

# INTERNATIONALIZATION OF FIRMS: THE IMPACT OF “MADE IN ALBANIA” ON STRATEGIC DECISIONS

Denada Liça \*, Silvana Gashi \*\*

\* Business Faculty, Aleksandër Moisiu University, Durrës, Albania

\*\* Corresponding author, Business Faculty, Aleksandër Moisiu University, Durrës, Albania

Contact details: Business Faculty, Aleksandër Moisiu University, Lagjja 1, Rruga e Currilave, 2001, Durrës, Albania



## Abstract

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This study focuses on the specific case of Albanian firms operating in the fashion industry and examines the significance of the “Made in Albania” label in their internationalization endeavors. It seeks to analyze the challenges and opportunities these firms encounter throughout the internationalization process, shedding light on the dynamics of the global fashion market. Multiple case studies are used in this investigation, focusing on Albanian firms that brand their products with the “Made in Albania” label. By employing a qualitative research approach, this study aims to provide an understanding of the factors influencing the internationalization efforts of these firms. Through in-depth interviews, document analysis, and on-site observations, the research explores the strategic decisions made by these companies in leveraging their national identity for global success. The findings of this research contribute to both academic discourse and practical insights for businesses seeking to investigate the complexities of internationalization. By analyzing the multifaceted nature of the “Made in Albania” label’s impact, this study offers valuable recommendations for policymakers, industry stakeholders, and business leaders aiming to enhance the global competitiveness of Albanian firms in the fashion sector. The integration of these elements not only adds value but also reinforces the cultural authenticity of Albanian fashion.

**Keywords:** Internationalization, “Made in Albania” Label, Fashion Industry, Challenges, Opportunities, Branding

**Authors’ individual contribution:** Conceptualization — D.L. and S.G.; Methodology — D.L. and S.G.; Software — D.L. and S.G.; Validation — D.L. and S.G.; Investigation — D.L. and S.G.; Resources — D.L. and S.G.; Writing — Original Draft — D.L. and S.G.; Writing — Review & Editing — D.L. and S.G.; Visualization — D.L.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the dynamic landscape of the global fashion industry, where trends overcome borders, and consumer choices are shaped by a joint of cultural influences, the significance of national identity in branding cannot be overstated. Against this setting, Albanian firms operating in the fashion sector find themselves in a situation where the label “Made in Albania” carries both cultural and strategic implications (Icka et al., 2021). The fusion of

traditional craftsmanship, contemporary design, and the unique cultural narrative of Albania surrounding this label positions it as a potential factor for the internationalization aspirations of Albanian fashion enterprises (Gashi & Liça, 2023; Icka et al., 2021; Liça & Gashi, 2023).

Albania, a country rich in history and cultural heritage, has increasingly tried to build a niche for itself in the global market. The “Made in Albania” label is not only a marker of geographic origin; it symbolizes a commitment to quality, and

authenticity rooted in the nation's traditions (CEIC, n.d.; Icka et al., 2021; The World Bank, 2021). As fashion markets become more saturated and consumers express a growing preference for ethically sourced and cultural products, understanding how the "Made in Albania" label influences the internationalization strategies of Albanian fashion firms becomes important (CEIC, n.d.; Icka et al., 2021; The World Bank, 2021).

The multifaceted objectives of this research extend beyond a mere exploration of the internationalization processes of Albanian fashion firms. The study aims to investigate the utilization of the "Made in Albania" label as a strategic tool in the global fashion area.

Firstly, the research aims to analyze the challenges faced by Albanian fashion firms during the internationalization process. These challenges may determine regulatory barriers, cultural adjustments, and market-specific intricacies, all of which contribute to the landscape of global business.

Secondly, the study aims to identify and investigate the opportunities that arise when Albanian fashion firms embrace the "Made in Albania" label. This includes an examination of consumer perceptions, market positioning, and the potential for leveraging national identity as a competitive advantage.

Thirdly, by employing a qualitative research design focused on multiple case studies, this research seeks to offer an in-depth analysis of the strategic decisions made by individual firms. Through interviews, document analysis, and on-site observations, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the internationalization process of these firms.

Furthermore, this study explores the primary countries where Albanian fashion firms establish collaborations. Identifying these key markets and understanding the factors contributing to successful partnerships will contribute valuable insights to both academia and industry practitioners.

Lastly, this study focuses on the barriers and opportunities encountered by Albanian fashion firms in global markets, offering important insights into the dynamics of international trade and competition.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature. Section 3 analyzes the methodology that has been used to conduct empirical research on challenges and opportunities in a globalized market and cultural identity and branding. Section 4 analyzes the results of key patterns, challenges, and opportunities of investigated firms. Section 5 analyzes the discussion and Section 6 is the conclusion.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Challenges and opportunities in a globalized market

The globalization of the fashion industry generates a variety of challenges for companies seeking to expand their presence beyond national borders (Giraldez & Berenguer, 2016; Hundal & Kauppinen, 2021). One prominent challenge lies in the increasing

competition resulting from increased market saturation (Situm & Märk, 2022). With numerous firms competing for consumer attention, fashion firms must develop strategies that not only differentiate them but also help them within the global market (Liça & Gashi, 2023; Situm & Märk, 2022).

Additionally, cultural factors present a significant challenge in a globalized market (Angulo-Ruiz et al., 2022; N'Dri & Su, 2023; Wadson, 2020). What may be well-received in one cultural context might be misunderstood or even rejected in another. Considering the link between a brand's cultural identity, represented by labels such as "Made in Albania", and adapting to diverse cultural preferences is a complex task that demands cultural intelligence and strategic marketing.

Supply chain complexities pose another challenge. As fashion firms globalize their operations, they often rely on complex supply chains including multiple countries. This not only exposes them to geopolitical risks but also makes them susceptible to disruptions, as witnessed during global events like the COVID-19 pandemic (Impola, 2023; Meester & Ooijens, 2020; Osland et al., 2020; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2020).

Intellectual property concerns and the threat of counterfeiting are also intensified in a globalized market (Shah et al., 2013). Protecting the unique designs associated with the "Made in Albania" label becomes important, requiring effective legal strategies and international cooperation.

Despite these challenges, the globalized nature of the fashion industry offers multiple opportunities for firms, especially those strategically using national labels like "Made in Albania". One of the main opportunities lies in the ability to access a large and diverse consumer base (Matarazzo et al., 2021). Through e-commerce platforms and digital marketing, even relatively small and niche fashion firms can connect with consumers worldwide. The "Made in Albania" label, in this context, becomes a gateway to introducing Albanian craftsmanship and design to a global audience.

Collaborations and partnerships represent another way for growth. In a globalized market, fashion firms can establish alliances with international designers, retailers, and influencers, amplifying their reach and influence (Hefer & Nell, 2015; Situm & Märk, 2022). Such collaborations not only enhance brand visibility but also contribute to the creation of ideas and styles.

The emphasis on sustainability in the global fashion area provides an important moment for firms leveraging the "Made in Albania" label. Albania's rich cultural heritage and commitment to ethical craftsmanship can be positioned as valuable assets in the growing market for sustainable and ethical fashion (Council of Ministers of the Republic of Albania, 2022).

Strategic adaptation to technological advancements opens doors for innovation. Fashion tech, including virtual try-on experiences, augmented reality, and blockchain for supply chain transparency, presents opportunities for firms to enhance the consumer experience and build trust in the global marketplace (Bettiol et al., 2021; Maisiri et al., 2019; Majumdar et al., 2021).

Moreover, the increase in conscious consumerism offers a chance for fashion firms to align with values that deal with modern consumers. By communicating the story behind the “Made in Albania” label, companies can meet the demand for products with authentic narratives and ethical production practices (CEIC, n.d.; Council of Ministers of the Republic of Albania, 2022).

The “Made in Albania” label, when strategically employed, can play an important role in understanding the challenges and opportunities presented by a globalized fashion market. Leveraging the unique cultural identity embedded in the label becomes a tool for differentiation in a crowded marketplace (CEIC, n.d.; Icka et al., 2021; The World Bank, 2021).

Additionally, the label can serve as a means of building authenticity and trust, addressing the challenges associated with cultural nuances. By communicating a clear brand narrative and fostering cultural intelligence, Albanian fashion firms can bridge cultural gaps and deal with diverse audiences (Gashi & Liça, 2023; Lica et al., 2021).

In conclusion, while a globalized fashion market presents important challenges, it also opens up a world of opportunities for fashion firms embracing the “Made in Albania” label. Moreover, dealing with these challenges and utilization of opportunities are essential for positioning Albanian fashion on the global stage.

## 2.2. Cultural identity and branding

The unification of national identity with fashion branding overcomes the simple commercialization of products; it becomes a strategic effort to position a country’s fashion industry on the global stage (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2011; Godey et al., 2012; Hong et al., 2023; Miyamoto et al., 2023). National branding in the context of fashion is a multifaceted process that involves a visual identity rooted in cultural heritage, craftsmanship, and design philosophy (Costa et al., 2016; Hsu & Iriyama, 2016; Li et al., 2023; Rashid & Barnes, 2017).

In the global fashion landscape, national branding serves as a tool that guides the unique identity of a country’s fashion industry. It involves the development of a distinctive design that determines the identity of the nation. This design identity goes beyond individual brands; it becomes a collective representation of the country’s creativity and cultural heritage (Godey et al., 2012; Hong et al., 2023; Miyamoto et al., 2023).

Fashion capitals such as Paris, Milan, and Tokyo have successfully established and maintained distinct identities that attract global attention. For Albania, the “Made in Albania” label represents an opportunity to craft a national fashion identity that draws from the country’s rich history and traditional craftsmanship (CEIC, n.d.; Icka et al., 2021; The World Bank, 2021).

National branding in the fashion context often involves the strategic use of cultural symbols and motifs. These elements serve as visual cues that communicate a brand’s origin and contribute to the broader narrative of a country’s fashion identity. Whether it is incorporating traditional patterns, colors, or artisanal techniques, these cultural symbols

become integral components of the storytelling process (Hong et al., 2023).

For Albanian fashion firms, the “Made in Albania” label can be a canvas for showcasing the country’s cultural symbols, be it the complex patterns inspired by Albanian folklore or the colors reflective of its landscapes. The integration of these elements not only adds value but also reinforces the cultural authenticity of Albanian fashion (CEIC, n.d.; Icka et al., 2021; The World Bank, 2021).

Participation in international fashion weeks and showcases plays an important role in national branding within the fashion context. These platforms provide a global audience into a country’s fashion field, acting as a stage for both established and emerging designers to show their creations (CEIC, n.d.; Council of Ministers of the Republic of Albania, 2022).

National branding in fashion is not an insular process; it involves active participation in cross-cultural dialogues and collaborations. Collaborations between local designers and international counterparts can result in a fusion of diverse perspectives, fostering a global appeal while preserving the authenticity of the national identity.

The “Made in Albania” label becomes a facilitator for such collaborations, signaling a commitment to cross-cultural exchange and innovation. By engaging in partnerships that overcome geographic boundaries, Albanian fashion firms can position themselves as contributors to a global fashion narrative.

Beyond the aesthetic and cultural dimensions, national branding in the fashion context also has tangible economic impacts. A strong and well-crafted national brand attracts international attention, potentially leading to increased exports, tourism, and investments in the local fashion industry (CEIC, n.d.; Icka et al., 2021; Council of Ministers of the Republic of Albania, 2022; The World Bank, 2021).

The “Made in Albania” label, when strategically employed, becomes a catalyst for economic growth and industry development. It contributes to the creation of a good image that attracts not only consumers but also potential collaborators, investors, and partners from the global fashion ecosystem. National branding in the fashion context involves the construction of a unique identity that encompasses cultural heritage, design aesthetics, and the economic viability of a country’s fashion industry (CEIC, n.d.; Icka et al., 2021; Lica et al., 2021).

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Method

A multiple case study is used as a methodology, involving six Albanian fashion firms to ensure diversity, relevance, and representativeness within the context of the study’s objectives.

Data collection for the case studies refers to the period March–April, 2023. This period was chosen to ensure the inclusion of the most recent and relevant information about the internationalization strategies of the selected Albanian fashion firms. The timeframe allowed for the examination of their

activities, collaborations, and market presence in both the domestic and international contexts.

Recognizing the dynamic nature of the fashion industry, an iterative approach to data updates was employed. Regular reviews of industry reports, publications, and firm activities were conducted throughout the data collection period to capture any significant developments or changes in the strategies of the selected firms.

In cases where historical data contributed to a comprehensive understanding of a firm's internationalization journey, relevant information from preceding years was also included. This allowed for a longitudinal analysis, tracing the evolution of the firms' strategies over time.

The chosen data collection period aims to offer a snapshot of the contemporary internationalization landscape for the selected Albanian fashion firms, balancing a focus on recent activities with the historical context where applicable.

The selection process considers firms from different regions within Albania. This criterion aims to encompass various cultural influences and regional design aesthetics. A diverse representation of the fashion sector is essential. The case studies include firms specializing in various aspects of the fashion industry, such as traditional textiles, contemporary design, sustainable fashion, and cultural narratives.

The selection process prioritized firms with a notable presence in both the domestic and international markets. This criterion aimed to investigate the internationalization strategies of firms that are engaged with a global audience. A commitment to ethical and sustainable practices was a significant factor in the selection. Firms that demonstrated a clear dedication to responsible production, fair labor, and sustainable innovation were given preference.

The inclusion of firms engaged in cross-cultural collaborations and partnerships was considered. This criterion aimed to highlight the role of collaborative efforts in internationalization strategies, emphasizing the importance of cultural exchange in the global fashion industry.

Secondary data from industry reports, publications, and reputable fashion databases were utilized to identify potential firms that met the inclusion criteria. These sources provide insights into market presence, industry recognition, and ethical practices. A total number of 36 firms were identified.

Firms with a strong online presence, positive media coverage, and international recognition were given consideration. This criterion aimed to ensure that the selected firms had demonstrable visibility and impact on a global scale.

Participation in international fashion events and weeks served as an indicator of a firm's global engagement. Firms that had showcased their collections at renowned fashion events were considered for the case studies. The number of investigated firms was then reduced to 13. Moreover, some in-depth interviews with the managers of each firm were done during the period May–July, using also document analysis, and on-site observations. The information gathered from these interviews helps to explore the strategic decisions made by

these companies in leveraging their national identity for global success.

Nevertheless, the availability of data and the willingness of firms to participate in the case studies were factors that influenced the final selection reducing the sample of analysis to six firms.

While the case study approach is considered appropriate for this research, alternative methods could also provide valuable insights for conducting the research. For instance, surveys could be used to collect quantitative data from a larger sample of Albanian fashion firms. This method would allow for the generalization of findings to a broader population. Additionally, a comparative analysis could be conducted to compare the internationalization strategies of Albanian fashion firms with those of firms from other countries or regions. This method would involve gathering data on firms' strategies, market performance, and branding efforts and comparing them across different contexts. Finally, experimental research could be employed to test the effectiveness of different branding strategies, including the use of the "Made in Albania" label, on consumer perceptions and behaviors. This method would involve designing controlled experiments to manipulate variables and measure their impact on participant responses. Experimental research allows for causal inference but may not fully capture real-world complexities.

### 3.2. Case studies analysis

The case studies presented in this study aim to provide an in depth-analysis of six Albanian fashion firms that have strategically embraced the "Made in Albania" label in their internationalization efforts. Each case represents a unique approach to leveraging cultural identity, ethical considerations, and strategic branding within the global fashion landscape (Table 1).

#### *Firm A: Ethical craftsmanship*

Firm A distinguishes itself through a strong emphasis on ethical craftsmanship within the Albanian fashion industry. The brand's identity is deeply rooted in preserving traditional Albanian textiles while adopting a contemporary, ethical approach to fashion. The "Made in Albania" label for Firm A serves as a tool, representing not only the geographical origin of its products but also its commitment to transparent supply chains, fair labor practices, and environmentally conscious production. The label becomes synonymous with ethical craftsmanship, positioning the brand as a responsible player in the global fashion market. Firm A strategically positions itself as a leader in the intersection of tradition and sustainability. Collaborations with international ethical fashion movements further amplify the brand's global visibility, showcasing a commitment to ethical considerations as a driving force for international success. For instance, it has established collaboration with European countries known for ethical fashion, such as Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands, and partnerships with sustainable fashion initiatives in the United States.

Table 1. Descriptive analysis

Firm	Year of foundation	Number of employees	Annual turnover (USD)	Brand identity	Strategic use of the "Made in Albania" label	Market positioning	Collaboration partners
A	2010	150	\$5 million	Ethical craftsmanship	Transparent supply chains, fair labor, and eco-friendly production.	Leader in ethical craftsmanship; positioned as responsible globally.	Ethical fashion (Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands). Sustainable fashion initiatives (the United States)
B	2005	200	\$8 million	Modern Albanian heritage	Visual representation of preserving and evolving Albanian heritage. Fusion of tradition and modernity; positioned as a cultural bridge.	Leader in blending tradition with contemporary aesthetics.	Fashion houses (Italy). Retailers (the United Kingdom)
C	2012	120	\$6.5 million	Collaborative cultural exchange	Symbol of inclusivity and cultural exchange. Integrated into the narrative of transcending borders.	Global player celebrating cultural diversity; engages with influencers.	Cultural exchange (Japan, South Korea, and China). Fashion influencers and brands (Middle East)
D	2008	180	\$7.2 million	Sustainable innovation	Symbol of commitment to sustainability; associated with eco-friendly practices.	Leader in a sustainable fashion; attracts environmentally conscious consumers.	Strong commitment to sustainability, (Denmark and Norway). Eco-conscious retailers (Australia and Canada)
E	2015	100	\$4.5 million	Cultural narrative amplification	Visual cues for storytelling and cultural richness. A vehicle for connecting with consumers through narratives.	Leader in connecting on a deeper level through authentic stories.	Amplify cultural narratives (Greece and Spain). Diverse consumer base (the United States)
F	2011	130	\$6.8 million	Digital innovation	Symbol of innovation and accessibility in digital fields. A key element in digital strategy for global engagement.	Leader in the digital fashion landscape; appeals to a digital audience.	Digital innovation in fashion (South Korea and Japan). Global online reach (the United States and the United Kingdom)

#### *Firm B: Modern Albanian heritage*

Firm B's brand identity concentrates on the fusion of traditional Albanian design elements with modern aesthetics. The brand embraces cultural heritage as a source of inspiration, creating a unique narrative that links with both Albanian and global consumers.

The "Made in Albania" label for Firm B becomes a visual representation of its commitment to preserving and evolving Albanian heritage. It serves as a marker of the brand's unique synthesis of tradition and modernity, positioning Firm B as a trendsetter in the global fashion landscape. Firm B positions itself as a cultural ambassador, appealing to a niche market that values both authenticity and contemporary style. The brand actively participates in international showcases, recognized for its innovative approach to design that overcomes cultural boundaries. For instance, it has established collaboration with fashion houses in Italy, leveraging the proximity and influence of Italian fashion and, strategic partnerships with retailers in the United Kingdom to tap into the European market.

#### *Firm C: Collaborative cultural exchange*

Firm C stands out with its commitment to collaborative cultural exchange within the fashion

industry. The brand's identity revolves around inclusivity, diversity, and the celebration of cultural richness through cross-cultural collaborations. The "Made in Albania" label becomes a symbol of Firm C's brand nature, signifying a commitment to overcoming borders and fostering cultural exchange. The label is strategically integrated into the brand's narrative of inclusivity, positioning Firm C as a global player with a focus on cultural diversity. Firm C positions itself as a brand that goes beyond fashion, actively engaging with influencers and designers from diverse backgrounds. Participating in major international fashion weeks and collaborations with influencers contribute to Firm C's global presence, establishing it as a brand that celebrates cultural inclusivity. For instance, it has established collaboration with diverse Asian countries to enhance cultural exchange, including Japan, South Korea, and China, and, partnerships with fashion influencers and brands in the Middle East for a fusion of styles.

#### *Firm D: Sustainable innovation*

Firm D establishes its brand identity as a pioneer in sustainable fashion within the Albanian context. The brand's culture focuses on eco-friendly practices, and it positions itself as a leader in

the intersection of fashion and environmental consciousness. The “Made in Albania” label for Firm D is not just a mark of origin but a symbol of the brand’s commitment to sustainability. It becomes associated with innovative practices, including the use of recycled materials, eco-friendly packaging, and partnerships with eco-conscious retailers. Firm D positions itself as a go-to choice for environmentally conscious consumers globally. The “Made in Albania” label serves as a key differentiator, attracting a market segment that prioritizes sustainable fashion. Collaborations with sustainability-focused movements contribute to Firm D’s recognition as a responsible player in the global fashion landscape. For instance, it has established collaboration with Nordic countries known for their strong commitment to sustainability, such as Denmark and Norway, and, partnerships with eco-conscious retailers in Australia and Canada.

*Firm E: Cultural narrative amplification*

Firm E distinguishes itself by placing a strong emphasis on cultural narrative amplification. The brand’s identity is rooted in storytelling, using fashion as a medium to conduct authentic narratives of Albanian culture. The “Made in Albania” label for Firm E becomes a visual cue for a brand that prioritizes storytelling and cultural richness. It serves as a marker of authenticity, positioning Firm E as a cultural ambassador that connects with consumers on a deeper level through its narratives. Firm E positions itself as a brand that goes beyond fashion trends, actively engaging in cultural storytelling. The “Made in Albania” label, associated with authentic narratives, becomes a vehicle for connecting with consumers globally who seek a deeper cultural connection through their fashion choices. For instance, it has established collaboration with countries in the Mediterranean region, such as Greece and Spain, to amplify cultural narratives and strategic partnerships with retailers in the United States to reach a diverse consumer base.

*Firm F: Digital innovation*

Firm F sets itself apart by adopting a digital-first approach within the Albanian fashion scene.

The brand’s identity is characterized by a strong presence on digital platforms, leveraging technology for global brand visibility. The “Made in Albania” label for Firm F is strategically integrated into online marketing materials, becoming a symbol of innovation and accessibility. The brand positions itself as a pioneer in the digital age, using the label to conduct a sense of pride and curiosity to a global online audience. Firm F positions itself as a brand that considers the digital consumer. The “Made in Albania” label becomes a key element in the brand’s digital strategy, facilitating direct engagement with a global audience. Collaborations with digital influencers and virtual fashion shows contribute to Firm F’s identity as a digitally innovative brand within the global fashion area. For instance, it has established collaboration with tech-savvy countries such as South Korea and Japan for digital innovation in fashion and, strategic alliances with e-commerce platforms in the United States and the United Kingdom for global online reach.

#### 4. RESULTS

The findings of this research provide an understanding of how Albanian fashion firms strategically leverage the “Made in Albania” label in their internationalization efforts. Through the analysis of six different case studies, key patterns, challenges, and opportunities have emerged, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of the global fashion area. The main results of this study are presented in Tables 2 and 3. In particular, Table 2 provides a concise summary of the key strategic focuses and outcomes for each of the six Albanian fashion firms analyzed in the case studies. In addition, Table 3 provides a comprehensive comparative analysis of the investigated firms across key dimensions related to market presence, product range, supply chain management, customer engagement, and financial performance.

**Table 2.** Key strategic focuses and outcomes

<i>Firm strategies</i>	<i>Key outcomes and strategies</i>
Firm A	Transparent supply chains
	Fair labor practices
	Environmentally conscious production
	Collaborations with ethical fashion movements amplify global visibility
Firm B	Fusion of traditional design with contemporary aesthetics
	Investment in innovative design
	Participation in international exhibitions as a trendsetter
Firm C	Active engagement in cross-cultural collaborations
	Participation in international fashion weeks and collaborations with influencers foster inclusivity and diversity
Firm D	Pioneering sustainable fashion
	Innovative use of recycled materials
	Eco-friendly packaging
	Partnerships with eco-conscious retailers
Firm E	Focus on storytelling through digital platforms
	Collaborations with cultural institutions enhance global appeal
Firm F	Digital-first brand positioning
	Prominent use of the “Made in Albania” label in online marketing
	Collaborations with digital influencers and virtual fashion shows

Source: Authors’ elaboration.

The strategic focus on ethical craftsmanship generates positive outcomes for Firm A. Consumer awareness and demand for ethically produced fashion have grown globally, aligning with Firm A’s

values. The “Made in Albania” label, when associated with ethical practices, enhances the brand’s credibility and appeal. Positive media coverage and recognition from ethical fashion platforms

contribute to the brand's reputation as a responsible and conscientious player in the global fashion arena. Firm A's emphasis on ethical craftsmanship significantly influences its internationalization efforts. The brand focuses on the growing market of consumers who prioritize ethical considerations in their fashion choices. The "Made in Albania" label, acting as a seal of ethical approval, becomes a key differentiator in international markets. Collaborations with ethical fashion movements facilitate cross-cultural dialogues, positioning Firm A as a responsible contributor to the global fashion landscape. Firm A demonstrates a strong emphasis

on artisanal craftsmanship and sustainability, with a presence in high-end boutiques and a focus on transparent sourcing.

The strategic focus on modern Albanian heritage shows positive results for Firm B. The brand captures the attention of consumers who seek fashion that is linked with cultural authenticity while embracing contemporary styles. Additionally, the "Made in Albania" label becomes a distinctive marker that sets Firm B apart in the global fashion marketplace. Positive reviews from fashion critics and influencers contribute to the brand's recognition as a cultural ambassador.

**Table 3.** Comparative overview of investigated firms in key operational dimensions

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Market presence</i>	<i>Product range and differentiation</i>	<i>Supply chain management</i>	<i>Customer engagement</i>	<i>Financial performance</i>
Firm A	Presence in high-end boutiques in Europe	Exclusive range of handcrafted garments	Transparent sourcing and fair labor practices	Engaging storytelling through brand narrative	Stable revenue growth and profitability
	Limited presence in select Asian markets	Focus on sustainable and eco-friendly materials	Direct engagement with local artisans	Sustainability-focused events and workshops	Investment in R&D for product innovation
Firm B	Global online presence	Fusion of traditional and modern styles	Strong partnerships with manufacturers	Interactive online community engagement	Strong financial performance
	Partnerships with luxury department stores	Distinctive designs with cultural motifs	Ethical treatment of workers in production	Customer feedback mechanisms and loyalty programs	Expansion into new markets
Firm C	Collaboration with Asian retailers	Diverse product offerings reflecting cultural exchange	Ethical sourcing practices for raw materials	Influencer collaborations for brand exposure	Growth trajectory in emerging markets
	Online retail platforms in Europe	Collaborative collections with international designers	Eco-friendly packaging and shipping practices	Social media campaigns to engage with consumers	Revenue diversification through licensing agreements
Firm D	Distribution partnerships in North America	Sustainable apparel and accessories	Vertical integration for control over the supply chain	Customer feedback mechanisms and loyalty programs	Healthy profit margins and reinvestment in sustainability
	Retail presence in sustainable fashion expos	Eco-friendly footwear and accessories	Investment in sustainable production processes	Social media engagement and influencer partnerships	Financial investment in sustainable initiatives
Firm E	Retail stores in the Mediterranean region	Clothing and accessories inspired by local culture	Ethical sourcing of materials and fair labor practices	Personalized customer interactions	Sustainable growth with steady revenue streams
	Online presence on social media platforms	Ethnic-inspired jewelry and textiles	Ethical treatment of workers in production	Customer feedback mechanisms and loyalty programs	Investment in digital marketing strategies
Firm F	E-commerce platforms worldwide	Digital fashion accessories and wearables	Collaborations with sustainable suppliers	Engaging content on digital platforms	Profitable digital business model
	Innovative digital marketing campaigns	Cutting-edge digital fashion technology	Sustainable packaging and shipping practices	Interactive digital experiences for customers	Revenue growth through digital innovation

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Firm B's emphasis on modern Albanian heritage significantly influences its internationalization efforts.

The brand focuses on a niche market that values cultural identity in fashion without compromising on style. The "Made in Albania" label, communicating the brand's unique design philosophy, attracts global consumers interested in diverse and culturally rich fashion. Collaborations with renowned designers and participation in international fashion events enhance Firm B's global footprint. Firm B showcases a fusion of traditional and modern styles, leveraging global online platforms and partnerships with luxury retailers.

The strategic focus on collaborative cultural exchange generates positive outcomes for Firm C. The brand positions itself as a global player that

values diversity and embraces different cultural perspectives. The "Made in Albania" label, associated with a brand ethos of inclusivity, becomes a powerful symbol in global markets. Collaborations with influencers and designers contribute to positive media coverage, further establishing Firm C as a brand that bridges cultural gaps. Firm C's emphasis on collaborative cultural exchange significantly influences its internationalization efforts. The brand is linked with consumers who value fashion as a means of connecting with diverse cultures. The "Made in Albania" label, when linked with collaborative initiatives, becomes a passport to global markets. The brand's presence in major fashion weeks and partnerships with influencers facilitate global visibility and establish Firm C as a brand that celebrates cultural diversity. Firm C

emphasizes diversity in product offerings and collaborates with international designers, targeting emerging markets through online platforms.

The strategic focus on sustainable innovation generates positive outcomes for Firm D. The brand focuses on the growing market of environmentally conscious consumers, both domestically and internationally. The “Made in Albania” label, associated with sustainable practices, becomes a key differentiator in global markets. Positive media coverage from sustainability-focused platforms and recognition from eco-conscious consumers contribute to the brand’s reputation as a responsible player in the global fashion industry. Firm D’s emphasis on sustainable innovation significantly influences its internationalization efforts. The brand is linked to consumers who prioritize sustainability in their fashion choices, contributing to the global movement towards ethical and eco-friendly fashion. The “Made in Albania” label, linked with sustainable practices, becomes a key point for environmentally conscious consumers seeking authentic and sustainable fashion options. Collaborations with eco-conscious retailers and participation in sustainability-focused events enhance Firm D’s global presence. Firm D prioritizes sustainability, with eco-friendly materials and vertical integration in its supply chain.

The strategic focus on cultural narrative amplification generates positive outcomes for Firm E. The brand is linked with consumers who seek fashion not only as a form of self-expression but also as a means of connecting with diverse cultural perspectives. The “Made in Albania” label, associated with authenticity and storytelling, has become a distinctive symbol in the global fashion industry. Positive reviews from cultural critics and influencers contribute to the brand’s recognition as a cultural storyteller. Firm E’s emphasis on cultural narrative amplification significantly influences its internationalization efforts. The brand refers to a market of culturally curious consumers who value fashion as a medium for cultural exploration. The “Made in Albania” label, linked with cultural authenticity, becomes a key element in Firm E’s global branding. Collaborations with cultural influencers and participation in events that celebrate diversity enhance Firm E’s global footprint. Firm E draws inspiration from local culture, engaging customers through personalized interactions and social media campaigns.

The emphasis on digital innovation seems to be a strategic success for Firm F. The “Made in Albania” label, strategically integrated into online campaigns and collaborations, becomes a symbol of digital accessibility and forward-thinking. The firm’s ability to adapt to the digital age allows it to overcome geographic boundaries, reaching consumers worldwide. The digital-first approach not only aligns with contemporary consumer preferences but also positions Firm F as a pioneer in the Albanian fashion industry. Firm F’s digital innovation contributes significantly to its internationalization efforts. The global audience, accessed through social media, e-commerce platforms, and virtual events, embraces the brand’s unique blend of Albanian identity and digital sophistication. The “Made in Albania” label, shown digitally, becomes a virtual bridge that connects the brand with consumers beyond physical

borders. This approach not only facilitates global visibility but also exemplifies a paradigm shift in the way Albanian fashion firms can navigate international markets. Firm F pioneers digital innovation, with a focus on e-commerce platforms and interactive digital experiences.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this research shed light on the role of the “Made in Albania” label in the internationalization of Albanian firms operating in the fashion industry. Drawing on insights from previous studies and the analysis of six selected cases/companies, several key themes emerge. The analysis reveals that each firm has strategically leveraged the “Made in Albania” label to establish a unique brand identity and position itself in the global fashion market. Previous research by Cuervo-Cazurra and Un (2023) supports this, emphasizing the importance of country-of-origin images in shaping consumer perceptions. The case of Firm A, for example, highlights how a focus on ethical craftsmanship has positioned the brand as a leader in sustainability, resonating with environmentally conscious consumers globally. The strategic use of the “Made in Albania” label varies across firms, reflecting their individual market positioning and branding strategies. Suh et al. (2016) emphasize the need for cultural adaptation in international marketing efforts, which is evident in the case of Firm B, where the brand embraces modern Albanian heritage to bridge tradition with contemporary aesthetics. This aligns with the findings of Hong et al. (2023) who underscore the importance of cultural congruence in branding strategies. This study highlights the importance of market presence and customer engagement strategies in driving internationalization efforts. Madzharov et al. (2015) emphasize the role of sensory cues in evoking cultural associations and influencing brand perceptions, which is exemplified in the case of Firm E, where cultural narrative amplification serves as a key driver of customer engagement. Similarly, Roth and Romeo (1992) stress the significance of aligning product categories with country image perceptions, which can influence consumer evaluations and purchase decisions. Financial performance and sustainability initiatives emerge as critical factors influencing firms’ internationalization strategies. The findings indicate that firms with a strong commitment to sustainability, such as Firm D, are able to attract environmentally conscious consumers and maintain competitive advantages in the global market. This aligns with previous research by Ha-Brookshire and Yoon (2012), who highlight the impact of national identity on consumer preferences and well-being. While this study showcases the successes of Albanian fashion firms in international markets, it also reveals challenges and opportunities for further growth. Supply chain management, market expansion, and competition from established brands are identified as key challenges that firms must navigate. However, the findings suggest that collaborations, innovation, and strategic partnerships present opportunities for overcoming these challenges and enhancing global competitiveness.



The investigation into the role of the “Made in Albania” label in the internationalization strategies of six diverse Albanian fashion firms shows a nuanced and multifaceted landscape. Each case study contributes unique insights, showcasing the versatility of the label in communicating diverse narratives to a global audience. The synthesis of findings leads to several overarching conclusions that contribute to the broader discourse on the global positioning of Albanian fashion.

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the role and significance of the “Made in Albania” label in the global fashion industry. By exploring the strategies and experiences of Albanian firms, the study offers important insights on how this label is leveraged for internationalization. The identification and analysis of challenges and opportunities faced by Albanian fashion firms during the internationalization process contribute valuable insights. This knowledge can inform both practitioners and policymakers on areas that may require targeted support or intervention. The research contributes to the literature on national branding in the context of the fashion industry. By examining how Albanian firms use their national identity as a strategic element in branding, the study adds to the understanding of how cultural elements influence international market positioning. The case studies presented in the research can serve as valuable learning tools for practitioners, students, and researchers. They offer real-world examples of internationalization strategies, brand positioning, and challenges faced by Albanian fashion firms, providing practical insights for those interested in the global expansion of businesses. The findings of the research contribute to discussions on how the internationalization of Albanian firms, particularly in the fashion industry, aligns with broader national development goals. This includes economic growth, job creation, and the promotion of the country’s positive image on the global stage.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the understanding of how cultural identity intersects with business strategy, particularly in the fashion context. It explores how firms navigate the balance between preserving cultural heritage and adapting to global market demands, offering valuable lessons for businesses in similar contexts. The research provides a foundation for further studies on the internationalization of firms from emerging markets, especially in the fashion industry. Scholars can build upon the insights gained from this research to explore related topics, expand the geographical scope, or delve into specific aspects of international business strategies. These contributions collectively enhance the knowledge base in the fields of international business, branding, and national identity in the context of the fashion industry.

This study provides some implications for the Albanian fashion industry, managers, and policymakers. Referring to the Albanian fashion industry, the findings collectively suggest that the “Made in Albania” label holds immense potential as a strategic tool for the internationalization of Albanian fashion firms. Embracing diverse

narratives, ethical considerations, sustainability, and digital innovation can position Albanian fashion on the global stage as a dynamic and culturally rich industry.

Referring managers, first, they should focus on building a strong brand identity and leverage the “Made in Albania” label as a symbol of ethical practices. Authentic storytelling about the brand’s commitment to ethical craftsmanship can be linked with global consumers. Second, managers should actively seek strategic international collaborations to expand market reach. Building partnerships with firms in key countries can facilitate market entry and help overcome barriers associated with cultural differences. Third, sustainability is a key driver in the global fashion industry. Managers should invest in sustainable practices, such as using eco-friendly materials and adopting circular economy principles. This not only aligns with global trends but also enhances brand image. Fourth, embracing digital marketing and e-commerce strategies is essential. Managers should invest in online platforms, engage in social media marketing, and explore virtual fashion events to reach a broader international audience. Fifth, managers need to have a deep understanding of cultural preferences in target markets. This includes adapting designs, marketing strategies, and even product offerings to adapt to the diverse tastes and preferences of consumers in different countries. Sixth, managers can actively engage with government bodies to advocate for policies that support the growth of the fashion industry. This may include participating in industry associations, providing input on trade policies, and collaborating on initiatives that benefit the sector. Finally, to stay competitive, managers should invest in continuous market research. Understanding evolving consumer trends, competitor strategies, and changes in global demand patterns is crucial for making informed business decisions.

Policymakers, first, should encourage and incentivize ethical practices in the fashion industry. Supportive policies can include tax incentives for sustainable production, transparent supply chain reporting requirements, and initiatives to promote fair labor practices. Second, policymakers can initiate international collaboration programs to facilitate partnerships between Albanian fashion firms and those in target markets. Trade agreements and diplomatic efforts can create a conducive environment for cross-border collaborations. Third, policymakers can support innovation and technology in the fashion sector. For instance, they can provide funding, grants, or subsidies for firms adopting digital strategies and sustainable technologies to enhance competitiveness in the global market. Finally, policymakers should invest in educational programs that enhance the skills of the workforce in the fashion industry. This can include training programs on sustainable practices, digital marketing, and international business strategies.

These implications provide a foundation for policymakers and managers to enhance the internationalization efforts of Albanian fashion firms and contribute to the sustainable growth of the industry.

The findings provide valuable insights for the future strategies of Albanian fashion firms.

For instance, fostering more cross-cultural collaborations, further integrating sustainable practices, embracing digital platforms for storytelling, and obtaining ethical certifications to substantiate commitments to fair labor practices. In conclusion, the exploration of these case studies highlights the dynamic strategies employed by Albanian fashion firms in operating in the global marketplace. The “Made in Albania” label, when used strategically, emerges as a key asset for communicating brand identity, values, and narratives in the international fashion area.

This study provides some limitations. First, it specifically investigates the internationalization of Albanian firms in the fashion industry. While this focus allows for in-depth insights into a specific sector, the findings may not be directly generalizable to firms in other industries. Different industries may face unique challenges and

opportunities during the internationalization process. Second, this study employs a case study methodology, drawing conclusions based on a selected number of Albanian fashion firms. While case studies provide rich, context-specific insights, they may lack generalizability. The findings may not be representative of the entire population of Albanian fashion firms, and variations in performance and strategies among firms may exist. Third, this study is conducted within a specific timeframe, and the findings are reflective of the economic, social, and political conditions prevailing during that period. Economic and market dynamics, as well as government policies, can change over time, impacting the internationalization strategies of firms. The study’s findings may not capture long-term trends or consider potential shifts in the global fashion landscape beyond the research period.

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