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AN INTERDISCIPLINARY ECOSYSTEM OF CORPORATE BRAND IDENTITY MANAGEMENT IN MULTINATIONAL ENTERPRISES

Summary. The present article offers a comprehensive interdisciplinary framework for understanding and managing Corporate Brand Identity (CBI) in multinational enterprises. It synthesizes the most significant theoretical insights from the fields of marketing, consumer psychology, behavioral economics, organizational theory, international business, and corporate communication to address fragmented academic discourse. The article conceptualizes CBI as a strategic tool, a behavioral construct, and a dynamic process that shapes its self-identification, stakeholder perceptions, and global brand coherence. The proposed CBI Ecosystem Model provides scholars and practitioners an integrative structure to support brand consistency, adaptability, and cultural relevance across diverse international markets.

Keywords: corporate brand identity, multinational enterprises, strategic branding, brand management, corporate communications, stakeholder perception.

Introduction and problem statement. In our era of intensified globalization, cultural mobility, and digital hyperconnectivity, the concept of Corporate Brand Identity (CBI) has emerged as a central paradigm in the strategic management and marketing of multinational enterprises (MNEs). CBI embodies the unique set of values and characteristics that define a company and distinguish it in the minds of stakeholders [1, p. 1041; 2, p.4]. When managed effectively, a strong corporate brand identity provides sustainable competitive advantage and multiple organizational benefits, from customer loyalty to financial performance [2, p 10; 3, p.510]. Indeed, many authors recognize corporate brands as invaluable intangible assets capable of maximizing revenues and stakeholder trust across global markets [3, p. 512; 4, p. 672]. Notably, CBI is no longer perceived as a static visual representation of a company, but rather as a strategic, multifaceted, and dynamic asset that transmits the essence of the organization both internally and externally [1, p. 1042; 5, p. 248]. Furthermore, recent studies emphasize that CBIs are created and shaped by multiple stakeholders over time, rather than controlled solely by managers, emphasizing the flowing, adaptive nature of CBI in today's MNEs [6, p. 366; 7, p. 721]. Despite scattered efforts to consolidate the field (e.g., the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix by Ind & Schultz, 2013 [14]), a notable **research gap** in the academic literature still remains; namely, a lack of systematization of the various schools of thought that inform CBI, an absence of a unified theoretical model that captures its dynamic, strategic, and behavioral dimensions, as well as limited

exploration of CBI as a system of managerial aspects rather than separate disciplines. Thus, multidisciplinary research of the present study draws from a range of academic fields—such as marketing, strategic management, organizational behavior etc., each of which contributes distinct conceptual frameworks of CBI [15, p. 351; 8, p. 733]. While such breadth is useful for mapping the landscape, this study moves a step further toward interdisciplinarity, which is characterized by the integration of disciplinary insights into a unified theoretical framework [16, p.15].

Analysis of recent research and publications. Among the authors that made some of the most impactful contributions to the development of CBI theoretical frameworks are such prominent names of the world's academic community as John M.T. Balmer, Macken Schultz, T.C. Melewar, Nicholas Ind, Stephen Greaser, K. L. Keller, J-N. Kapferer, Joep Cornelisse and many others. But despite its widely acknowledged importance, the academic research on CBI remains fragmented, largely due to the absence of a unifying theoretical framework. Academic literature contains a variety of perspectives rooted in marketing, organizational behavior, communication, design, cultural studies, and economics, leading to a multitude of conceptual interpretations without a cohesive outline (Fetscherin M., Usunier J.-C. [8]). For example, brand management research often stresses external aspects, such as brand image, reputation, and customer-based brand equity (Keller K.L., Brexendorf T. O. [3], Abratt R., Kleyn N. [9], Balmer J.M.T., Greyser S.A. [10]), while organizational theories focus on internal features, like culture,

values, and employee self-identification with the corporate brand (Albert S., Whetten D.A. [11]). This multidisciplinary origin of CBI has led to terminology that quite significantly overlap conceptually: “corporate identity”, “corporate brand,” “organizational identity,” to name just a few, which are closely related with each other but often studied separately (Melewar T.C., Karaosmanoglou E. [12], Balmer J.M.T., Greyser S.A. [10]). While such a pluralism might reflect the richness of the concept, studies such as Fetscherin & Usunier (2012) [8] argue that it presents a number of challenges, such as a lack of definitional clarity, inconsistencies in the use of core terminology, and a somehow underdeveloped theoretical background. Furthermore, existing studies tend to examine corporate brand identity through the lens of isolated disciplines, rarely addressing its systemic and integrative nature (Amoozad M.H. et al [13]).

Objectives of the article. Addressing the existing research gap, the aim of the present study is to contribute to the theoretical consolidation of the Corporate Brand Identity ecosystem by developing an integrative, interdisciplinary framework that reflects the complexity and strategic importance of the concept in multinational enterprises. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to: 1. Identify and synthesize the most influential theories across disciplines that form the theoretical backbone of the concept, and contribute to the understanding of corporate brand identity; 2. Critically examine, how CBI functions as a system within the managerial context: as a tool and a symbolic communication mechanism, a process, a behavioral construct; 3. Map a conceptual model that integrates these perspectives into a coherent ecosystem. By addressing these objectives, the present article seeks to bring greater conceptual clarity and academic consistency to a field that is both practically significant and theoretically scattered.

Results of the study. Theoretical Ecosystem of Corporate Brand Identity.

1. In the interdisciplinary examination of CBI from the perspective of **Marketing and Consumer Behavior**, theories from psychology and economics provide vital insights into how individuals perceive corporate brands and interact with them. In our opinion, the most fundamental frameworks in this context are Behaviorism and Behavioral Economics as they help explaining how various stakeholders (including consumers, partners, employees, investors, governments, and non-governmental organizations) form cognitive and emotional associations with CBI. The most fundamental studies that shaped **Behaviorism** were conducted at the beginning of XX century by Ivan Pavlov (1927) and Burrhus Frederic Skinner (1938), and postulate that all behaviors are learned through interaction with the environment, primarily via classical conditioning [17] and operant conditioning [18] respectively. Applied to branding, behaviorist principles suggest that repeated positive experiences with a brand, such as quality, reliability,

or emotional gratification, can condition stakeholders to develop favorable attitudes toward it. In marketing contexts, this conditioning eventually stimulates building brand loyalty [19, p. 57]. Consequently, **Behavioral Economics** integrates insights from the field of Psychology into economic models, particularly focusing on how human behavior can often deviate from the accepted norms of rationality [20, 21]. For example, the concept of loss aversion assumes that individuals tend to feel the pain of losses more intensely than the pleasure of equivalent gains [22]. Behavioral economics has proven particularly valuable in marketing strategy and consumer behavior analysis by acknowledging that brand-related decisions are often emotional, contextual, and shaped by subconscious biases [19]. In B2B models, decision-makers may dwell on brand reputation, references, or past experience when choosing between corporate suppliers and partners [23]. For investors, a strong and consistent CBI may serve as a background for organizational competence and credibility, especially when operating on foreign volatile markets. At the same time, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) evaluate brand identity through the lens of social and ethical behavior, while for internal stakeholder, behavioral reinforcement strategies can align them with brand values [19].

Furthermore, insights from marketing and consumer psychology offer comprehensive frameworks for understanding how brands obtain symbolic, emotional, and perceptual meaning. Thus, Keller’s **Customer-Based Brand Equity model** [24] emphasizes the importance of building a brand from the consumer’s perspective. The model is structured as a pyramid with four ascending stages: brand identity, brand meaning, brand responses, and brand resonance. Progressing through these stages, brands can cultivate strong equity, resulting in stronger customer loyalty, lower marketing costs, and the ability to establish premium pricing. The strength of a brand here is determined by how effectively it exists in the minds of customers, influencing their preferences, decisions, and, eventually, loyalty [25]. Moreover, in a multinational context, consistency in brand meaning across cultures, while allowing for a certain degree of adaptation, is crucial to building equity. The concept of **Brand Personality** refers to the set of human traits associated with a brand [26], where consumers often evaluate brands as if they were people. According to Aaker’s Brand Personality Scale, five key dimensions define brand personality, and these dimensions enable consumers to form emotional attachments to brands, particularly when the perceived personality aligns with their self-image or aspirations [27]. Consequently, in B2C and B2B markets, a consistent and appealing brand personality enhances trust and likability, encouraging long-term loyalty. For NGOs and governments, brands with personality traits aligned with ethics, responsibility, or reliability are more likely to attract collaboration and positive public perception. **Brand Identity Theory** focuses on the core essence of what a

brand stands for: its values, purpose, visual and verbal codes, and unique positioning [28; 29]. Unlike brand image, which is externally perceived, brand identity is internally constructed and serves as the foundation of brand strategy. A strong brand identity becomes a guiding model for all marketing communications and helps in creating a consistent image in the minds of stakeholders. It ensures that the brand's message is clear, cohesive, and reflective of its core values. Therefore, well-defined identity aligns internal culture and external brand communication, fostering credibility and authenticity [1]. In B2B markets, brand identity guides relationship-building, helping firms express their value propositions clearly to partners and clients, while for governments and NGOs, identity signals organizational values such as innovation, sustainability, or integrity – crucial to stakeholder trust and legitimacy.

2. International Business Theories in the ecosystem of CBI studies provide critical insights into how organizations navigate and establish their brands across diverse markets and cultures. **Uppsala Internationalization Model** states that firms internationalize incrementally, expanding into foreign markets through a series of stages that reflect increasing commitment and learning experience [28]. Initially, companies enter markets that are psychically closer: those with similar language, culture, and business practices. Gradually, as they accumulate knowledge and resources, the companies can venture into more distant markets. Therefore, by starting in culturally similar markets, firms can test and refine their brand identity with less risk, ensuring that they maintain core brand values throughout the expansion process. Step by step, internationalization enables firms to allocate resources strategically, building brand equity and avoiding uncontrolled growth. **Dunning's Eclectic Paradigm**, also known as the OLI Framework, integrates three factors that influence a firm's international expansion: ownership advantages (O), location advantages (L), and internalization advantages (I) [29]. Applying OLI to CBI, we may assume that a well-established brand identity serves as a critical ownership advantage, facilitating entry into new markets by providing recognition and trust among consumers. Moreover, aligning with favorable location advantages, companies can enhance their brand identity by associating with the positive attributes of a host country, such as high-skilled craftsmanship or technological innovations, thereby strengthening their global positioning. Finally, maintaining control over branding activities ensures consistency and authenticity across markets, preserving the integrity of the corporate brand identity. We may conclude, therefore, that integrating insights from the Uppsala Internationalization Model and Dunning's Eclectic Paradigm enables companies to strategically develop and manage their corporate brand identity in international markets. By understanding the stages of internationalization and the advantages influencing market entry strategies, organizations can make more informed decisions that enhance brand equity and reinforces long-term success overseas.

3. Strategic Management and Organizational Behavior theories provide essential perspectives on how companies build and sustain their brands, highlight the dual influence of internal capabilities and external pressures in shaping corporate brand identity. **Resource-Based View** states that firms achieve sustained competitive advantage by developing and protecting strategic resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable [30; 31]. From this perspective, corporate brand identity is not merely a communication artifact but a strategic resource on its own; an intangible asset that can influence stakeholder behavior and support market positioning. In global contexts, MNEs that leverage their brand identity as a strategic asset can reduce cultural friction and increase their legitimacy in local markets. **Institutional Theory** provides a complementary point of view, examining how organizations are influenced by the normative, cultural, and regulatory matters in their external environment [32, 33]. It states that organizations adopt certain practices and identities to align with societal expectations and secure legitimacy, both of which are vital condition for survival and success of an enterprise. From a corporate branding perspective, institutional pressures shape how brand identity must be constructed and presented. For instance, organizations may incorporate sustainability, diversity, or transparency into their brand identity not only because these are their internal values, but because they reflect the dominant institutional paradigm in their specific market [33]. **Dynamic Capabilities Theory** offers a valuable framework for understanding how firms, particularly MNEs, continuously adapt their resources and strategies (including brand identity) in response to rapidly changing environments. Developed by Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997) [34], this theory emphasizes a firm's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external capabilities to address changing market conditions and technological disruptions. In the context of CBI, dynamic capabilities are critical for maintaining brand relevance, consistency, and authenticity in the face of global expansion, market volatility, shifts in cultural trends, and stakeholder expectations, and means being aligned with market trends and external perceptions, anticipating reputational risks and opportunities [35], adjusting communication strategies, product portfolios, or positioning to reflect new realities while preserving brand cohesiveness [36].

4. Culture and Psychology Theories, in their turn, help MNEs to maintain a globally coherent brand identity while locally adapting it to resonate with cultural norms and consumer expectations. Thus, **Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory** offers empirical comparative tools for anticipating stakeholder expectations and behavior in various countries and managing brand expression with regard to cultural sensitivity. It identifies six dimensions that differentiate national cultures and influence organizational behavior and consumer preferences [37, 38]. For instance, Power Distance affects responses to authority: brands

emphasizing hierarchy resonate more in high-power distance cultures, while transparent, egalitarian branding suits low-power distance ones. Individualism vs. Collectivism informs whether branding should highlight personal success or communal values and Uncertainty Avoidance shapes preferences for stability versus innovation. Masculinity vs. Femininity influences whether brands should emphasize performance and success or empathy and aesthetics, while Long- vs. Short-Term Orientation affects branding strategies tied to sustainability or tradition. Finally, Indulgence vs. Restraint indicates whether messaging should focus on lifestyle and pleasure or discipline and moderation. Similarly, Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (1997) developed their **Trompenaars' Seven Dimensions of Culture** with seven cultural dimensions to explain variations in communication, authority, and relationships across national cultures [39], and the two frameworks provide MNEs with practical guidance on how to adjust tone, positioning, and relational cues in different markets while reinforcing the overarching brand promise – a systematic basis for anticipating cultural preferences, avoiding symbolic missteps, and fostering authenticity across markets.

In addition to strategic and cultural frameworks, theories from social psychology and cultural studies offer crucial insight into how corporate brand identities resonate on a symbolic and emotional level. **Social Identity Theory**, developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979) [40], proposes that individuals derive part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups. This drive for favorable identity associations extends to brands, which often serve as symbolic markers of group affiliation [41]. Corporate brand identity thus becomes a platform for collective identification where stakeholders who identify with a brand tend to display loyalty and emotional attachment often irrationally disregarding competitors [42]. Holt's **Cultural Branding Theory**, argues that iconic brands achieve cultural prominence not merely by offering functional value, but by addressing cultural contradictions and embodying identity myths that resonate with prevailing tensions in a society. Thus, successful brands construct and maintain emotionally charged narratives that resolve ideological tensions, such as individualism vs. conformity or tradition vs. progress [43]. For MNEs, the corporate brand can function as a transcultural myth carrier, adapting identity myths across different markets while maintaining symbolic coherence.

5. Communications and Semiotics Theories interrelated with Culture and Psychology and provide essential frameworks for understanding how brands convey meaning and connect with their audience. **Integrated Marketing Communications** theory emphasizes the coordination and integration of all marketing communication tools, media, and sources within a company into a seamless program to maximize the impact on consumers and other end-users at minimal cost [44]. At the same time, Cornelissen's

Corporate Communication theory focuses on the strategic management of communication between an organization and its various stakeholders. Effective corporate communication aligns the organization's vision, culture, and image, thus strengthening its brand identity [45]. **Semiotics**, the study of signs, symbols and codes, and their use or interpretation, offers a profound understanding of how brands create and communicate meaning. This theory examines how various elements (such as logos, colors, packaging, and advertisements) serve as signs that transmit specific messages to consumers [46]. Applying the narratives from communications and semiotics we may conclude that brands must actively manage the meanings attached to their identity through corporate communications strategy and symbolic representation, ensuring that messaging and visual identity elements convey coherent meanings across all the touch-points, thus providing brand clarity and memorability while eliminating cognitive dissonance in the minds of stakeholders, and sensitivity to cultural semiotics and communication norms.

Toward an Interdisciplinary Model of Corporate Brand Identity. Having reviewed and analyzed a wide range of theoretical perspectives from above-discussed disciplines, we are now in a position to systematize the multidisciplinary theoretical concepts of CBI into a unified interdisciplinary model: The 3D-CBI Ecosystem, which is intended as a comprehensive theoretical framework that helps MNEs understand, build, and manage their corporate brand identity across dynamic global environments. While existing frameworks, such as the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix [14], provide a robust structure for internal – external brand alignment, the suggested in the present study Model offers a complementary approach that organizes key theoretical contributions into three fundamental and interrelated categories: CBI as a Strategic Tool, CBI as a Behavioral Construct, and CBI as a Dynamic Process. In this way, the Model moves beyond structural alignment to consider functional and temporal, dynamics of brand identity formation and management interrelated with the perception of it by the major groups of stakeholders. **CBI as a Strategic Tool** captures CBI as a vital resource, designed and implemented to support competitive advantage, strategic positioning, and stakeholders' alignment of an enterprise. From this perspective, corporate brand identity serves as a symbolic and communicative asset that reflects the core of an organization's purpose, culture, and value proposition. Thus, MNEs must identify what their CBI is: what symbolic resources and values they possess that can be translated into strategic tools. Visual consistency, symbolic authenticity, and meaning alignment are critical here as the brand becomes part of the company's internal capabilities. **CBI as a Behavioral Construct** addresses how CBI is perceived, experienced, and cognitively processed by internal and external stakeholders. The knowledge from the theories in this group help explain how brand identity influences and is influenced by behavioral responses,

emotions, biases, and cultural filters. Understanding CBI as a behavioral construct requires deep insight into stakeholder psychology, culture, and experiences and environments. Here, segmentation, cultural adaptation, and emotional resonance become central aspects of CBI management. **CBI as a Dynamic Process** that CBI is not static and constantly evolves. This category captures the transformational and adaptive dimension of CBI as it progresses over time in response to organizational growth, market shifts, cultural changes, and stakeholder feedback. Under these conditions, CBI is seen as a process of ongoing alignment and reconfiguration while preserving its original true core. Managing CBI as a process, companies must monitor how their brand is being interpreted, realign values, and ensure internal and external coherence as they scale globally.

It is important to mention that the suggested 3D-CBI Ecosystem Model does not assert rigid theoretical boundaries. Depending on the context, many theories can be interpreted through more than one lens. For instance, Social Identity Theory may function as a behavioral explanation of consumer perception in some cases, while in others it informs a brand evolution process driven by changing group associations and societal values. In other words, cultural constructs shape both the tools of adaptation, the processes of localization, and the lens through which stakeholders assess brand authenticity. Similarly, communication and impression management serve as tools for strategic influence, but also evolve over time as part of branding processes, and shape stakeholder perceptions and decisions.

Hence, we may advocate that the value and the strength of the suggested Model lies in its applicability and adaptability, helping MNEs navigate the complexity of brand identity management through an integrated yet flexible structure. For academics, it offers a consolidated mode for studying CBI within and across disciplines, facilitating more precise theoretical engagement and empirical investigation. For practitioners, particularly those managing MNE brands, it provides a diagnostic and strategic framework for understanding how brand identity functions, evolves, and influences decisions across stakeholders, markets, and organizational contexts.

The illustration above provides visual representation of the 3D-CBI Ecosystem Model through where each part of the circle represents one of the three conceptual lenses: CBI as a Strategic Tool, CBI as a Behavioral Construct, and CBI as a Dynamic Process. The diagram shows that each theoretical aspect overlaps partially with the others and theories are positioned based on interpretive use rather than as static entries in one group. Shared theories like Social Identity Theory and Cultural Branding Theory appear across two domains, reflecting the fluid and context-dependent nature of theoretical applications in corporate brand identity management.

Conclusions. Present article contributes to the theoretical and practical understanding of Corporate Brand Identity (CBI) by synthesizing its complex, multidisciplinary foundations into a cohesive interdisciplinary model. Through a critical examination

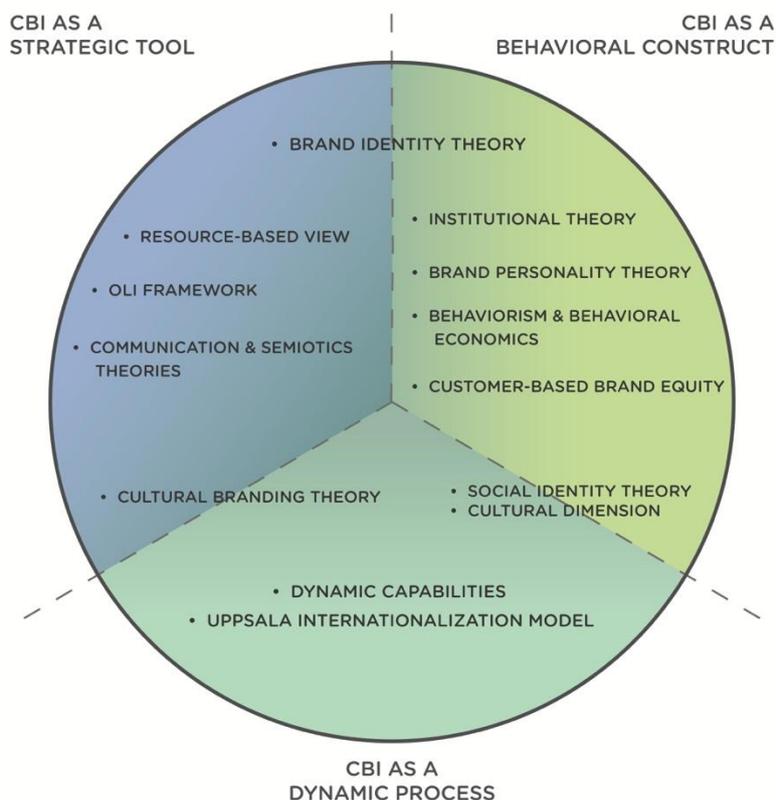


Figure 1. 3D-CBI Ecosystem Model

Source: Developed by the author

of diverse theories spanning strategic management, marketing, behavioral science, communication, ethics, and cultural studies, we have demonstrated that CBI is not a singular construct confined to one academic domain, but rather a multifaceted phenomenon operating simultaneously as a strategic tool, a developmental process, and a behavioral decision-making mechanism. Our proposed model builds upon and complements earlier frameworks by offering a functional synthesis that reflects the evolving reality of branding in multinational contexts. In contrast to static or discipline-bound views, this article emphasizes that CBI must be understood in terms of its diverse managerial expressions, each shaped by different yet interrelated theoretical approach. From a theoretical standpoint, this interdisciplinary model contributes to the literature by helping to clarify conceptual ambiguities, unify fragmented perspectives, and identify core theoretical anchors that

can support further empirical work. It also responds to longstanding calls in the branding literature for more integrative and cross-disciplinary approaches. From a practical perspective, the model serves as a diagnostic and strategic framework for brand managers operating in complex, multicultural environments, enabling them to align internal values with external perceptions while navigating evolving stakeholder expectations. Ultimately, the article reinforces the argument that CBI is not merely an abstract organizational ideal, but a living system of meaning and identity – one that must be continually shaped, communicated, and ethically managed in the context of globalization, digital transformation, and cultural diversity. By offering a structured yet flexible lens through which to interpret and apply CBI theory, our framework provides both academics and practitioners with a robust foundation for engaging with one of the most critical strategic assets of the modern enterprise.

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МІЖДИСЦИПЛІНАРНА ЕКОСИСТЕМА УПРАВЛІННЯ КОРПОРАТИВНОЮ ІДЕНТИЧНІСТЮ БРЕНДУ БАГАТОНАЦІОНАЛЬНИХ ПІДПРИЄМСТВ

Анотація. У запропонованій статті подано міждисциплінарну концептуалізацію корпоративної ідентичності бренду (КІБ) у контексті діяльності мультинаціональних підприємств. КІБ дедалі частіше розглядається не лише як візуальне або комунікативне представлення компанії, а як динамічний, стратегічний та психологічно вкорінений організаційний актив, що активно формує сприйняття стейкхолдерів, ідентифікацію працівників і довгострокову ефективність підприємства. По мірі того, як компанії стикаються з викликами глобальної експансії, культурного розмаїття та цифрової трансформації, здатність визначати, управляти та узгоджувати єдину корпоративну ідентичність у різних географічних контекстах стає критично важливою для досягнення конкурентної переваги та довіри з боку зацікавлених сторін. Попри зростаючу актуальність, наукова література з КІБ залишається достатньо фрагментованою. Дослідження у сферах стратегічного менеджменту, маркетингу, організаційної поведінки та комунікацій часто розглядають корпоративну ідентичність ізольовано одна від одної, що призводить до дублювання термінів, розбіжностей у концептуальних моделях і відсутності теоретичної узгодженості. Така фрагментація ускладнює формування цілісного розуміння того, як КІБ діє як міжфункціональний конструкт у глобальному бізнес-середовищі. З метою усунення існуючих прогалин у наукових дослідженнях, дана стаття узагальнює ключові теоретичні підходи та пропонує цілісну міждисциплінарну модель, яка концептуалізує КІБ крізь три основні управлінські вирази: як стратегічний інструмент, як динамічний процес і як поведінковий механізм прийняття рішень. Запропонована модель інтегрує наративи з найбільш фундаментальних та актуальних теорій, запозичених із різних дисциплін. Таким чином, вона забезпечує як теоретичну чіткість, так і практичну користь для управління корпоративною ідентичністю бренду в умовах складних організаційних процесів. Крім того, у статті запропоновано ключові напрями для майбутніх досліджень, зокрема потребу в емпіричній перевірці та подальшому розвитку моделі в різних бізнес-контекстах.

Ключові слова: корпоративна ідентичність бренду, мультинаціональні підприємства, стратегічний брендинг, управління брендом, корпоративні комунікації, сприйняття стейкхолдерів.