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CREATING BRAND RESILIENCE: A TERMITE FRAMEWORK APPROACH FOR BRAND RESILIENCE SUSTAINABILITY IN BUSINESSES

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Abstract

In today's volatile business environment, brand resilience is crucial for survival. Drawing inspiration from the resilient termite mounds found in Africa, this paper proposes a Termite Framework for building sustainable brand resilience. The framework consists of five pillars: Resilience, Adaptation, Cooperation, Resourcefulness, and Endurance (RACRE). Most brands in Africa fade and disappear in the market within a short period of time. It is with great concern that Africa needs to build brand resilience to meet globalisation changes for sustainability. The environment is DVUCADD, meaning it is dynamic, volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous, diverse, and disruptive. There is an imminent need for brand resilience. This study proposed a model framework focusing on termite behaviour. Resilient brands are adaptive, change direction, take knocks and setbacks, and come back stronger. These brands can easily extend to new products, take their customers with them, and take on new business models. Main characteristics of resilient brands are setting goals and priorities, having a strategy, working together, uncovering new threats proactively, regrouping, and retesting. In retesting and regrouping, resilient brands protect their customers, reputation, and revenue, continually refining their tactics. In this sense, they communicate failures and successes to team members to reevaluate their methodology until the desired results are achieved. These brand resilience characteristics match the life and behaviour of termites. Termites go through a cycle like that of an organisation. Termites are flexible, which is the major characteristic of resilient brands. Agility is the major element in building resilient brands. Termites have teamwork through which they complement each other's strengths and complement each other's weaknesses without discrimination. Termite mounds reveal residence, cooperation, resourcefulness, and endurance. We explore each pillar's application in the African context, using observation and literature sources. It is with great emphasis that Africa builds resilient nations, organisations, products and services for continental sustainability in line with economic, social, technological, and ecological aspects, like the termite resilience and cooperation.

Keywords: Brand resilience, Cooperation, Endurance, Sustainability, Termites.

I. Introduction

We are living in a DVUCADD environment, meaning it is dynamic, volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous, diverse, and disruptive. In an era marked by rapid globalisation, technological disruption, and socio-economic volatility, brand resilience has emerged as a critical determinant of business sustainability. Particularly in Africa, where markets are often characterized by instability and fierce competition, many brands fail to sustain their presence beyond a few years (Adeleke, 2020). This paper introduces a novel conceptual framework inspired by the natural resilience of termites in Africa—organisms that have thrived for millions of years in harsh environments through resilience, adaptability, cooperation, resourcefulness, and endurance (RACRE). By drawing parallels between termite behaviour and brand management, this study aims to provide actionable insights for businesses seeking to build resilient brands capable of enduring and thriving in the DVUCADD environment. The African business landscape is characterized by rapid changes, economic instability, and intense competition, leading to short brand lifespans (Adeola, 2021). This paper introduces the Termite Framework RACRE (Resilience, Adaptation, Cooperation, Resourcefulness, and Endurance) as a model for brand resilience sustainability, drawing parallels between termite survival strategies and business adaptability. It is the purpose of the study to research the building of brand resilience using the termite framework.

I.i. Background to the study

Globally, countries invest in various branding programs hoping to gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace (Kaneva, 2017). National branding is considered very important for nation-building. According to Amalu (2013), every nation has a brand that is reflected in the images it evokes in the minds of the world's citizens. National branding in Africa came into effect in the 1990s and became very popular in the 2000s (Kaneva, 2017) due to the pressing need from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to show compliance with liberal democracy and market economy principles, leading to foreign aid funding. National branding also reveals national anxieties and aspirations. However, African national brands faded mainly due to a lack of coordination of branding efforts, misrepresentation of national identity, propaganda critique, conflicts between economic & political sectors, and the inability to control brand message (Kaneva, 2017). Papadopoulosa and Hamzaoui-Essoussi (2015) found that most African national branding, especially in line with tourism, has faded mainly due to a lack of well-established professional public service and political stability. Southern African countries like Kenya, Zambia, Tanzania, and Botswana were well known for their tourism branding. Some African countries had their well-known slogans to give a few; Malawi's "Warm Heart of Africa" vs Nigeria's "Heart of Africa", and South Africa's "Alive with Possibility" vs Ghana's "Come alive with our homeland". African countries rebranded after their national names. For example, Gold Coast to Ghana and Southern Rhodesia to Zimbabwe. However, these national brands had their main activity, which faded and disappeared. Zimbabwe was the 'breadbasket' in the southern region, but this branding now stands as a nightmare for the Southern

African country. Most African National brands faced negative images, long-standing internal problems, negative global opinion, and state ethnocentrism.

Mugobo and Ukpere (2011) explained that National branding seeks to differentiate a particular country by establishing sustainable and difficult-to-copy competitive advantages. Country branding is a marketing strategy that positions a country in an enviable position, creating an attractive identity amongst its internal and external stakeholders. The response would be evaluated based on the ability of the country to increase tourism, boost export trade, and attract foreign direct investment. However, Mugobo and Ukpere (2011) found out that African Countries' country brands faded, even South Africa is affected. They found that the countries are having difficulties in obtaining foreign investment, exports are contracting, banks and investors have become wary of lending money to companies, and tourist numbers have dwindled as holidays are now regarded luxury. Some well-performing business companies in Africa, as a continent, have disappeared over the years. Governments came up with rescue packages for private and public companies. These incentives include tax holidays, reduced import and export duties, and direct financial support. At the corporate level, they also came up with strategies like downsizing, cutting expenditure, shelving new projects, and renegotiating loans with creditors, but still, companies fail and disappear in the market.

In Zimbabwe, a lot of companies faded and disappeared. The Agricultural sector, which was once a pillar for Southern African countries, is now a thing of the past. Samanyika Connect (2024) listed several companies that were so vibrant but closed and disappeared in Zimbabwe since independence. These companies include: Dunlop, Karina Textiles, David Whitehead, Cone Textiles, G&D Shoes, Colgate Palmolive, Hunyani Pulp & Paper, Reckitt and Coleman, Kadoma Paper, Pelhams, Tedco, Lion Match, Olivine Industries, Trinidad, Aroma bakeries , Jagger's Wholesalers, Berger Paints, Masco , Anchor Yeast, Tabex, Supersonic, Alka Paints, Baldwins Steel, Zimcast Gweru, Fire Batteries, Powersales, Border Timbers, Mutare Board & Paper Mill, Parkinglton, KODAK, WRS, Radio Limited, Greatermans, Barbours, Huddon and Sly, Tube and Pipe , Merlin, W Craster, Nisbert Breweries , Mitchel Bakery, Kondozi, Harambe, Imperial Refrigeration, Nedlaw, Luna Chickens, Rainbow Cinemas, Liberty Cinemas, Rufaro Marketing, Morewear Ind, Trinity Engineering , Phillips, Modzone, Zex Airline, Gulliver, Kingstons, Allen Wack and Shep, Zimglass, ZimAlloys, Deven Engineering, Willowvale Mazda, Springmaster, Cosmos, Zelco, First Tel, Shell, BP, Mobil, Amato Supermarkets, Jazen Supermarkets, Dino Nobel, Glyn, Bolts, Zisco, Interfresh, MINES; Alaska, Mhangura, Silverside, Shackleton, Golden Kopje, Falcon Gold, Elvington, Sandawana, Inyati Copper, Muriel mine, BHP, ZIMASCO , ZIM ALLOYS , IRON DUKE PYRITES, MADZIWA MINE, SHANGANI, EPOKE, FINANCIAL SECTO; TRUST, Royal Bank, ZABG, INTERFIN, KINGDOM, CFX, BARCLAYS, BEVERLY, FOUNDERS, INTERMARKET, Genesis, Bard Discount House, Discount Company of Zim, Rapid Discount Hse, Time Bank, Barbican Bank, Renaissance, UDC, Scotfin, Unibank, United Merchant Bank, ENG Capital and Tetrad. These companies were once vibrant and strong brands in Zimbabwe, but they disappeared away becoming history. The Zimbabwe Mail (2024) stated that the Confederation of Zimbabwe Retailers (CZR) has called for the government to intervene in the country's business environment since most retailers were falling away. Despite economic hardships, resilient brands should sail through and survive, shining to greater heights. Therefore, the study sought to develop a brand-resilience framework that enables brands to have a sustainable competitive advantage.

I.ii. Statement of the problem

Despite concerted efforts by African countries to revamp and sustain their brands, many are struggling to maintain a lasting presence in the market, with some succumbing to premature decline. In today's fiercely competitive business landscape, branding is a critical determinant of success, and the lack of brand resilience poses a significant threat to the long-term viability of African businesses. Therefore, developing a robust brand resilience framework is imperative for African businesses to not only survive but thrive in the face of intense competition and rapidly changing market dynamics. This article aims to address this pressing need by proposing a Termite Framework for building brand resilience, tailored to the unique challenges and opportunities of the African business context. By exploring the principles of resilience, adaptation, cooperation, resourcefulness, and endurance, this framework seeks to empower African businesses to achieve sustainable competitive advantage and enduring success.

I.iii. Objectives

Objective of the study**:** To develop a framework for brand resilience sustainability in Africa.

I.iv. Theoretical Framework

Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCA)

Dynamic capabilities (DC) theory emerged as both an extension to and a reaction against the inability of the resource-based view (RBV) to interpret the development and redevelopment of resources and capabilities to address rapidly changing environments. DC may be considered as a source of competitive advantage (Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997). DC theory was derived from RBV theory and compensated for that theory's shortcomings when it came to explaining sustainable competitive advantage and superior performance in a dynamic environment. Teece, Pisano & Shuen (1997) defined DCs as "the firm's ability to integrate, build and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address rapidly changing environments". DCs are thus "the organizational and strategic routines by which firms achieve new resource configurations as markets emerge, collide, split, evolve, and die" (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000). Dynamic Capability Theory (DCT) is a strategic management framework that explains how firms can adapt and evolve their capabilities to achieve sustainable competitive advantage in rapidly changing environments.

Key Components of Dynamic Capabilities Theory

Sensing

The organisations should be in a position to identify and interpret changes in the environment. There is a need to carry out environmental scanning. This involves recognizing trends, analysing data, and interpreting information to anticipate potential impacts on the business.

Seizing

Responding to opportunities and threats. There is a need to be in a position to seize opportunities, seizing refers to the process of mobilizing resources and making strategic decisions to address and exploit identified opportunities. It involves actively pursuing and capturing value from these opportunities through new products, processes, or business models.

Reconfiguring

Adapting and evolving capabilities to sustain competitiveness. Reconfiguring in dynamic capabilities refers to a firm's ability to restructure its resources and routines to adapt to changing environments. This involves integrating, building, and reconfiguring internal and external competencies to address new opportunities or challenges.

II. Literature Review

Resilience is defined in management literature as an innovative concept that can help organizations survive amidst disturbances caused by social, environmental, and/or economic challenges (Folke et al., 2002). Kupers et al (2014) define resilience through a broader lens as the capacity of business, economic, and social structures to survive, adapt, and grow in the face of change and uncertainty related to disturbances, whether they be caused by resource stresses, societal stresses, and/or acute events. Belelieu and Churney (2022) aver that resilience is the ability of an organisation to overcome external shocks and grasp new opportunities in their wake, hence building resilience encompasses five pillars, which are operational resilience, strategic resilience, financial resilience, social resilience, and organisational resilience. Belelieu and Churney (2022) came up with a resilience framework with four principles that show an organisation's will to survive, communication showing commitment to develop plans, goals with procedures, agility to facilitate execution for sudden change adaptation, and empowerment that enables individuals to have ownership with peers' collaboration.

Brand resilience refers to a brand's ability to recover from setbacks, adapt to change, and maintain customer loyalty (Keller, 2020). Resilient brands exhibit:

- **Agility** – Swift response to market shifts (Reeves & Deimler, 2011).
- **Cooperation** – Team-based problem-solving (Edmondson, 2012).
- **Endurance** – Long-term sustainability despite challenges (Hamel & Välikangas, 2003). Brand resilience is a term used to describe how strong brands can withstand external pressures during difficult times. If properly cultivated, brand resilience will ensure your brand stands the test of time, time and time again.

Aldianto et al (2021) used a case study approach to build a resilience framework using 3 start-up owners in Indonesia. Aldianto et al (2021) developed a brand resilience framework that consists of five variables, which are: dynamic capability, technology capability, agility leadership, innovation ambidexterity, and business resilience. They justified that these variables stand to justify the definition of organisational resilience, which is the ability to deal with challenging conditions by ensuring the prosperity and existence of the organisation. Radic, Herrman, Haberland, and Riese (2022) came up with eleven factors that characterise business model resilience. However, Jamade and Dasgupta (2024) combined sustainable marketing to improve performance with psychological capital theory to create a brand resilience framework that emphasises fostering optimism, personality, where the system dynamic model for resilient branding and sigmoid action resilience of brand equity by Heise is used for better results. Elalfy et al (2021) conducted a study on Business resilience in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) era. Aldianto et at (2021) carried out a study on a Business Resilience Framework for Start-ups. They focused on business brands and start-ups. Rosita et al (2017) study was on the role of brand identity in creating resilient small enterprises (SMEs) in the Fashion Industry. Bachtiar et al (2023) opine that businesses, especially SMEs, experienced a massive downturn during the recent pandemic. Global lockdowns, industry closures, and food and health crises were experienced at the beginning and middle of the pandemic. This situation has caused a severe negative impact on business sustainability, which requires a balance of supply and demand. Moreover, a declining number of sustainable businesses directly impacts the economic growth of a whole country. Scholars above came up with a list of principles and factors that promote resilience. However, this study focused on studying the behaviour of termites and came up with a unique Termite Brand Resilience Framework.

III. Research Methodology

Research Onion

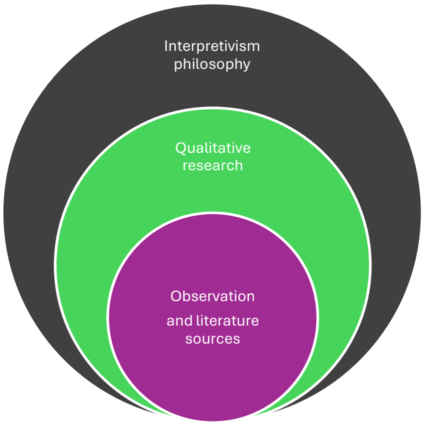


Fig.1.

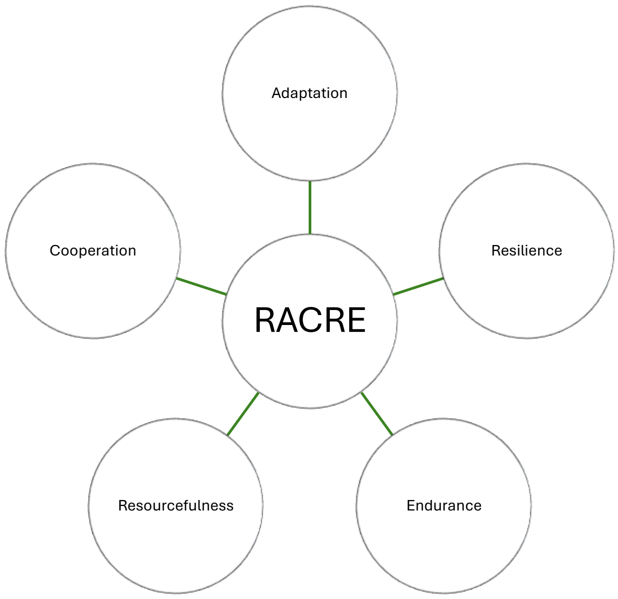
Interpretivism philosophy was used for this study. The study was qualitative in nature. Observation was used to study the behaviour of the termites for a long time since we were growing up.

III.i. Key Findings

The behaviour of termites was observed to come up with the Termite Brand Resilience Framework. This framework is built on five major pillars, which are: Resilience, Adaptation, Cooperation, Resourcefulness, and Endurance (RECRE Framework).

III.ii. Termite Framework for Brand Resilience Sustainability

The framework consists of five pillars: Resilience, Adaptation, Cooperation, Resourcefulness, and Endurance (RACRE).



III.iii. Resilience: Recovering

Resilient brands maintain customer trust and reputation over time. The endurance of termite colonies over centuries exemplifies this longevity (Evans et al., 2011). African brands like MTN have shown resilience by quickly adapting to regulatory changes and market disruptions (Ncube, 2019). Termites demonstrate resilience through their ability to adapt to diverse environmental conditions and disturbances. This is evident in their mound construction, which can withstand extreme temperatures and even fire, and in their gut microbiomes, which can adjust to varying food sources. Furthermore, termite activity can enhance ecosystem resilience, particularly in dryland environments, by improving water infiltration and nutrient cycling. This mirrors termites' capacity to rebuild damaged mounds rapidly.

III.iv. Termites demonstrate resilience in the following situations:

Natural disasters: Termite colonies can survive floods, droughts, and other natural disasters by adapting their behaviour and infrastructure. During the global pandemic COVID-19 period, so many organisations failed to operate as a result of this disaster, yet termites find ways of defending and protecting themselves.

Predator attacks: Termites have defense mechanisms to resist predator attacks, such as soldiers with enlarged heads and mandibles.

Environmental changes: Termites can adapt to changes in temperature, humidity, and other environmental factors.

Food scarcity: Termites can survive for extended periods without food by reducing activity and relying on stored resources.

Colony damage: Termites can repair damaged tunnels and nests, demonstrating their ability to recover from physical disruptions.

Disease outbreaks: Some termite species have developed social immunity, where the colony works together to prevent the spread of disease.

Adaptation: Strategic Flexibility

Termites demonstrate adaptability through various strategies, like diverse feeding habits, building specialized nests, and exhibiting social behaviours that enhance survival in different environments. They can scavenge, store water, and feed on a wide range of organic matter, including wood, litter, and grass, allowing them to thrive in areas with variable rainfall. Their ability to build mud tubes provides access to food sources and protection from predators, and their complex social structures, including specialized worker and soldier castes, enable them to exploit resources and defend their colonies effectively. Termites construct elaborate nests, such as mounds and subterranean tunnels, providing shelter, defense against predators, and microclimate control. For example, mound-building termites create structures that can regulate temperature and humidity, offering a stable environment within the colony. Dangote Group diversified its portfolio from cement to food products, demonstrating adaptation akin to termites adjusting their foraging patterns based on environmental conditions (Okoro, 2021).

Cooperation: Building Networks

Termites work collectively for colony survival; similarly, resilient brands foster partnerships and stakeholder collaboration. For example, Safaricom's collaboration with mobile money agents has expanded its ecosystem (Mwangi, 2020). Termites demonstrate cooperation through various complex social behaviors within their colonies, including division of labor, altruistic actions, and communication systems. These behaviors contribute to the colony's survival and overall success. There is a division of labour in the termites' colony.

Division of Labor:

- Termite colonies exhibit a sophisticated caste system with distinct roles for different groups of individuals.
- **Workers:** Primarily responsible for foraging for food, constructing the mound and maintaining the nest, and caring for the young.
- **Soldiers:** Defend the colony against predators and intruders, often with specialized body parts like strong mandibles.
- **Reproductives (Queen and King/Neotenics):** Responsible for reproduction and the continuation of the colony.

Collective Intelligence and Distributed Effort:

- Termite colonies function as highly organized societies, with individual termites performing specialized tasks without a central “director”.
- This illustrates the power of collective intelligence, where the combined efforts of many individuals lead to complex structures and coordinated actions.
- Startups can learn from this by encouraging collaboration and allowing individual contributions to drive innovation.

Biomimicry and Innovation

- Termite mounds are remarkable feats of engineering, regulating temperature, humidity, and airflow without relying on external power sources.
- Engineers and architects can study these structures to develop more energy-efficient and sustainable building designs, for example, Eastgate.

Pic. 2. The passive cooling design of the Eastgate Centre in Zimbabwe, with its distinctive chimneys, was inspired by termite mounds.

Resourcefulness: Optimizing Assets

Brands that leverage limited resources creatively, such as using digital platforms for marketing, resemble termites' efficient use of soil and organic matter to build mounds. Termites exhibit resourcefulness through their sophisticated nest building, their ability to adapt to diverse food sources, and their efficient recycling of resources within their colonies. They are also skilled at regulating their environment, maintaining optimal temperature and humidity, and even transporting water to manage conditions within their mounds. Termites play a crucial role in decomposing organic matter, particularly dead wood, which helps recycle nutrients in ecosystems. They also recycle water and other resources within their colonies.

Endurance: Sustaining Long-Presence

Termites demonstrate remarkable endurance through their continuous work, ability to survive in various conditions, and adaptations for resourcefulness. They are known for their relentless activity, never truly sleeping, and their ability to thrive in challenging environments.

Termites demonstrate endurance in several ways, which organisations can learn from:

- Long-term colony survival: Termite colonies can survive for decades, with some species living up to 100 years or more. This demonstrates their ability to endure and thrive over long periods.
- Underground tunnel systems: Termites build complex underground tunnel systems that can withstand natural disasters, such as floods and earthquakes, and harsh environmental conditions.
- Termites, unlike other insects, do not hibernate or enter diapause during the winter. While they may become less active and retreat deeper into the soil for warmth during colder months, they remain active year-round. Their activity simply shifts, with termites moving to warmer areas like deeper soil or inside structures, rather than becoming dormant. This shows endurance during difficult times.
- Adaptation to changing environments: Termites can adapt to changes in their environment, such as changes in temperature, humidity, or food availability, allowing them to endure and survive.
- Resistance to predators: Termites have developed defense mechanisms to resist predators, such as soldiers with enlarged heads and mandibles, which help them endure and protect their colonies.
- Continuous foraging and resource gathering: Termites continually forage for food and resources, demonstrating their endurance and ability to sustain themselves over time.
- Colony growth and expansion: Termites can build and expand their colonies over time, demonstrating their endurance and ability to thrive in a variety of environments.

IV. Recommendations

- There is a need to adopt RACRE Principles: Businesses should integrate resilience, adaptation, cooperation, resourcefulness, and endurance into their strategy in order to build brand resilience and sustainability.
- Enhance Agile Leadership: Leaders must anticipate disruptions like termites sensing environmental changes.
- Protect Intellectual Property: brands should safeguard assets in volatile periods as termites safeguard themselves and their resources in difficult times.
- Foster Collaborative Culture: Encourage team-based innovation for long-term survival.
- Organisations should be built in a termite-resistant and sustainable way. Whenever there was a problem, people would spontaneously self-organize to fix it. Whenever a new revenue source was found, resources would shift to take advantage of the new opportunity. Everyone would perform at their personal peak, but the needs of the community would be paramount and met. Resource mobilisation would be effectively implemented.

V. Conclusion

The Termite Framework (RACRE) provides a sustainable model for brand resilience with special reference to Africa. By emulating termite strategies, which include resilience, adaptation, cooperation, resourcefulness, and endurance, businesses can thrive in DVUCADD environments, an environment characterised by dynamic, volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous diversity and disruptive change.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding this paper.

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