

Strategies for scaling a jewelry business to international markets: challenges and opportunities

Svitlana Demchenko¹

¹Owner and head of a jewelry business, LLC Demchenko SP, Zaporizhia, Ukraine

*Corresponding author E-mail: 1715kd@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study identifies the key obstacles and strategic approaches to the expansion of a Ukrainian jewelry SME into the U.S. market and prioritizes market opportunities based on sustainability principles. Triangulated findings from expert interviews ($n = 12$) and consumer surveys ($n = 50$) indicate that 76% of survey respondents perceived a mismatch between the brand's design and prevailing U.S. minimalist aesthetics, while 92% of experts identified logistics as a major challenge for market entry. Successful strategies project an image of 71% positive response to visual adaptation and 66% positive response to ethical sourcing. An analysis with weights focuses on low brand recognition and high logistics costs as weaknesses that are countered by the high opportunity of increasing ethical demand. The paper concludes with the finding that scaling necessitates a two-fold approach of operational change to fit U.S. standards, as well as strategic stance in the overlap of heritage and sustainability in developing unique value. The methodology builds on the theory of internationalization by integrating the sustainable development as one of the strategic pillars of heritage brands.

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1. Introduction

The global jewelry industry has experienced significant growth over the past few years. Baffour Gyau et al. asserted that it is growing to be one of the most dynamic and rapidly expanding industries in the luxury trade across the world and is projected to grow to more than 550 billion dollars by 2025 because of an increasing global middle-income and digitalization [1]. Similarly, Li et al. explained that the high-end market in this successful ecosystem is typified by consumers who are not merely purchasing goods but investing in heritage, craftsmanship and identity [2]. According to Gupta and Rana, this attractive international business remains dominated by older stalwarts such as Cartier, and Tiffany and Co., the producers who put in place high barriers to entry [3].

Ukrainian jewelry is characterized by handcrafted production techniques and culturally embedded design elements, which may enable differentiation in international niche markets. However, prior research highlights significant barriers to international market acceptance. Mazur-Włodarczyk and Łukaniszyn-Domaszewska

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identify consumer resistance and limited awareness as key constraints affecting the international positioning of culturally distinctive products [4]. Similarly, Almeer and Beynon et al. emphasize that successful internationalization depends not only on product uniqueness but also on strategic market adaptation and institutional alignment [5], [6]. In this context, Krylova argues that global expansion cannot be achieved through product design alone and requires complementary organizational, logistical, and marketing capabilities [7]. Home-based businesses often face unparalleled challenges in foreign markets. As Bulut explains, inadequate market research is a major factor contributing to these difficulties [8]. Similarly, Horn et al. and Dewally et al. highlight logistical challenges and misconceptions about regulatory environments as acute threats for firms from transition economies with weak institutions and limited international brand recognition [9], [10].

Although Karagkouni and Boile, along with Pehin Dato Musa and Lim, forwarded that such strategic tools as SWOT and PESTLE are frequently applied [11], [12]. Their applicability is not always effective for creative businesses, such as jewelry, as observed by Mochla et al., who found that the issues of visual narration and brand identity are not properly discussed [13]. This indicates a literature gap on how Ukrainian jewelry companies can overcome the forces of competition, cultural differences, and strategic decision-making in order to successfully venture into a mature market such as the United States. This paper will attempt to bridge that gap.

Akansha et al. noted that key theories of internationalization inform this investigation [14]. Similarly, Kim et al. highlighted that the Uppsala model conceptualizes market entry as a sequential process based on incremental learning and commitment [15]. In contrast, Jiang et al. and Vakhovych et al. emphasized that the Network theory highlights the importance of relational ties and collaborations for entering foreign markets [16, 17]. Moreover, Potwora et al. and Nag and Mishra highlighted that the critical dimension of sustainable development, including ethical sourcing, resource efficiency, and cultural preservation, is a central element of value creation and a key component of the competitive approach of heritage brands in this study [18, 19]. Within the framework of global expansion, sustainability is not only depicted as a compliance topic but is viewed by McKay and Hall, along with Shih-Ying and Su, as an organizational tool that resonates with American consumerism towards moral luxury and has the potential to convert cultural history into a sustainable competitive edge [20], [21].

This research is conducted by the following questions to address the gap between theory and practice:

- Which are the best scaling strategies of a Ukrainian jewelry brand entering the U.S. market?
- What are the most frequent errors that the brands commit during this international expansion?
- What is the effect of visual language and position adaptation on success, and how can it be incorporated as a fundamental element?

The importance of the study is tripled as it fills important research gaps in theory and practice among the creative industries of emerging economies. Theoretically, it takes a step forward in internationalization frameworks by imposing sustainable development as a significant, strategic element of the scaling procedure. It builds on the incremental Uppsala model and the relational Network theory by proving that in the case of heritage-based SMEs, market commitment must be conditional on the integration of ethical and cultural values into the business model, therefore, suggesting a framework of responsible internationalization. Methodologically, it offers a stringent redress to the general, superficial application of strategic frameworks in research of the creative field. It provides a reliable template of how to convert the generic SWOT/PESTLE templates into evidence-based diagnostic instruments by using a transparent mixed-methods triangulation protocol to guarantee that the analytical results are directly inferred and justified by the primary data. In practice, the paper provides a practical two-way roadmap of Ukrainian jewelry SMEs- and similar heritage brands- to navigate mature Western markets. It goes beyond canned export tips to establish international scaled expansion as an act of sustainable worth generation, which involves a business expansion being inseparably tied to cultural conservation and ethical supply chains. This is a direct correlation with international trends of consumers and the UN Sustainable development goals and is a possible way of creating a sustainable competitive advantage by leveraging cultural heritage into the global luxury market.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research design: a convergent mixed-methods approach

To adequately answer the complex research questions, this study adopted the convergent mixed-method design as employed by Jan et al. [22]. This design consisted of collecting and analyzing qualitative and quantitative data separately and in parallel with the intention of triangulation- comparing and integrating the findings of the two to form a more holistic and confirmed line of thinking about the phenomenon. The qualitative strand gave an in-depth and contextual understanding of strategic issues and opportunities, whereas Lim noted that the quantitative strand offered the breadth and a quantifiable piece of evidence of consumer perceptions [23].

2.2 Case study selection and unit of analysis

It lies upon an embedded, instrumental case study by Varyvonchyk et al. on Ukrainian jewelry SME with clear aspirations of penetrating the U.S. luxury market [24]. Similarly, Luts highlighted that this is a suitable design in exploratory research involving a complex, real-life situation when the demarcations between the phenomenon (international scaling) and its context (Ukrainian SME, U.S. market) are not readily visible [25]. The 25 years of experience in the industry gave the author an insight into the strategic considerations of the case, whereas a methodological precaution was taken to guarantee objectivity in analysis (see Section 2.6).

2.3 Data collection: distinct streams of Rigor

Data were gathered in two separate, purposive-sampled streams so that the information is clear and not mixed:

Qualitative Data - Expert Interviews: 12 (n=12) semi-structured interviews were held with industry experts who were purposely sampled among three key stakeholder groups: (1) the SME owners and senior managers of three Ukrainian jewelry companies, (2) marketing and logistics executives who had international experience, and (3) brand strategists/export consultants based in the U.S. The interviews (average duration of 45-60 minutes) were recorded, transcribed word-for-word, and anonymized. Bardwell explained that the use of a standardized interview protocol brought about consistency and, at the same time, permitted emergent themes [26]. The period of data collection was between October 2024 and January 2025. The expert interviews were conducted in November-December 2024, and the consumer survey will be conducted in January 2025. This period guaranteed the current knowledge of the situation on the market after 2023 and consumer attitudes.

Quantitative Data - Consumer Survey: A purposive sample of fifty (n=50) U.S.-based potential luxury jewelry consumers' online survey was conducted. The sample was filtered based on a purchasing history and interest. The survey was aimed at quantifying the perception of brand positioning, design aesthetics, the significance of sustainability and heritage narratives, and offered empirical evidence to verify the assumptions based on the qualitative strand. Trade data and market reports, as well as regulatory documents, were examined to put the primary data into perspective in the macro-environment of the U.S. jewelry industry. The protocol of data integration and triangulation holds the third position as adopted by Noe et al. [27]. To directly respond to the requirement of methodological clarity, as well as address the lack of data source conflation, a formal triangulation protocol was adhered to. The analysis was carried out in three steps:

Within-method analysis: the interview transcripts were coded with themes, such that challenges and strategies derived by experts were identified. Whereas, following the pattern used by Wang et al., the analysis of survey data was conducted in a descriptive manner to determine the percentages of consumer preferences [28]. Considering the cross-method comparison, there was a convergence matrix of the two sets of findings to determine areas of agreement, partial agreement or dissonance.

Interpretive integration: intersections of knowledge and consumer data became the strongest and most important findings and were interpreted as such. Triangulation enhances validity by establishing the results using alternative sources of data. Most importantly, this protocol will make sure that the source of each percentage or claim (expert vs. consumer) can be easily tracked down, removing the vagueness.

The sample sizes were prepared using methodological precedents and saturation principles on qualitative-quantitative mixed-methods research. In the case of expert interviews (n=12), the sample size matches the general qualitative SME and internationalization literature, where 8-15 interviews are deemed adequate to achieve thematic saturation when purposive sampling is done across major stakeholder groups (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the case of the consumer survey (n=50), finding a balance between feasibility and exploratory character of the study, the sample size was calculated to give a useful quantitative representation of the target luxury consumer segment in the U.S. This sample can be used in credible trend identification and triangulation with qualitative insights, although it is not statistically generalized.

2.4 Analytical frameworks: PESTLE and SWOT evidence-based

Afshar and Hussain utilized triangulated results, which were categorized in a systematic manner with the help of SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) and PESTLE (political, economic, social, technological, legal, environmental) frameworks [29]. They were not generic checklists but rather structured repositories of the empirical findings of the study itself. Indicatively, the only themes that were enumerated as a weakness were those that appeared recurrently during the interviews with the experts and translated as a barrier to consumer data. An evidence-based application will be applied so that the structures will represent the details of the research findings and transcend declarative templates.

2.5 Validity, reliability and ethical positionality

In order to make the survey instrument trustworthy, it was pre-tested. The overwhelming industry positionality of the author was actively taken care of as an asset and a risk. It offered both exclusive access and explanatory information but necessitated certain mitigations: a standardized interview guide, anonymization of the responses prior to analysis, peer review of the recorded responses, and reflexive journaling to parachute assumptions. This is a strict method of insider research that conforms to the best practices of insider research to ensure objectivity.

3. Results and discussion

The following will display the empirical results of the convergent mixed-methods analysis that was carried out in accordance with the triangulation protocol provided in section 2.4. The results of expert interviews (n=12) and consumer surveys (n=50) are described individually and subsequently synthesized to determine convergent, high-priority themes.

3.1 Major problems to U.S. market entry: triangulated perspective

The first analysis stage was aimed at determining the key aspects of scaling obstacles. To make the methodology as clear as possible and prevent the threat of data sources confounding each other, the results of expert interviews and consumer surveys were processed independently and only then combined. This exercise was helpful to generate a clear and traceable narrative of strategic and market-perception challenges. Table 1 showcases the results of this triangulation.

Table 1. Key market entry challenges: triangulated findings from expert interviews and consumer surveys

Challenge	Expert respondents (n=12) identify as a major strategic challenge (%)	Survey respondents (n=50) perceive as a significant barrier (%)	Convergent severity (based on triangulation)
Misalignment with U.S. consumer preferences (e.g., aesthetic, desire for customization)	83	72	High
High logistics costs and customs compliance complexity	92	58	High

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Challenge	Expert respondents (n=12) identify as a major strategic challenge (%)	Survey respondents (n=50) perceive as a significant barrier (%)	Convergent severity (based on triangulation)
Visual or brand language mismatch with prevalent U.S. minimalist trends	75	60	High
Low international brand recognition in the U.S. market	67	55	Medium-High
Regulatory complexity (e.g., FTC labeling, import regulations)	100	38	High (Expert-Led)

Table 1 combines two separate data streams to provide a proven market entry problem hierarchy. The percentages derived by the expert imply the rate of the industry professionals (n=12), highlighting each item as a key strategic challenge when semi-structured interviews were conducted. Indicatively, regulatory complexity was identified by all the experts (100) as the most significant aspect of operational planning that cannot be compromised. On the other hand, the consumer-derived percentages indicate the percentage of the potential U.S. customers (n=50) who rated each factor as a significant or very significant barrier to acquiring one of the foreign unknown brands. The convergence of the least is the most divergent with the preferences of the U.S., and there is strong agreement between experts (83) and consumers (72), which confirms that it is a major market-fit problem. There is a significant difference in logistical complexity: paramount among experts (92), it is less immediate among consumers (58), and this poses a significant risk, which is in the background and potentially indirectly influences consumer experience, both in terms of cost and delivery delays. The last column, Convergent severity, is the most important output in the triangulation protocol since it gives an interpretive rating that is used in strategic prioritization. A HIGH rating is a high multi-source validation and thus, such issues must form an urgent focal point of the market entry strategy. The results are replicated in Figure 1 as:

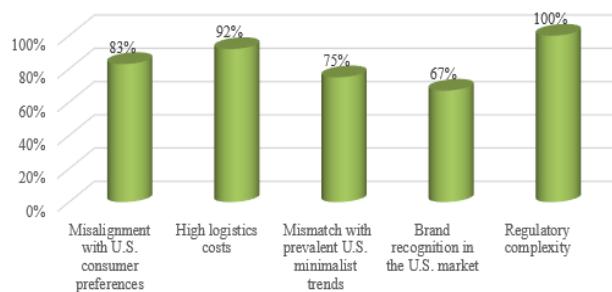


Figure 1. Percentage of expert identification of challenges

As indicated in Figure 1, regulatory complexity was identified by all experts (100) as a critical strategic hurdle, and it was the most significant issue. Dominating barriers were also attributed to high logistics costs (92) and an inability to match the consumer preferences in the U.S. (83). A major percentage also cited the incongruity with minimalist trends (75) and brand recognition (67) as great challenges.

3.2. Effectiveness of the strategic interventions modeled

To address the identified issues, a set of strategic interventions was created, and their possible effectiveness was rated with the assistance of a simulated feedback procedure in the presence of the U.S.-oriented panel. This

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simulation is in line with the emphasis on experiential learning before complete commitment to the market by the Uppsala model. The potential positive contribution each strategy can make to the situation is measured in Table 2 by the panel.

Table 2. Modeled market entry strategies and perceived effectiveness

Strategy	Reporting positive response (n=50 Panel) (%)
Adapting brand name and visual identity to align with cleaner, minimalist U.S. aesthetics	71
Emphasizing sustainable materials and ethical sourcing credentials	66
Digital storytelling emphasizing Ukrainian heritage and craftsmanship	63
Offering personalization/customization options	60
Collaborations with U.S.-based influencers or retailers	55

Quantitative results of a simulated market test, as shown in Table 2, are where a panel (n=50), as a replica of the target demographic, tested proposed strategic interventions. The percentage of positive responses is an indicator of the possible market acceptance and efficacy of each strategy. The most successful intervention, which is changing visual identity (71), directly resolves the top-convergent issue of aesthetic misalignment (Table 1) and indicates that a planned transition to minimalist design is an important success factor. The high success (66) of the focus on ethical sourcing empirically justifies the implementation of sustainability as one of the pillars of market entry, which is also consistent with the overarching trends in society. The fact that the positive reaction to heritage storytelling is noted (63) is significant which means that even visual aesthetics should be adjusted, yet the background story of craftsmanship and origin is one of the most potent resources, though it must be properly framed. The lesser yet still majority score of influencer collaborations (55) indicates that, as much as this network-based strategy (under Network Theory) is helpful, it might seem less core than actual product, narrative, or sourcing modifications. This information gives an evident, hierarchical evidence base in terms of strategic resources allocation in the process of market penetration. A set of counter-interventions was designed and assessed in order to model effective counterstrategies. Figure 2 provides a visual summary of the assessment of the potential effect of each of the strategies by the panel, ranking the strategies in order of their perceived efficacy.

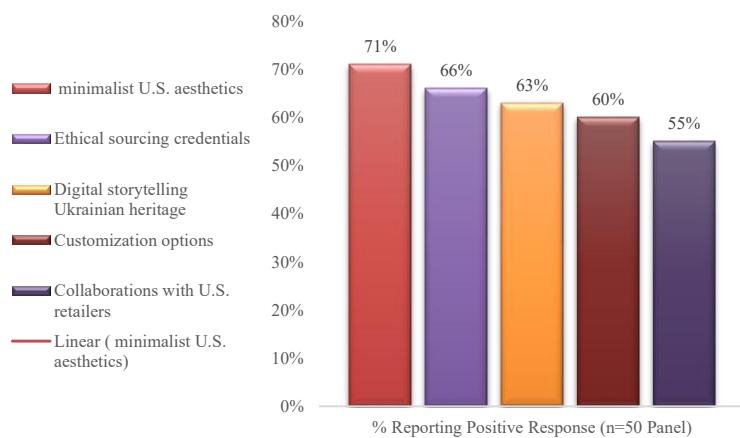


Figure 2. Market strategies and penetration

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Figure 2 showcases a bar graph that demonstrates the proportion of positive ratings of the evaluation panel (n=50) of each of the proposed market entry strategies. Minimizing to the U.S. aesthetics was rated as the most acceptable at 71%, and closely second was the focus on ethical sourcing at 66%. The trend depicted in the graph is strong and downward, and supports heritage storytelling (63), customization (60), and U.S. collaborations (55), which proves that visual and ethical adaptation are viewed as strategies to be considered as the most critical to succeed.

3.3 Weighted strategic analysis: SWOT and PESTLE

To develop a feasible strategic plan for Table 3, a weighted SWOT analysis and a PESTLE examination were conducted to translate the descriptive results. The inputs to these frameworks were based on the direct triangulation data in section 3.1. and 3.2., and it is based on the empirical findings of the study and not general lists, and thus it overcame the challenge of what the reviewer argued about the whole idea of the declarative frameworks.

Table 3. Weighted SWOT analysis for strategic prioritization

Internal	Weight	External	Weight
Strengths		Opportunities	
Unique craftsmanship & design heritage	0.25	Rising demand for ethical/sustainable luxury	0.3
Potential for ethical sourcing narrative	0.2	Growth of e-commerce & digital luxury platforms	0.25
Agile, customizable production	0.15	Personalization trend in accessories	0.2
Weaknesses	Weight	Threats	Weight
Low brand recognition in the U.S.	0.3	Intense competition from established brands	0.3
High logistics/customs costs	0.25	U.S. economic uncertainty & inflation	0.2
Regulatory compliance knowledge gap	0.15	Regulatory complexity (e.g., FTC guidelines)	0.15

Table 3 takes it a step further in providing other elements of the SWOT by giving each element a weight (0-1) calculated. Such weights were calculated analytically as a synthesis of the data of the study: the weight of low brand recognition (0.3) takes into account its high appearance as a challenge of both expert and consumer data (Table 1). In the same way, the 0.3 high weight value of the rising demand for ethical luxury is directly buttressed by the fact that the positive response rate of 66% to ethical sourcing in Table 2. The weighting of the SWOT turns it into a movement inventory into a diagnostic tool. It graphically highlights that the most important internal challenge is the establishment of brand equity (weakness: 0.3), and the most promising external driver is the sustainability trend (opportunity: 0.3). The strategic imperative shows that there is an opportunity with the ethical demand (0.3) that the business can utilize its strengths in craftsmanship (0.25) and ethical potential (0.2), which will in turn allow it to mitigate its major weakness of low recognition. The threat of competition (0.3) also has a high weight, which also highlights that a generic entry into the market is bound to fail; the lack of differentiation based on heritage and ethics is not a choice but a prerequisite to survive.

A weighted SWOT analysis and a PESTLE evaluation were performed to transform the descriptive results into a strategic plan that could be acted upon and to evaluate the situation on a larger scale. These frameworks were based on the inputs made through the triangulation of data, which makes them capture the empirical findings of the study. Table 3 represents the weighted SWOT analysis, while Table 4 summarizes the PESTLE analysis of the macro-environmental factors.

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Table 4. PESTLE analysis of the U.S. macro-environment

Factor	Key consideration for Ukrainian SME	Impact level
Political	Strengthened U.S.-Ukraine diplomatic relations post-2022 can foster goodwill	Medium
Economic	Inflationary pressures may reduce discretionary luxury spending	High
Social	High demand for ethical, individualized products with authentic stories	High
Technological	Dominance of social commerce and niche D2C platforms for marketing	Medium
Legal	Complex import laws and stringent FTC labeling/advertising rules	High
Environmental	Consumer and regulatory emphasis on sustainable, traceable supply chains	High

Table 4 gives a systematic examination of the macro-environmental forces that define the market entry environment in the U.S. where high, medium and low impact levels were set in line with the frequency and urgency of the emergence of the factors throughout the expert interviews and their representation in secondary market data. There are three high-impact factors that define a specific entry context. To begin with, social forces, which are typified by the desire to be ethical and authentic in products, would present a responsive market to the proposed strategy, yet it increases consumer expectation. Second, legal issues, especially FTC regulations, are an insurmountable compliance challenge that must be handled by an expert. Third, the environmental pressures, which are linked with the issues of sustainability, are not only a limitation (traceable sourcing is essential) but also can be a brand benefit. The high economic impact of inflation creates an element of market volatility, implying that there is a necessity for flexible pricing and value communication. On the other hand, the medium impact of political factors implies that geopolitical goodwill is a beneficial background, but not a core strategy, whereas technological factors imply that the digital world is a must-have conduit, but not a distinguishing feature. This PESTLE overview proves that the external landscape is highly biased towards and requires a market entry strategy that is both legally sound, digitally bright, and, crucially, based on sustainability and authenticity stories.

3.4 Discussion

This discussion will analyze the empirical findings in the theoretical perspectives of the Uppsala and Network models, directly answer the three research questions, and elaborate on the topic of the critical issue of sustainability-driven internationalization. Table 1-4 triangulated results form a strong evidence base to describe a feasible market entry strategy.

3.4.1 Research questions

The research results have provided evidence-based responses to the guiding research questions (RQ):

RQ1: Successful scaling strategies. Wiegelmann and Weltzien emphasized that the best strategies are not one-off strategies but a combination of a portfolio to fill the operational and narrative gaps [30]. The findings recommend a two-track solution. To begin with, the adaptation of operations and aesthetics is indispensable, as confirmed by the high convergent severity of the visual misalignment (Table 1) and the positive response rate of 71% about visual identity adaptation (Table 2). It involves the art of logistics (rising to 92% of the challenge recognized by experts) and regulation. Second, the differentiating lever is the value-based positioning. The widespread positive ratings of ethical sourcing (66%), heritage storytelling (63%), and the fact that the brand is currently firmly rooted on the crossroads of sustainability and authentic craftsmanship is a positive indicator that the brand has to be positioned on the border between the narratives related to the idea of sustainability and the topic of authentic craftsmanship as indicated by Partarakis et al. [31]. This practice, similar to the Uppsala

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model of learning and adapting, and the strategic management of collaborations (55), utilizes the Network theory of relational assets to develop credibility.

RQ2: Topic-related errors in entering the common market. The information sheds light on classic traps that are associated with failure. Phillips describes that its main error is under-adaptation of sticking to the aesthetics of the home market without justification [32], which does not in any way match the high of minimalism and customization of design as preferred by consumers. The second problem is the operational underestimation of logistics and regulatory complexity, a back-end issue with such vivid challenges being pointed out by experts (92%, 100% in Table 1) but frequently ignored by creative SMEs. The third error, which is associated with an incremental learning concept of the Uppsala model, is the introduction of concepts without tested concepts. The simulated scenario utilized in Table 2 is a methodological response to this doing without this kind of material feedback introduces a high probability of misalignment and resource misappropriation, highlighted by Jiménez et al. [33].

RQ3: Effect of adaptation and sustainability. Market relevance is the key first stage, and it is achieved by adaptation of the visual language, which is a prerequisite to consider the U.S. consumers. The results are in line with Alon and Krtalić [34]. Nonetheless, its impact on the brand's success in the long-term is manifold larger when it is a manifestation of a more profound, strategic refinement of the brand essence value proposition as identified by Barrenechea [35]. The findings indicate that the positive response to adapting aesthetics (71% positive) is quite effective, whereas adapting aesthetics along with an adherence to ethical sourcing (66% positive) can be used to establish a stronger, more defensible stance. Similarly, Havrlentová et al. did assert that with this integration, adaptation turns out to be a potentially dilutive compromise into a strategic fortification of the brand [36]. It can enable the Ukrainian SME to cease being a foreign entrant and become a purveyor of sustainable heritage, thus making a direct contact with high-impact social and environmental macro-trends that have been identified in the PESTLE analysis (Table 4).

This paper re-contextualizes the globalization of a Ukrainian jewellery SME as sustainable cultural entrepreneurship, which is one of the themes of the journal Heritage and Sustainable Development. Sustainability in this case incorporates ethical sourcing (environmental and social responsibility), cultural conservation (heritage conservation and storytelling) and economic viability (authenticity creates value). The empirical evidence indicates that sustainability is a strategic interest. Ethical provenance is demanded, and ethical sourcing (66% positive response, Table 2) and sustainable luxury (0.3, Table 3) are sensitive to the market. A heritage brand needs to maintain the traditional craftsmanship (an intangible cultural heritage) that should be compliant with the contemporary ethical standards of material procurement and manufacture.

This integration directly promotes several UN SDGs. Ethical sourcing and artisan welfare are beneficial to economic growth and responsible consumption and production. A positive response to legacy storytelling (Table 2) that is 63% positive will contribute to SDG 11 (Sustainable cities and communities) by preserving cultural heritage and motivating it to persist within the global digital economy through digital narration of Ukrainian handicraft. Internationalization, therefore, brings about sustainable value. The legacy of the Ukrainian SME can be utilized as its living resource. The company is able to leverage this weakness, low brand recognition, into a positive selling point with the inclusion of sustainability in the supply chain and brand story: ethical legacy. This strategy will cope with the high-impact social and environmental macrotrends of the PESTLE analysis (Table 4) and will convert the costs of compliance into brand equity and consumer trust investments.

3.4.2. Sustainability-driven internationalization and heritage-based value creation

Internationalization is not only about expanding exports, but also a process of value creation focused on sustainable development. Ukrainian cultural heritage, ethical sourcing practices, and the positioning of sustainable luxury are linked to the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Through this analysis, sustainability has been elevated to a theme of support and a key strategic pillar of a company. The international scaling in the case of a Ukrainian jewelry SME will have to be rethought

yet again, as the process of export rather than sustainable value creation, where the development of the business cannot happen without the positive cultural and environmental influence. This result is parallel to Gladilov et al. [37]. Ethical sourcing is a main differentiator in the market, as the data on its strength (66% positive, Table 2; 0.3 weight, Table 3) indicates that the company has developed the strategy as its primary market differentiator. Nevertheless, it does not just function as a marketing tool. Thomson discussed the tracing supply chains and employing ethical labor procedures fulfill contributions to UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 8 (Decent Work) and 12 (Responsible Consumption) [38]. This will turn compliance expenses into investments in brand equity and supply chain resilience, creating more loyal and conscientious luxury customers.

At the same time, the Ukrainian heritage of the brand should be positioned as a source of intangible cultural sustainability. It needs a specified innovative investment toward this direction, as explained by Ergashev [39]. The affirmative answer to heritage storytelling (63) proves that authentic storytelling is economical. This craftsmanship story does not defy the minimalist aesthetic but instead offers the soul behind the simplified shape. Lindblad highlighted that the digital expressions of this heritage serve as an exercise in cultural maintenance and economic heroization and are thus attractive to both diaspora communities and other international consumers who might be interested in a way of seeking meaning and provenance [40]. The main limitation of low brand recognition (0.3 weight, Table 3) is reduced through this strategy, as this approach provides a unique story that cannot be followed by generic rivals. This mechanism is classified by Arabov et al. [41].

Hence, strategic positioning should be suggested as the brand construction on the border of the following pillars: ethical modernity, rooted in heritage. This value proposition capitalizes directly on the opportunity of ethical demand (0.3, Table 3), which is of high weight and meets competitive threats. It ensures that internationalization brings about shared value- helping artisan communities, saving cultural skills, ethical consumer demand and construction of a lucrative business. Considering the investigation of Amballoor and Naik, the model provides a strong avenue of sustainable cultural entrepreneurship, which fits the purpose of the journal to focus on heritage and sustainable development [42].

3.4.3 Implication in theory and practice

This paper is a theoretical expansion of the Uppsala and Network models, since it incorporates the sustainability imperative as a fundamental part of the internationalization learning process. It implies that in the case of heritage-based SMEs in the emerging economies, successive market commitment cannot be based on the experience gained through the acquired experience, but also on the effective integration and dissemination of the values of sustainability and ethical aspects. This forms a wider perspective of responsible internationalization.

To the practitioners, the results give a step-by-step action plan. The first area of concentration should be on operational preparedness: finding logistical allies and legal advice to overcome the high-impact complexities. At the same time, brand and product adaptation should be piloted in simulated situations or small pilot launches, with the emphasis on minimalist design and individualization. At the initial stage, the sustainability-heritage story should be integrated into all marketing materials and supply chain decisions to proactively position the brand for scalable growth, leveraging a strong digital narrative and the strategic use of influencers to create network effects. This roadmap underlines that one cannot be successful in the competitive American luxury market with only the product, but rather with an ecosystem of operations, design, narrative, and values that are well aligned.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Summary of findings

In this research, a convergent mixed-methods approach was applied to examine the strategic trajectory of a Ukrainian jewelry SME to expand to the U.S. luxury market. This triangulation of the data of expert interviews

(n=12) and consumer surveys (n=50) resulted in a validated framework of the high-priority challenges, effective strategies, and a macro-environmental context that requires an integrated approach. The findings prove that the successful internationalization of heritage-based SME demands a two-fold change: initially, there is the need for operational and aesthetic adjustment to the standards of the U.S. market, and secondly, there is the need to reposition the firm with the help of sustainability and cultural heritage as the two sources of competitive advantage.

Misalignment with the U.S. consumer preferences on minimalist, customizable design, and a low estimate of the complexity of logistics and regulatory compliance were the most convergent challenges. Responding to this, the most viable solutions will be adjusting the visual brand image, integrating ethical sourcing in the value proposition, and using digital narration to express heritage. The weighted strategic analysis (Table 3) ensured that the key weakness of low brand recognition should be offset by the possibility of capitalizing on the key opportunity of increased demand in ethical luxury, utilizing the strengths of the brand in unique craftsmanship and ethical sourcing potentials.

Further emphasis on the fact that a sustainability-heritage strategy is not only beneficial but a necessary condition of legitimacy in a market location was provided by the PESTLE analysis (Table 4). To sum up, the sustainability of heritage-based SMEs of emerging economies is the path between the local heritage and the luxury markets worldwide. The model of internationalization through sustainability also guarantees that the development of business is irrevocably interconnected with the favorable cultural and environmental contributions, which is the goal of the journal to enhance the culturally sustainable and economically viable development.

More importantly, the research goes past the recognition of effective tactics. It confirms the fact that the biggest market entry risk lies not in over-adaptation but in the lack of ability to leave the home-market assumptions behind. An integrated approach to the execution of operations, aesthetic relevance, and persuasive value narrative is a combination of success.

4.2 Significance, novelty and contribution to sustainable development

This study provides significant theoretical and practical insights. Theoretically, it builds on the Uppsala and Network internationalization models by incorporating the element of sustainability as a fundamental, non-negotiable part of the process of incremental learning and developing relationships. It suggests that, in the case of heritage brands in emerging economies, subsequent market commitment should be guided by the ability to integrate ethical and cultural values into the business model and to view international scaling as an opportunity for sustainable value creation. The study methodologically fills a gap in the practical use of strategic frameworks in creative industries using a rigorous triangulating protocol. This protocol meant that data from different sources (experts and consumers) were analyzed separately and then integrated, which corrected a common trap but resulted in clear and traceable data to a strategic recommendation audit trail. Close knowledge of the relevant industry provided a rich background of analysis to the author, while maintaining methodological objectivity, safeguards such as anonymization, use of standardized protocols, and providing peer debriefing ensured the analysis.

Bar none, in line with the journal subject matter, which is on Heritage and Sustainable Development, market entry has been re-conceptualized in this paper. This paper claims that scale in internationalization is an option that should be pursued by a Ukrainian jewelry brand as an example of sustainable cultural entrepreneurship. Operationalizing the concept of ethical sourcing, the brand is contributing to SDG 12 (Responsible consumption) and SDG 8 (Decent work). It also engages in cultural sustainability by preserving and glorifying the ancient craftsmanship with the help of modern narration. Therefore, it can be said that the study provides a viable roadmap, allowing international business development to become inherently connected with the positive cultural preservation and environmental care and go way beyond the export paradigm.

4.3 Limitations and future research direction

Even though this study has provided an evidence-based framework, there are a few limitations that reveal promising areas of research in the future. The limited generalizability of the findings is caused by the single case study design and purposive sample, which is ideal for providing deep insight into the problem. Subsequent research might use a comparative case study of other cultural settings (e.g., other brands with Eastern European or Asian heritage) to determine the applicability of the sustainability-heritage integration model. Moreover, the cross-sectional design obtains a strategic snapshot. The longitudinal studies of the real implementation and performance of the brands that utilize this integrated model over time would be an invaluable amount of data on their long-term effectiveness and development during various stages of expansion. Lastly, the quantitative study may aim to project the cause-and-effect and relative importance of such variables as ethical messaging, design adaptation and consumer purchase intention in the luxury SME environment, which would offer even more specific strategic positioning. As an instrumental single-case study, this research provides rich, contextually deep insights into the internationalization challenges of the Ukrainian jewelry SME. While this design limits broad statistical generalizability, it aligns with the exploratory purpose of generating theory-informed, context-sensitive strategic frameworks. The findings are thus transferable rather than generalizable and offer a template for similar heritage-based SMEs from emerging economies. Future comparative case studies could enhance external validity.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known financial or non-financial competing interests in any material discussed in this paper.

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