

Africa's Top 100 Brands 2020



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When we carried out our survey of Africa's most admired brands for the first time in 2010, things were looking optimistic for African brands, but since then their representation in the ranking has dropped by nearly two-thirds. What will it take to allow African brands to compete with the global giants that dominate the table? Brand Africa founder **Thebe Ikalafeng** examines the results of the 2020 survey and reflects on what they tell us

In the midst of the euphoric and successful staging of the first FIFA World Cup in Africa when internal pride and admiration of Africa was arguably at its highest, African brands also enjoyed their most dominant position in the inaugural Brand Africa 100: Africa's Best Brands ranking. Back in 2010/11, when we launched the ranking of Africa's best brands, African brands accounted for 34 of the 100 most admired African brands, following a continent-wide poll.

The then president of the African Development Bank, Dr Donald Kaberuka, stated that "Africa's private sector is poised to become the main engine of growth for the African continent." Following a decade of

growth driven by public investments, the advent of technology, rising exports to China and a fast-growing consumer class, the private sector, the engine of brands, was predicted to fuel the growth of the continent.

With the rise of new African private sector champions, many anticipated the emergence and rise of African brands. Growth was projected to reach 6.2% by 2020. A decade later, in the midst of a global health and economic pandemic, the optimism has been tempered. Growth projections at the start of the year hovered around 3.9% but now there is talk of Africa's first recession in 25 years.

How is this reflecting on African brands? It's a bleak outcome. [This year's ranking](#) shows a further decline for African brands, representing 13% of this year's list, little more than a third of their showing a decade earlier. This is their lowest performance to date, down 2% from last year. Asia (16%), Europe (42%) and North America (29%) have all managed to increase their share.

Overall, out of the top 100 most admired brands from our first ranking in 2010/11, only half still appear in this year's list. This is due to mergers, acquisitions and the obsolescence of many brands. The most prominent changes are in the technology category with the demise of Blackberry (#32 in 2010/11); the consolidation of Vodafone (#54 in 2010/11 and now #13); which acquired Vodacom in 2008 and rebranded in 2011; Etisalat (#40 in 2010/11) rebranding to 9 Mobile in 2017; and Motorola (#39) being acquired by Lenovo in 2014. We've also seen the rise of Chinese brand Tecno, which has raced up the ranking from #33 to #5 – a dominant performance for one of China's premier global brands that's not even sold in China!

Mergers and acquisitions will impact the rankings in different ways. Following a merger it will take time for a brand to rebuild its presence and this appears to be the case for Absa as it asserts its brand beyond South Africa. Despite [rebranding back to Absa](#) in 2018 after UK-based Barclays sold back its shareholding in Barclays Africa to the South African banking group, it has dropped out of this year's rankings as it rebuilds its brand across the continent, having featured at #76 in 2010/11. The same is true for former South African brewer, SAB Miller, since the multi-billion dollar merger between AB InBev and SAB Miller in 2016. It took the #31 spot in 2011, with its iconic beer Castle at #67, but neither feature this year.

The goddess of victory

American sports brand Nike retained its top spot for the third year in a row as the #1 most admired brand in Africa. Ranked #9 a decade ago, the brand today reigns supreme, buoyed by partnerships with record-breaking African athletes such as Kenyan Eliud Kipchoge, the sub-two-hour marathon runner, and also by global collaborations such as the ones with South Africa designer Poppy Karabo and Nigeria's music sensation Wizkid on his Starboy brand.

Nike also sponsors the shirts of the Nigerian and South African football national teams, thus being ever visible throughout sub-Saharan Africa. As a result of these high-profile actions, Nike continues to reign as an aspirational and go-to brand for sports, fitness and lifestyle.

What is African?

The dominance of non-African brands is unabated. In the survey question to determine the most admired African brands (see our [methodology](#)), a host of non-African brands are identified as African. Brands such as Coca-Cola (#2 in 2011 and #4 in 2020) top the list of such brands. The company has been on the continent for almost 100 years and through innovative distribution and engaging localised campaign strategies tailored to African markets, it has achieved ubiquity and a certain Africanness. Where else would you have someone ordering a warm coke, as is often the case in East Africa?

A common theme among the top 10 such brands is their deep local insights, localised marketing and outsize marketing budgets. As a result they have managed to create an intimate and infectious relationship with the African consumer. The strategy for these global brands has been, as Brand Leadership terms it, to "think locally and act globally".

This is the case for brands such as Vlisco, the Dutch wax fabric designer, which is dominant in its sector, and Guinness, consumed by more people in Africa than its own domestic market in Ireland. The same is true for Vodafone and Airtel.

Africans don't prefer local

Among the 27 countries surveyed, which account for over 85% of the continent's population and GDP, only in Zimbabwe (through Econet), in Zambia (through Trade Kings) and in Tanzania (with Azam) do we have a local brand taking the country's #1 spot.

In Liberia, an African brand from another country, MTN, takes the #1 spot, but in all the other countries, it is a non-African brand: Nike (11 out of 27), Samsung (4/27), Coke (3/27) and Adidas (2/27) lead the way, with Tecno, Orange and Airtel each dominant in one country.

Powerhouse African brands, such as [Dangote](#) in Nigeria, Safaricom in Kenya and MTN in South Africa, don't even make the top spot in their domestic markets, and in North Africa, all the Top 10 most admired brands in Egypt and Morocco are non-African.

Kings of finance

GTBank claimed back the #1 spot this year, in a specific question and [ranking of brands in financial services](#), after falling out of the top five in 2019. Its clever marketing, global presence and some of its flagship food and fashion events have undoubtedly helped make it a fixture of daily life in some of its key markets, especially its home base Nigeria. The bank has taken banking and finance to the people, and associating this with something fun and useful.

Interestingly, every brand in last year's top five (FNB, Bank of Africa and Standard Bank) has lost ground in the rankings, with only Ecobank and Absa managing to stay within the top five. The industry is dominated by African giants. International brands do feature in some cases but these are payment companies as opposed to traditional banks – Paypal, Western Union and Visa. We expect to see mobile money and other disruptors muscle their way up the ranking as we see an increase in digitisation and digital-led economies, something which this pandemic has only accelerated.

Where's the African media?

As part of the survey, we also ask media-specific questions. The [top 25 media](#) is once again dominated by international groups, led by the BBC, CNN and Al Jazeera. Only seven of our top 25 originate from Africa which begs the question how much of our narrative do we control.

The major shift has come as non-traditional media have entered the sway. Streaming giant Netflix comes in at #10, ahead of traditional media stalwarts such as SABC, France24 and Sky News. Just outside the top 10, at #12, social media juggernaut Facebook also ranked above traditional media brands such as Sky (#21), France24 (#15) and Fox (#23). Making up our list are other digital players: YouTube comes in at #20, Google at #24 and Instagram at #25. These non-traditional players have increasingly positioned themselves as, and are, preferred media channels among African consumers.

Made in Africa

When prompted to choose their [favourite African brand](#), the split is pretty even between South, East and West Africa. Compared to last year, East Africa increased its contribution by 4% to 36%. West Africa came in with 28% of those brands represented and Southern Africa with 36%. A key driver for East Africa's growth is the Tanzanian conglomerate Azam, with a diverse portfolio that spans media and consumer goods, and a rebranding that has started to reap rewards and endearment from the region's consumers.

While its peers are on their knees, the crown jewel of the African skies, Ethiopian Airlines, continues to grow its brand, moving 14 spots to #7. Increased market share from a bigger fleet and new routes, an ambitious growth strategy and its status as an airline that actually manages to make money have turned it, it appears, into the "Pride of Africa", as it likes to call itself.

Zimbabwe's stalwart brand, Econet, has slid eight places to #13. It is hard to pinpoint exact reasons but it's been a tough year for the group which last year pulled the plug on its pay-TV venture, Kwese media. The

group has an important African footprint through Liquid Telecom, an internet solution provider, and its reputation will only increase if it manages to acquire a telecoms licence in Ethiopia, which is opening up its market to foreign entities.

[Jumia](#), dubbed “The Amazon of Africa” at its audacious launch on the NYSE, has struggled to match expectations, dropping five spots to #18. Jumia, and many e-commerce brands in Africa have their work cut out, especially with e-commerce giants Alibaba (#92 in the main table) and Amazon (#56 in the main table) lurking in the background. The African consumer may be their next battle ground. Jack Ma, the billionaire founder of Alibaba, launched the [Africa Netpreneur Prize](#) last year to support the next generation of African entrepreneurs, with the understanding, as he sees it, that “a digital revolution, will make it possible to turn Africa into a global hub”.

One company trying to create a hub in motor manufacturing is Nigeria’s Innoson. The brand, which comes in at #10 in our most admired African brand category, whose ambition is to eradicate [tokunbo](#) (used foreign automobiles) from Africa, manufactures cars and motorbikes in the industrial heartland of Nigeria in Anambra state. Our main top 100 list, however, only features non-African automobile majors such as Toyota (#11), Mercedes Benz (#19) and BMW (#40).

Winners and losers

In the [main table](#), one of this year’s big winners is Indomie, which comes in at #34. An Indonesian based company that entered the Nigerian market over 30 years ago has today managed to turn instant noodles into a staple food in Africa’s most populous country, challenging jollof rice for main billing in Nigerian households. It controls 74% of the market and the brand is so popular that the Indonesian trade minister Enggartiasto Lukita said that most Nigerians make the common mistake thinking of Indomie as a local product. To many Nigerians, all noodles are Indomie!

The second highest mover is Vlisco, moving 50 places to #45. Vlisco is arguably the most dominant brand representing African fashion. Its success has shone a light on [African fashion](#) and undoubtedly inspired other global brands, such as LV Basotho’s range of blankets or Christian Louboutin’s collaboration with Senegalese artists to launch the Africaba Tote Bag incorporating bold Ankara prints that originated in West Africa.

The world of fashion has helped African style go global. More recently we saw English designer Stella McCartney also use Ankara inspired prints in her Paris show and Thai-American designer Thakoon taking inspiration from the Maasai for his latest collection. In a resurgence and appreciation of “African fabrics” most of which are inspired by Vlisco, among the “brands” mentioned by respondents were Mozambique’s “Capulana”, Ghana’s “Kente” and Zambia’s “Kitenge”.

The company that has moved most in our rankings is French dairy company Danone, moving up 60 places to #30. It hasn’t all been plain sailing, however, for this brand that celebrated its 100th birthday last year. In Morocco, a major market for the company, it suffered a wide boycott in 2018. However, following some consumer engagement sessions and nationwide awareness-raising it has managed to build back this brand equity. The brand won an award at the Peace and Sport Awards in late 2019 and the year saw the return of the Danone Nations World Cup, with Danone taking kids from all around the world to Barcelona to compete in this prestigious competition.

One brand that has dropped significantly since we compiled the first rankings is Dolce & Gabbana, dropping from #58 in 2010 to #98 today. In a YouGov survey in the US conducted in February 2020, it was the least popular luxury brand in the rankings. This slide of the popularity of the former global trendsetter in America appears also to be the case in Africa.

Another brand that seems to have lost its lustre is Turkey’s LC Waikiki, falling 32 places to #99. Its higher position last year coincided with a campaign they ran as they expanded their footprint in Kenya and South Africa. This year’s ranking is probably a truer reflection of its position.

Conclusion

So what does this year's ranking tell us? After an exciting early start to the decade, and despite a vibrant entrepreneurial environment with pockets of excellence, the scramble for the much trumpeted value and size of the African consumer spend is still taking place between brands from outside the continent rather than from within.

What Africa isn't short of are ideas, blueprints and enthusiasm. But they require financial and government support to really grow and take off. We appear to be moving in the right direction: the [African Continental Free Trade Area](#) will help our brands reach new markets; the removal of travel barriers with the African Union Passport will also enable Africans to discover new brands as they travel the continent.

But to compete with the global behemoths will require greater ambitions for our brands to be the ones our people aspire to and respect – “top-of-mind” brands that we don't only consume but which represent the lives we want to live. That will require a change of mindset from the top down. It can't be someone else's story or success. It needs to come from within. The next decade cannot be another promise for an “Africa rising”, an “African renaissance” or “Africa's time”. Africa's time is NOW.

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