continent has to build sustainable businesses across markets and sectors?

Dangote Group overcame structural challenges by improving on existing resources or building totally new ones. The Group built new access roads to plant sites and constructed captive power plants. The captive power plants solved the problem of unreliable public electricity supply. At various seaports, the Group overhauled existing facilities to help either in the export or import of clinker and other materials.

While building the refinery, Dangote built a new jetty, bought thousands of cranes, dredging machines, trucks, etc.

What message does Dangote's success send to the next generation of African industrialists?

Africa is home. Only African investors can really develop Africa. Invest in Africa. The continent offers the best in terms of returns on investment.

Yes, there are challenges, but those challenges are investment opportunities. There are opportunities in Africa in all sectors. We have opened the road, hitch on the ride.

Methodology

Now in its 15th year, *Brand Africa 100: Africa's Best Brands* *stands as the continent's most comprehensive and credible barometer of brand performance and consumer admiration. It is produced using a rigorous, authentically African, consumer-led methodology.*

Determining Africa's best brands

The study is independently conducted by the world's most respected global research firms, with deep coverage and experience across Africa – GeoPoll and Kantar – and supported by regional research partners – Integrate (Morocco), Gopinion (Algeria), Analysis (Mauritius), and Oxygen (Namibia). The 2025 study spans 31 African countries, representing over 85% of Africa's population and GDP. The research is conducted in the eight major languages that are official or widely spoken in the five major economic regions of Africa – europhone (English, French and Portuguese), Austronesian (Malagasy), Afro-Asiatic (Arabic, Amharic) and major indigenous African languages such as Swahili and Kinyarwanda – to ensure linguistic and cultural diversity, inclusion, comprehension and standardisation.

Data collection was conducted through a mix of mobile, SMS, and face-to-face methodologies, ensuring inclusivity across both urban and rural demographics. Consumers aged 18 and older in the sampled countries are asked to spontaneously identify their most admired brands across several categories: brands that are doing good for society and the environment; brands contributing to a better Africa; African and non-African brands; and the most admired nations – regardless of the respondent's nationality or the brand's origin. To understand insights of categories with low unaided recall but significant societal influence, in 2017 Brand Africa introduced prompted (aided) questions for media and financial services brands.

The 2025 study generated more than 150,000 brand mentions across 5,930 unique brands.

Strategic insights and analysis were led by Kantar and Brand Leadership – Africa's premier branding, strategic communications, and intellectual property advisory firm. The final results are reviewed and validated by the Brand Africa Research and Rankings Integrity Advisory Board, safeguarding the independence and credibility of the rankings.

What sets these rankings apart:

First, these rankings are Africa-focused – conceived in Africa, for Africa. They are comprehensive, covering 31 countries across all five economic regions and multiple languages. They are empirical – rooted in robust, consumer-led insights.

They are independent – conducted by globally trusted, neutral research partners. And, finally, they are brand-neutral – unsponsored and free from commercial influence.

To gain a place on the list of Africa's Most Admired Brands, a brand must be recalled in at least three other countries beyond its home market and must receive a minimum of 10% of its total mentions from outside its country of origin. Where brands operate under multiple names – such as Stanbic/Standard Bank, Vodacom/Vodafone/Safaricom/Mpesa (Vodafone group), DStv/GoTV/Multichoice (DStv group), or have sub-brands, like iPhone, iPad, or iWatch from Apple, they are consolidated under the most dominant consumer-facing brand.

Brands that are created in Africa and maintain a dominant African identity – regardless of current ownership – are recognised as African brands. Examples include Tusker and Safaricom from Kenya, and Castle Lager from South Africa.

Since its inception in 2011, Brand Africa 100: Africa's Best Brands has grown from just eight sample markets to 31. Grounded in a rigorous, globally benchmarked methodology, it has yielded consistent results and established itself as a trusted lens into Africa's dynamic brand landscape. ■

Research leads: Karin Du Chenne (Chief Growth Officer, Africa Middle East – Kantar); Matthieu Sauvage-Mar (VP of Client Development – GeoPoll); Innocentia Liphoko (Research Director – Brand Africa).

The renowned British-Ghanaian tailor put African fashion on the global stage when he dressed some of the continent's biggest stars at the Met Gala, writes **Lennox Yieke**.

Ozwald Boateng at the Met Gala: branding Africa on the global stage

Fashion maestro Ozwald Boateng made a striking debut at the Met Gala in New York this May, capturing hearts and minds at the fashion industry's biggest night with his ability to merge African aesthetics with British craftsmanship. The Ghanaian designer dressed 16 celebrities attending the Gala, including three of Africa's biggest musicians, Tems, Burna Boy and Arya Starr, as well as actors Ncuti Gatwa and Jaden Smith.

Boateng says that the theme for the Gala resonated deeply with everything he stood for. "This year's Met Gala theme – *Superfine: Tailoring Black Style* – was entirely in my wheelhouse. When the opportunity came to dress a number of guests for the evening, it wasn't something I had to think twice about. I've spent the last four decades redefining tailoring through the lens of African identity, so it was the right moment to bring that narrative to one of fashion's biggest global stages. In many ways, this moment was a continuation of a journey I've been on for the last years – one that began in the early days of my career and has crescendoed through landmark events like my 2019 show at the Apollo Theater in Harlem. That show, inspired by the Harlem Renaissance, was a cultural reset – a celebration of black excellence and a reassertion of tailoring as a powerful form of storytelling. It was about reclaiming our past to inform our future, and doing it on our own terms," Boateng tells *African Business*.

A 40-year journey

Boateng earned his stripes as a tailor in London in the 80s, championing the idea that a good suit was

a statement of identity, power and heritage. His bold and flamboyant suit designs took off in the 90s, and in 1994, Boateng staged his first runway show in Paris – marking the first time a British menswear tailor achieved such a feat.

In 1995, he became the first black tailor – at the age of just 28 – to open a store on London's Savile Row, setting a new standard for inclusion in the elite of British fashion.

Born to Ghanaian immigrants in London, Ozwald Boateng used Ghana's traditional kente cloth to create his signature "tribal" pattern. His eponymous brand is known for its form-fitting suits, frequently accented with West African-inspired designs that feature bold colours. Two years ago he oversaw the design of outfits worn by British Airways cabin crew.

The future is expansion

For fashion brands, having celebrities wear their designs at the Met Gala can lead to increased sales and brand recognition among global audiences. Boateng recognises the opportunity that this presents and says that he's currently focused on raising capital to "push the brand globally".

"Visibility on a platform like the Met Gala has real commercial weight. It introduces the brand to new audiences, new markets, and new levels of demand. But beyond the short-term attention, it's about long-term brand equity.

"The looks we created weren't just red carpet moments, they were proof points in a broader strategy to scale the business globally.

"This year marks 40 years of my work in fashion, and it's no coincidence that we're actively expanding the brand across new verticals. We recently debuted a fine jewellery capsule in collaboration with Hirsh London. We've also showcased our new eyewear line, developed in partnership with Odette Lunettes, introducing a fresh way for audiences to access the brand's aesthetic.

"These collaborations speak to a future where the business is both creatively visionary and commercially sustainable. We're growing our digital footprint, deepening licensing and partnership models, and moments like the Met Gala help accelerate that trajectory by showing exactly what the brand can stand for, at scale."

This comes even as the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank), which supported Boateng's showcase at the Gala, doubled its credit commitment to the global African creative industry to $2bn, signalling strong institutional backing for African creatives such as Boateng.

Benedict Oramah, president of Afreximbank, noted that Boateng's presence at the Gala exemplified how the Bank's Creative Africa Nexus (CANEX) initiative helps African talents gain international recognition, potentially opening doors to new markets and investors.

"Just recently, I joined a powerful conversation at Atelier Jolie with Angelina Jolie alongside Afreximbank and CANEX, an initiative committed to building long-term, scalable value within Africa's creative industries," Boateng says. "The visibility is there, but we must now match it with sustained investment in local talent, infrastructure, and global distribution networks. That's how we move from recognition to real impact." ■

Below: Ozwald Boateng (fifth from left) with some of the celebrities he dressed for the Met Gala on 5 May, and family members.

Interview: **Thebe Ikalafeng, founder of Brand Africa**

Thebe Ikalafeng, founder of Brand Africa, reflects with **Omar Ben Yedder** *on why foreign brands dominate the continent and how African companies can grab a greater share of the market.*

African brands' quest to win customers back from the brands of the west

In his previous life Thebe Ikalafeng worked to boost western-originated brands such as Colgate and Nike. For the past 15 years, however, he has been preoccupied with the question of how African brands can find and leverage that ***je ne sais quoi*** that will make them as pervasive as western brands are in the continent and elsewhere. The organisation he founded, Brand Africa, is behind the Annual Brand Africa 100 that has been published every year since 2011 – a ranking of which brands, local and foreign, hold the most sway with African consumers. Ikalafeng says the idea, popular at the time, that Africa was the next frontier, led him to question exactly how Africa might profit. "It seemed that the conversation was more about how to extract more out of the continent, rather than Africans themselves seeing the opportunities presented by the continent," he recalls.

Ikalafeng's apprehension was that, with the various advantages that foreign brands had over African ones, they would gain more from the burgeoning African opportunity than would local brands. A decade and a half later, the odds remain firmly stacked in the favour of non-African brands.

Ikalafeng says this is due not just to a first-mover advantage, but to decades of foreign brands working to build loyalty among African consumers. "They have invested heavily to find a way into our mouths, our minds and our money. We have been led to believe that the west is best; and if you look at the African [consumption] basket, it is dominated by non-African brands, which means the externalisation of African profits," Ikalafeng explains.

Barriers to entry in own lands

For African brands, Ikalafeng adds, there is also a barrier to entry, even in their own lands. Having a captive audience and a decades-long head start means that foreign brands selling to Africans have access to resources, production capacity and distribution networks that their African competition simply do not have. "The barrier is money," he points out starkly.

The result of all this is an entrenched perception among African consumers, Ikalafeng observes. This perception has been further exacerbated by new media and technology, which allows Africans to engage even more with western culture and brands.

"Because of the porous mental borders that were created and have been opened up by technology and media, we now find ourselves in a situation where we are more mesmerised by western cultures than by our own cultures."

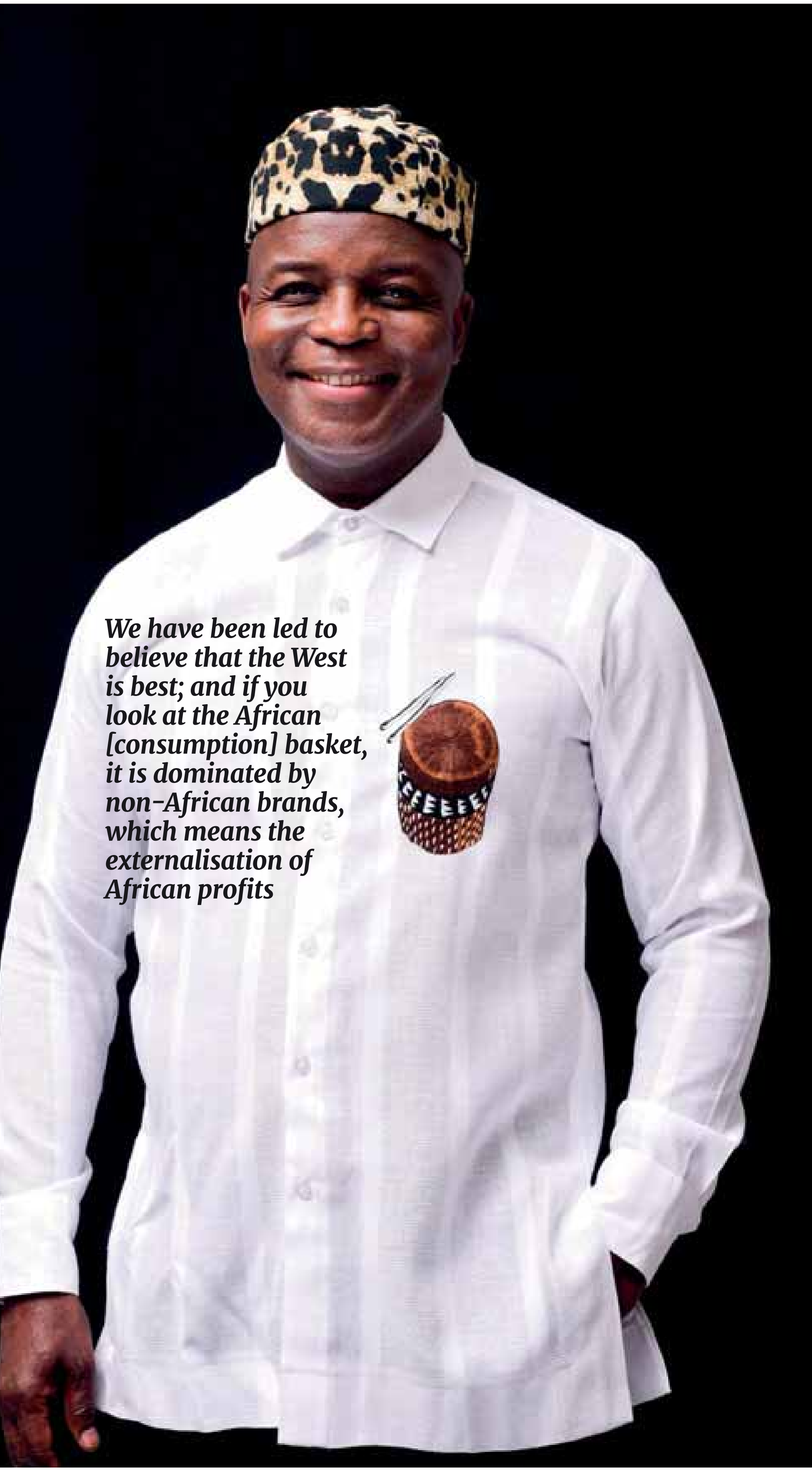
According to Ikalafeng, Brand Africa's interactions with consumers show that while they use some African brands, they are more likely to choose foreign brands when purchasing products that speak to their identity. "If you look at the things that we need to survive, such as food, we buy local, generally. So in the more rural parts of the continent, say in Kenya or Rwanda, when you ask them what their best brand is, they will say *ugali* [a porridge staple popular in East Africa]. But for what we need to show off, we buy non-local," he asserts. In effect, if it comes with a label, it is more likely to be western.

Crisis of identity

In addition, Ikalafeng argues, the prevalence of western culture has led to a crisis of identity, in which African cultural products must be validated by a western stamp of approval. African acts, for example, view performing at Madison Square Garden as the ultimate confirmation of their megastar status. It is also why, he says, affluent Africans would rather shop in Paris and buy property in London than in African cities.

"That's how we know that we have arrived, because we are still so dependent on the western validation." Some African cultural exports have begun to more loudly proclaim their African origins; Ikalafeng says the continent is beginning to exude more confidence in its culture and that the world is taking notice. "It is only when we saw Africa rising that we have them paying more attention to their African heritage because they see the opportunity to bring Africa into the mainstream."

Despite what seems to be a challenging state of affairs more generally, Ikalafeng says there are some bright spots that offer hope for the continent. The African Continental Free Trade Area, which seeks to



We have been led to believe that the West is best; and if you look at the African [consumption] basket, it is dominated by non-African brands, which means the externalisation of African profits

open up trade between the continent's 54 countries, consolidating it into a single $3.5 trillion economy with 1.4 billion consumers, is an opportunity for local brands. There are also, he says, pockets of excellence in fintech, telecommunications, financial services, fashion and the creative industries. In South Africa, he points out, this and last year's rankings were led by fashion brands – Maxhosa and Bathu – which he says are an indication of the continent's growing power in that industry.

The lesson from other parts of the developing world that have had more success promoting home-grown brands, Ikalafeng suggests, is for African governments to pursue a more concerted agenda towards that purpose. "The first thing we have learned is there must be a vision of leadership. But the second thing you must do is identify what your competitive advantage is.

"China, for example, leveraged its size and population to build a manufacturing base, while giving selected local brands the space to grow by keeping competing western brands out. India, on the other hand, focused on technology. What we need is a national or regional agenda," he proposes, emphasising that it must be anchored on a competitive advantage, while investing in the right institutions.

Invest in, build and protect local brands

Ikalafeng suggests that Africa must invest in, build and protect local brands and champions, pointing to how the United States and South Korea each appear to back Apple and Samsung when disputes occur between the two electronics giants. "Whenever Samsung fights in the US against Apple, Apple wins. Whenever Apple fights Samsung in South Korea, Samsung wins. It is not about being anti-international brands; it's about protecting African brands. It's not being anti-western; it's about being pro-African." For instance, Innoson and Kantanka, indigenous car brands in Nigeria and Ghana respectively, would benefit from the custom of their governments, he argues.

Another issue that is critical for African brands is that of intellectual property. Ikalafeng points to a long history of disputes, from Ethiopia's tussle with Starbucks over coffee branding rights, to the Maasai community's battle with entities in India over cultural appropriation, and South Africa's drawn-out negotiations with the European Union over Rooibos tea. These cases, he says, offer examples of why the continent must properly protect its intellectual property (IP).

"We need to invest in research and development and we need to protect IP," he stresses. But innovation isn't the only area of concern. Ikalafeng also takes the view that Africa needs to reassess how it engages with external trading partners. "It might be a terrible thing to say, but I think what Africa needs is tighter control of its borders. Current trade policy, he says, has left the continent open to dumping by foreign producers and weakened local industry, and as a result, local brands.

"You speak to young entrepreneurs and they tell you they can't compete." Stricter economic border controls, he believes, could provide breathing space for African enterprises to grow and stabilise, and perhaps come to take up more spaces in the rankings in years to come. Africa can't be "kicking away the ladder" from its own enterprises just as they're emerging, he concludes. ■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