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**Leadership and Strategic Organization in New Markets:
Management Approaches for Building Business Identity from
Scratch**

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Patras, Greece, June 2026

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Abstract

This thesis examines the influence of business strategy and leadership on the development of a corporate identity and business presence in emerging international markets. The thesis is particularly concentrated on the instances in which a company is required to establish its operations from the ground up, without the benefit of pre-existing local structures, assembled teams, established procedures, or established recognition in the host market. International expansion is not merely a strategic decision to enter a new country; it is a multifaceted process that involves the organization's structure, management guidance, adaptation, and the development of a corporate identity.

The paper is predicated on a qualitative secondary case study of iStorm, a company that operates in the premium technology retail sector. The rationale for selecting this case is that it establishes a connection between strategic management, leadership, organizational design, operational processes, organizational culture, customer experience, and brand identity with respect to international expansion. The methodology of this study is predicated on the examination of secondary sources, including academic literature, public corporate information, business publications, and industry sources. The analysis is thematic, theory-driven, and based on the primary themes of the literature review.

The results of the investigation suggest that the initial strategic decision to expand is insufficient to ensure successful entry into new markets. This necessitates the establishment of local teams, operational planning, process development, knowledge transfer, and continuous organizational learning, in addition to a clear strategic vision and strong leadership. Additionally, it is underscored that corporate identity in the technology retail sector is not solely determined by communication or marketing; rather, it is established through the consistency of operational practices, employee conduct, service quality, and the customer experience. The paper concludes that internationalization from the ground up should be regarded as a dynamic process that involves the formulation of identity, strategic implementation, organizational structuring, and leadership.

Keywords: international expansion, strategic management, leadership, organizational design, organizational culture, corporate identity, brand experience, iStorm, technology retail.

Περίληψη

Η παρούσα εργασία εξετάζει την επίδραση της επιχειρηματικής στρατηγικής και της ηγεσίας στην ανάπτυξη εταιρικής ταυτότητας και επιχειρηματικής παρουσίας σε

αναδυόμενες διεθνείς αγορές. Η εργασία εστιάζει ιδιαίτερα στις περιπτώσεις όπου μια εταιρεία καλείται να εδραιώσει τις δραστηριότητές της από το μηδέν, χωρίς να διαθέτει προϋπάρχουσες τοπικές δομές, οργανωμένες ομάδες, καθιερωμένες διαδικασίες ή αναγνωρισιμότητα στην αγορά υποδοχής. Η διεθνής επέκταση δεν είναι απλώς μια στρατηγική απόφαση για είσοδο σε μια νέα χώρα· είναι μια πολύπλευρη διαδικασία που περιλαμβάνει τη δομή του οργανισμού, την καθοδήγηση της διοίκησης, την προσαρμογή και την ανάπτυξη εταιρικής ταυτότητας.

Η εργασία βασίζεται σε μια ποιοτική δευτερογενή μελέτη περίπτωσης της iStorm, μιας εταιρείας που δραστηριοποιείται στον τομέα της λιανικής πώλησης τεχνολογίας υψηλής ποιότητας. Ο λόγος για την επιλογή αυτής της περίπτωσης είναι ότι δημιουργεί μια σύνδεση μεταξύ στρατηγικής διαχείρισης, ηγεσίας, οργανωτικού σχεδιασμού, λειτουργικών διαδικασιών, οργανωτικής κουλτούρας, εμπειρίας πελατών και εταιρικής ταυτότητας σε σχέση με τη διεθνή επέκταση. Η μεθοδολογία της παρούσας μελέτης βασίζεται στην εξέταση δευτερογενών πηγών, συμπεριλαμβανομένης της ακαδημαϊκής βιβλιογραφίας, των δημόσιων εταιρικών πληροφοριών, των επιχειρηματικών εκδόσεων και των πηγών του κλάδου. Η ανάλυση είναι θεματική, βασίζεται στη θεωρία και στηρίζεται στα κύρια θέματα της βιβλιογραφικής ανασκόπησης.

Τα αποτελέσματα της έρευνας υποδηλώνουν ότι η αρχική στρατηγική απόφαση για επέκταση δεν αρκεί για να εξασφαλίσει την επιτυχή είσοδο σε νέες αγορές. Αυτό απαιτεί τη δημιουργία τοπικών ομάδων, επιχειρησιακό σχεδιασμό, ανάπτυξη διαδικασιών, μεταφορά γνώσης και συνεχή οργανωτική μάθηση, πέραν ενός σαφούς στρατηγικού οράματος και ισχυρής ηγεσίας. Επιπλέον, υπογραμμίζεται ότι η εταιρική ταυτότητα στον τομέα της λιανικής πώλησης τεχνολογίας δεν καθορίζεται αποκλειστικά από την επικοινωνία ή το μάρκετινγκ, αλλά διαμορφώνεται μέσω της συνέπειας των επιχειρησιακών πρακτικών, της συμπεριφοράς των εργαζομένων, της ποιότητας των υπηρεσιών και της εμπειρίας του πελάτη. Η εργασία καταλήγει στο συμπέρασμα ότι η διεθνοποίηση από τη βάση προς τα πάνω πρέπει να θεωρείται ως μια δυναμική διαδικασία που περιλαμβάνει τη διαμόρφωση της ταυτότητας, τη στρατηγική υλοποίηση, την οργανωτική δομή και την ηγεσία.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: διεθνής επέκταση, στρατηγική διαχείριση, ηγεσία, οργανωτικός σχεδιασμός, οργανωτική κουλτούρα, εταιρική ταυτότητα, εμπειρία μάρκας, iStorm, λιανική πώληση τεχνολογίας.

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1. Introduction

In today's business environment, companies rarely operate within stable or clearly defined boundaries. Markets are increasingly interconnected, competition is intense, and firms are often pushed to look beyond their domestic environment in search of new opportunities. International expansion is therefore one of the most important strategic choices for companies that want to strengthen their competitive position, reach new customer groups, and reduce their dependence on a single market (Hitt, Ireland and Hoskisson, 2020). At first glance, this may appear to be mainly a question of growth: a company identifies a new market and enters it. In practice, however, the process is far more demanding.

International expansion is not simply the geographical transfer of products, services, or business models. It is a strategic and organizational process that requires planning, knowledge of the external environment, and the ability to respond to different institutional, cultural, and consumer conditions (Johanson and Vahlne, 1977; Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1989). The classic model developed by Johanson and Vahlne (1977) is particularly useful here, because it reminds us that internationalization is not usually completed in one step. Firms learn gradually. They gain knowledge about foreign markets, adjust their decisions, and increase their commitment as their experience grows. This point is important for the present study, because the central issue is not only whether a company enters a new market, but how it learns to operate there.

The complexity becomes even clearer when a company enters a foreign market without an already established local structure. In such cases, the firm does not only need to sell products or services to a new group of customers. It must also create the conditions that allow it to function. This involves building organizational structures, staffing local teams, defining responsibilities, developing operational procedures, and creating mechanisms of coordination and control. It also involves something less visible, but equally important: transferring, adapting, and sometimes renegotiating the company's culture in a new setting. A company may have a clear identity in its home market, but this identity still has to be understood, accepted, and reproduced in the host market. This is not automatic. It requires work. It is also connected to the need for organizational legitimacy,

since internationally expanding firms must be accepted by employees, customers, partners, and other stakeholders in the host country (Kostova and Zaheer, 1999).

These issues become especially relevant in the retail sector. Retail expansion is not only about choosing a country or opening a store. It is about creating a consistent customer experience in a different environment. Service quality, store atmosphere, employee behaviour, brand image, and local expectations all shape the success of the new presence (Alexander and Doherty, 2009). In other words, a retailer does not simply transfer products abroad. It transfers a whole way of operating. This includes the design of the store, the service routines, the behaviour expected from employees, the communication of the brand, and the way customers are expected to experience the company. Corporate identity and brand are therefore not secondary elements. They are strategic resources, because they help the company differentiate itself and build trust-based relationships with customers (Aaker, 1996).

This is the point at which the present study locates its main interest. Successful entry into new international markets does not depend only on economic, commercial, or geographical factors. These matter, of course. But they are not enough. Expansion also depends on how leadership defines the direction of the organization, how people and processes are organized, how uncertainty is managed, and how a coherent corporate identity is created in practice. Leadership, strategic organization, and corporate identity are therefore treated in this dissertation as interconnected dimensions of international expansion, especially when a company is trying to establish itself in a new market from the ground up.

The international expansion of firms has been widely examined in the literature as a strategy for growth, competitiveness, and the exploitation of opportunities in foreign markets. Earlier studies placed particular emphasis on the motives for internationalization, country selection, entry modes, and the gradual accumulation of knowledge and experience from the external environment (Johanson and Vahlne, 1977; Root, 1994). More recent approaches, however, suggest that internationalization is not always a neat or linear process. It may involve repeated decisions, organizational learning, network relationships, uncertainty, and continuous adaptation to changing market conditions (Martín, Chetty and Bai, 2021; Romero, Durst and Garcia, 2023). This more dynamic view

is useful for the present dissertation, because it allows international expansion to be examined not as a single decision, but as an ongoing process of organizing, learning, adapting, and building identity in a new market.

However, although international expansion has been widely examined as a strategic choice, less attention has been given to the practical managerial and organizational work through which this choice becomes operational reality. This is where the issue becomes more interesting. A company does not expand simply by deciding to enter another market. It has to organize that entry. It has to build routines, assign responsibilities, train people, communicate its identity, and learn from the local environment.

This becomes particularly important when the company enters a foreign market without an already established local structure. In such a case, the firm is not only dealing with market selection or entry mode. It is also dealing with organization, learning, legitimacy, leadership, and adaptation to a new institutional and cultural environment (Barkema, Bell and Pennings, 1996; Kostova and Zaheer, 1999; Chetty, Martín and Bai, 2024). The process is therefore both strategic and practical. It involves decisions made at the level of management, but it also becomes visible in everyday operations: in stores, in service routines, in staff behaviour, and in the way customers experience the company.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine how leadership, strategic planning, and organizational practices contribute to the creation of an operational presence and corporate identity in a new international market. More specifically, the study focuses on the case of iStorm and its expansion from the Greek market to the Cypriot market. This distinction is important. Greece is not treated here as a new international market for iStorm, but as the company's base market and point of reference. Cyprus, by contrast, is examined as the international expansion market in which an already developed retail model is transferred, adapted, and put into practice.

International expansion is therefore not treated in this study merely as a strategic growth choice. It is approached as a process of organization, adaptation, and value creation in a new business environment. This approach is consistent with contemporary literature, which emphasizes that internationalization requires market knowledge, organizational capabilities, strategic flexibility, and effective managerial leadership

(Johanson and Vahlne, 2009; Martín, Chetty and Bai, 2021; de Diego Ruiz, Almodóvar and Birkinshaw, 2024). In the case of iStorm, the central question is not only why the company expanded to Cyprus, but how such an expansion can be understood in organizational terms.

Specifically, the study examines the expansion of iStorm into the Cypriot market by focusing on managerial coordination, the creation and transfer of internal processes, the staffing and training of teams, the shaping of organizational culture, and the adaptation of corporate identity to a related but still distinct market environment. Cyprus is close to Greece in several cultural and linguistic respects. Still, it remains a separate market. This makes the case particularly useful, because it shows that even expansion into a relatively familiar environment requires planning, coordination, learning, and adaptation.

To achieve this purpose, the thesis sets out a number of research objectives that define the scope of the study and guide the analysis. These objectives relate to leadership, organizational strategy, knowledge transfer, and the creation of corporate identity when a company expands from its base market into a new international environment.

- i. The research objectives of this thesis are as follows:
- ii. To analyze the role of leadership when a company enters a new international market, particularly under conditions of uncertainty and limited local experience.
- iii. To examine the strategic and operational decisions involved in the initial phase of expansion and their contribution to the creation of a new operational presence.
- iv. To investigate how organizational processes, roles, internal systems, and coordination mechanisms are established when there is no prior local infrastructure.
- v. To study the contribution of staffing, training, and knowledge transfer to the formation of local teams and the operational stabilization of the company.
- vi. To examine how organizational culture and corporate identity are transferred, shaped, and adapted in a new international, cultural, and business environment.
- vii. To identify the key challenges, management practices, and lessons that can be drawn from iStorm’s expansion from Greece to Cyprus.

Based on the above purpose and objectives, the research questions serve as the central guide for the study. They shape the literature review, the methodological approach, and the case analysis. The central research question is formulated as follows:

How can the process of a premium technology retail company expanding from the Greek to the Cypriot market be analyzed, using the case of iStorm, in terms of strategic planning, leadership, process development, and corporate identity formation?

To explore this question more fully, the following specific research questions are formulated:

- 1) What strategic rationale can explain iStorm’s expansion into the Cypriot market?
- 2) How does this expansion relate to the transfer of an established retail model from the Greek market to a new international environment?
- 3) What is the role of organizational structure, processes, and the transfer of know-how in establishing a presence in Cyprus?
- 4) How are corporate identity, brand experience, and service quality linked to iStorm’s presence in the Cypriot market?
- 5) What lessons can be drawn from the iStorm case for companies expanding into related but distinct international markets?

The significance of this dissertation can be understood at both the academic and the practical level. Academically, the study contributes to discussions on strategic management, international expansion, strategic leadership, and organizational development. Its main contribution lies in the way it approaches internationalization: not simply as a decision to enter a new market, but as a process through which a company has to organize itself, transfer knowledge, adapt procedures, and build a recognizable corporate presence.

This distinction matters. Much of the international business literature has examined why firms expand, which markets they choose, and which entry modes they adopt. These are important questions. However, the present study focuses more closely on what happens after the decision to expand has been made. How does the company turn this decision into a functioning presence? How are people, processes, services, and brand identity coordinated in a new environment? These questions are particularly relevant in the case of iStorm, where the expansion from the Greek market to the Cypriot market involves the transfer of an already developed premium technology retail model into a related, but still distinct, market context.

The existing literature has shown that international expansion is closely connected to market knowledge, strategic adaptation, organizational learning, and network capabilities (Johanson and Vahlne, 2009; Martín, Chetty and Bai, 2021). More recent approaches also emphasize that internationalization takes place under changing conditions and uncertainty, which means that firms need strategic flexibility and managerial mechanisms that can support adaptation in practice (de Diego Ruiz, Almodóvar and Birkinshaw, 2024). For this reason, the study brings together several theoretical areas: international entrepreneurship, leadership, organizational design, organizational culture, and corporate identity. The aim is not to treat these areas as separate topics, but to show how they interact when a company tries to create and stabilize its presence in a new market.

At the practical level, the dissertation can offer useful insights for businesses, executives, and managers planning to expand beyond their home market, especially when there are no pre-existing local structures. The case of iStorm is useful here because it shows that even expansion into a relatively familiar market, such as Cyprus in relation to Greece, still requires careful preparation. Similar language and cultural proximity may reduce some difficulties, but they do not remove the need for local knowledge, trained staff, clear processes, and operational coordination.

The practical value of the study is particularly relevant for the retail and technology sectors. In these sectors, customer experience, service quality, technical knowledge, brand consistency, and local adaptation are not secondary issues. They are part of the value proposition itself. A customer does not experience the company only through the product. The experience also comes through the store, the staff, the support offered after the purchase, and the overall feeling of reliability and professionalism. This makes organizational preparation especially important.

The literature on international retailing emphasizes that retail companies face specific challenges when they expand beyond their domestic market, because they must balance the need for a consistent corporate identity with the need to adapt to local conditions (Alexander and Doherty, 2009; Dimitrova, Kim and Smith, 2018). Recent research on international retail environments also suggests that companies can combine global identity elements with local cultural adaptation, creating experiences that allow the

brand to remain recognizable while still connecting with the local market (Schau, Akaka and Segabinazzi, 2023). In this sense, the present study can highlight practical lessons related to market-entry preparation, staffing, training, process development, uncertainty management, customer experience, and the maintenance of a coherent but flexible corporate identity in a new international environment.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Strategic Management and Business Development

Strategic management is one of the central concepts in management studies, because it deals with a basic but demanding question: how do organizations decide where they are going, and how do they organize themselves in order to get there? It concerns the

way firms define their long-term direction, assess their internal and external environments, and make decisions about growth, sustainability, and competitive positioning. Strategy, however, should not be understood only as a formal plan written in advance. Mintzberg (1987) famously presents strategy through five dimensions: plan, ploy, pattern, position, and perspective. This is useful because it shows that strategy is not only what a company intends to do, but also what it actually does over time.

This point is particularly relevant for the present dissertation. When a company expands into a new market, strategy cannot remain at the level of intention. It has to be implemented, monitored, adjusted, and sometimes reconsidered as new information appears. In this sense, strategic management involves both formulation and action. It includes the setting of objectives, but also the practical work of turning these objectives into organizational routines, structures, and decisions.

The importance of strategic management is closely connected to the ability of a firm to create and sustain competitive advantage. According to the resource-based view, firms can achieve sustainable competitive advantage when they possess resources that are valuable, rare, difficult to imitate, and non-substitutable (Barney, 1991). These resources may be tangible, such as financial assets or physical infrastructure, but they may also be intangible, such as knowledge, reputation, organizational routines, service quality, or brand identity. In the context of this study, the intangible dimension is particularly important. A retail company expanding abroad does not only rely on products or locations. It also relies on know-how, customer experience, trained staff, and the ability to reproduce a recognizable way of operating.

At the same time, strategic management becomes more demanding under conditions of uncertainty and rapid change. Teece, Pisano and Shuen (1997) argue that firms need dynamic capabilities in order to coordinate, reconfigure, and renew their resources and capabilities in changing environments. This idea helps explain why expansion into a new market should not be viewed simply as an initial strategic decision. It is also a process of implementation, adaptation, and organizational integration. Put simply, the decision to expand is only the beginning. The real test is whether the company can organize itself effectively in the new environment.

Strategic planning is one of the main functions of strategic management, as it translates broad business objectives into more specific priorities, choices, and actions. Through strategic planning, firms examine the external environment, assess market conditions, evaluate competition, identify available resources, and define possible paths for future growth. This process is not limited to producing a written business plan. It also involves judging opportunities and risks, allocating resources, and considering alternative courses of action. Empirical research supports its importance. For example, the meta-analysis by George, Walker and Monster (2019), based on 31 empirical studies, found a positive and statistically significant relationship between strategic planning and organizational performance.

Still, planning has limits. This becomes clear in environments where information is incomplete, changing, or difficult to interpret. Strategic decision-making under uncertainty requires speed, judgement, and flexibility. Eisenhardt and Bourgeois (1988) showed that in dynamic environments, strategic decisions are shaped not only by information and analysis, but also by power relations and political processes within top management. Eisenhardt's (1989) later work on rapid strategic decision-making in high-velocity environments adds an important insight: effective firms do not rely only on slow, linear planning. They combine analysis with experience, multiple sources of information, and the ability to adjust quickly.

This is highly relevant for market entry. A firm entering a new market cannot simply prepare financial targets or sales forecasts and assume that the strategy will unfold smoothly. It must also make decisions about people, internal processes, organizational structure, brand positioning, customer experience, and local adaptation. In practice, strategic planning has to be both structured and flexible. Contemporary approaches to decision-making under uncertainty make a similar point: strategic plans need to be tested, revised, and adapted as new information emerges from the market and the organization itself (Marchau et al., 2019). That is where planning becomes less of a fixed document and more of an ongoing managerial process.

Strategic adaptation is another key dimension of strategic management, especially when a company enters an international market. The firm has to maintain its core strategic identity while also responding to the conditions of the host market. This is not always easy.

The international business literature often describes this as the tension between standardization and adaptation. Standardization allows firms to maintain a unified image, common processes, economies of scale, and consistent positioning. Adaptation, on the other hand, allows them to respond more effectively to local needs, cultural differences, consumer expectations, and institutional conditions (Jain, 1989; Vrontis and Thrassou, 2007).

This tension is particularly important for firms expanding into new markets, because strategic decisions do not concern only the product or service. They also concern the customer experience, marketing, internal processes, leadership style, and corporate identity. Leonidou, Katsikeas and Samiee (2002) point out that the empirical evidence on standardization and adaptation in international marketing strategy is complex and does not support one universal solution. More recent research by Hultman and Oghazi (2024) also suggests that the effectiveness of either standardization or adaptation depends on the strategic fit between the firm, the market, and the type of international activity. In other words, the right balance depends on the case.

For this reason, strategic adaptation should not be understood as a loss of corporate identity. It is better understood as the alignment of the company's core strategic direction with the realities of the new market. This is also reflected in the broader theory of international management, where firms are expected to combine global integration with local responsiveness (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1989; Rugman and Verbeke, 2004). For the present study, this point is central. The expansion of a premium technology retailer from Greece to Cyprus is not simply a question of copying an existing model. It is a question of keeping the core identity recognizable while adjusting the way that identity is organized, communicated, and experienced in a different market.

2.2. International Business Expansion

International expansion is one of the main ways in which firms pursue growth beyond their domestic market. It allows them to reach new customers, increase sales, strengthen their competitive position, and reduce their dependence on one national market. In the international business literature, the motives for expansion have often been

linked to the search for markets, resources, efficiency, and strategic assets, following Dunning’s (1993) classic categorization. This remains useful, because it shows that firms do not expand abroad only in order to sell more. They may also seek knowledge, networks, resources, new capabilities, or access to opportunities that are not available in the home market.

More recent studies build on this view by offering more detailed classifications of internationalization motives, such as selling more, improving inputs, upgrading capabilities, or escaping constraints in the domestic market (Cuervo-Cazurra, Narula and Un, 2015; Benito, 2015). International expansion can also help firms diversify risk, since activity in more than one market reduces reliance on a single economy or customer base. Still, expansion does not automatically lead to better performance. This is an important point. The benefits of internationalization depend on whether the firm can use its resources effectively, manage added complexity, and adapt to local conditions (Hennart, 2007). Recent research also shows that internationalization is closely connected to the accumulation of knowledge, strategic resources, and organizational capabilities that support gradual expansion into foreign markets (Breuillot, Bocquet and Favre-Bonté, 2022).

The choice of entry mode is one of the most important decisions in international expansion. It affects the level of control, cost, risk, speed of entry, and organizational commitment required from the firm. The literature distinguishes between lower-commitment forms, such as exports, licensing, and franchising, and higher-commitment forms, such as strategic alliances, joint ventures, acquisitions, subsidiaries, and greenfield investments, where operations are built from scratch (Anderson and Gatignon, 1986; Root, 1994). Anderson and Gatignon’s (1986) approach remains central because it links entry mode choice to the balance between control, resource commitment, and risk.

Each entry mode has its own advantages and limitations. Exports and contractual arrangements usually require lower investment and less organizational commitment, but they also offer limited control over operations and the customer experience. Joint ventures and alliances can provide access to local knowledge and networks, yet they require coordination with partners and shared decision-making. Acquisitions and subsidiaries offer greater control, but they also involve higher costs, greater risk, and more organizational

complexity (Brouthers, 2013; Morschett, Schramm-Klein and Swoboda, 2010). Recent meta-analyses confirm that entry mode choice is influenced by the firm’s resources, prior international experience, institutional conditions, and expected outcomes after entry (Brouthers and Hennart, 2007; Wan et al., 2023).

Entering a new international market also brings several challenges. These are not limited to the commercial distribution of products or services. A firm has to operate in a different institutional, cultural, competitive, and organizational environment. One of the key concepts in this area is the “liability of foreignness”, which refers to the additional costs and disadvantages faced by foreign firms compared with local competitors, mainly because they lack local knowledge, relationships, and legitimacy in the host country (Zaheer, 1995). This helps explain why a firm that performs well in its home market may still face difficulties abroad.

These challenges can be grouped into four broad categories. First, institutional challenges relate to the legal framework, taxation, labour laws, regulatory requirements, and administrative rules of the host country. Institutional distance between the home and host country can increase uncertainty and affect the decision to enter a market, as firms have to adapt to different systems of rules and practices (Kostova and Zaheer, 1999; Donnelly et al., 2023). Second, cultural challenges concern work culture, communication styles, employee expectations, and consumer behaviour. Barkema, Bell and Pennings (1996) show that cultural barriers can affect organizational learning and the survival of foreign entrants.

Third, consumer and market-related challenges involve local customer needs, purchasing habits, competition, and brand recognition. A company may have a strong identity in its home market, but trust in a new market takes time. It has to be built. Fourth, organizational challenges concern staffing, training, process development, knowledge transfer, and coordination between the parent company and the local team. Cuervo-Cazurra, Maloney and Manrakhan (2007) argue that the difficulties of internationalization do not come only from the external environment, but also from internal constraints within the firm. These challenges become even more visible when the company enters from scratch, without an existing local team, routines, or established corporate presence. In that

case, the firm must adapt to the market while also building the human, operational, and organizational conditions required for a stable presence.

International expansion in retail has some distinctive characteristics compared with other forms of international business. Retailers are in direct contact with the final consumer. As a result, success depends not only on product availability or pricing, but also on the experience created at the point of sale, the functionality of the store, service quality, and the consistency of the brand image. The literature on international retailing emphasizes that when retailers expand abroad, they transfer not only products but also a retail format: the set of practices, processes, systems, and experiences that shape the value offered to the customer (Alexander and Doherty, 2009; Swoboda, Elsner and Morschett, 2014).

The transfer or adaptation of the retail format is therefore a key issue. It affects both operational consistency and local acceptance. In retail, location choice, store design, staff training, inventory management, local marketing, and service quality all matter. Dimitrova, Kim and Smith (2018) note that international retail operations involve specific challenges, including retail format selection, brand management, and adaptation to local markets. Customer experience has also become a central source of competitive advantage, as consumers evaluate not only the product but the whole shopping experience (Bueno et al., 2020). Recent studies further suggest that service quality and store design can help differentiate a business and strengthen customer loyalty to the brand (Faria, Carvalho and Vale, 2022).

2.3. Leadership in International Expansion Environments

Leadership is a central concept in management studies, but it is not always easy to define in a simple way. In broad terms, it refers to the process through which an individual influences, guides, and motivates others toward shared organizational goals. It is not limited to formal authority. A person may hold a managerial position without necessarily exercising effective leadership. Leadership is more closely linked to setting direction, communicating a vision, strengthening commitment, and influencing how people behave within the organization (Yukl, 2013).

The literature presents leadership as a complex phenomenon, shaped by individual characteristics but also by social, organizational, and contextual factors (Northouse, 2021). Although leadership and management are closely connected, they are not the same. Management is mainly concerned with planning, organizing, coordinating, and controlling operations. Leadership, on the other hand, is more strongly associated with vision, change, inspiration, and the motivation of people. Kotter (2001) argues that leadership and management are two different but complementary systems of action. Both are needed. This distinction is useful in the context of international expansion, where a firm does not only need efficient coordination, but also direction, confidence, and the ability to guide people through uncertainty.

Intercultural leadership is especially relevant when firms operate across national markets. It refers to the ability of leaders to communicate with, guide, and coordinate people from different cultural backgrounds. In international business, leadership cannot be separated from the cultural values, social expectations, and workplace practices of each country. The GLOBE study showed that ideas about effective leadership are shaped by cultural dimensions such as attitudes toward hierarchy, collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, autonomy, and participation in decision-making (House et al., 2004). Based on research across 62 societies, the project highlighted the relationship between societal culture, organizational culture, and leadership effectiveness.

For companies expanding internationally, this means that leaders may need to adjust their behaviour to the local context. Employees and customers in different countries may not respond in the same way to communication, authority, collaboration, or service expectations. The literature on global leadership therefore places emphasis on cultural sensitivity, cross-cultural adaptability, and the ability to read different social contexts (Bird and Mendenhall, 2016). Bird and Mendenhall (2016) note that global leadership has developed within the wider field of intercultural management, with growing attention to how leaders adapt to complex international environments. More recent work also suggests that leadership effectiveness in cross-cultural settings depends partly on knowing when communication, motivation, or guidance needs to change (Tsai, 2022). This does not mean abandoning the organization's identity. Rather, it means translating leadership practices into a form that makes sense in the local environment.

Leadership under uncertainty is another important dimension. Entering a new market from scratch is rarely a fully predictable process. The firm may not yet have complete local knowledge, tested procedures, stable routines, or an established team. In such conditions, leadership has to do two things at once: maintain strategic direction and create enough flexibility for adjustment. This is a difficult balance. Too much rigidity can prevent learning, but too much flexibility can create confusion.

The literature on decision-making under uncertainty helps explain this challenge. Eisenhardt (1989) showed that in high-velocity environments, effective organizations make fast decisions not because they ignore analysis, but because they use more immediate information, consider alternatives, and remain flexible during implementation. At the same time, Weick’s (1995) concept of sensemaking is useful because it shows how leaders help organizations interpret unclear situations, give meaning to events, and coordinate action when conditions are uncertain. In practice, people need to understand not only what is changing, but also why it matters.

Recent research on strategic leadership in crises and uncertain environments also points to the need for decisiveness, communication, adaptability, and the ability to manage conflicting demands (Hannah et al., 2009; Schaedler, Vlachy and König, 2021; Förster et al., 2022). For the present study, these ideas are important because international expansion is not only a strategic decision made at the top of the organization. It is also a process that has to be explained, coordinated, and made workable for the people who carry it out in everyday practice.

2.4. Organizational Design and Building Processes from Scratch

Organizational design refers to the way a company shapes its internal structure, roles, procedures, and coordination mechanisms in order to achieve its strategic and operational goals. It is not only about the organizational chart. It is also about how responsibilities are allocated, how decisions are made, how activities are coordinated, how information moves, and how performance is monitored. Galbraith (1974) linked organizational design to the organization’s ability to process information and coordinate interdependent roles and units. Similarly, Mintzberg (1979) showed that organizations are

shaped through choices about division of labour, standardization, hierarchy, and coordination.

The importance of organizational design becomes especially clear when a firm enters a new market and has to create operational stability quickly. Roles need to be defined. Communication channels have to be clear. Procedures, control systems, and decision-making mechanisms must be put in place before everyday operations can run smoothly. Contemporary approaches also treat organizational design as a multidimensional issue involving structure, control, coordination, and the flow of information within the organization (Puranam, Alexy and Reitzig, 2014; Joseph and Gaba, 2024). Recent research on organizational design highlights configuration, control, channelization, and coordination as key areas, confirming that design remains central to understanding how firms operate and adapt.

Operational processes are the everyday mechanisms through which strategy becomes action. They are not just technical instructions or formal manuals. They include routines, workflows, rules, and coordination practices that allow the firm to operate in a consistent and predictable way. The literature on organizational routines is useful here, because it shows how procedures connect knowledge, action, and coordination inside the organization (Nelson and Winter, 1982; Feldman and Pentland, 2003). Feldman and Pentland (2003) argue that routines are not simply fixed patterns. They include both formal structure and practical use, which means they can support stability but also change.

In a new market, operational procedures become particularly important. The company has to establish how key functions will work from the beginning: hiring, training, sales, customer service, store operations, internal communication, reporting, inventory management, financial monitoring, and problem-solving. These procedures create stability and reduce uncertainty during the early setup phase. They also make coordination between the parent company and the local team easier. The literature on strategy implementation makes a similar point: a strategy is not implemented only because it has been well formulated. It also needs organizational mechanisms, suitable structures, clear roles, and continuous managerial monitoring (Hrebiniak, 2006; Holm, Kringelum and Anand, 2025). Holm, Kringelum and Anand (2025) show that successful strategy

implementation depends on the right managerial and organizational levers, not only on the existence of a strategic plan.

In retail, these processes matter even more because the customer sees the results of internal organization directly. Service quality, product availability, response speed, employee communication, and the overall in-store experience are all connected to how the business is organized behind the scenes. A delay in stock, unclear responsibilities, or poorly trained staff can quickly become part of the customer’s experience. Recent studies also show that efficient retail operations can improve customer convenience and experience, reinforcing the link between internal processes and the value perceived by consumers (Kumar and Agrawal, 2024).

Internationally expanding firms must also decide which processes should be transferred from the home market and which should be adapted to the host market. This is linked to the broader tension between global integration and local responsiveness. Standardizing processes can help maintain consistency, control, common quality standards, and corporate identity across markets. Adaptation, however, allows the firm to respond to local institutional, cultural, and operational conditions, which can support acceptance by employees, customers, and other stakeholders (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1989; Kostova, 1999).

The transfer of organizational practices is not mechanical. Kostova (1999) argues that the cross-border transfer of strategic organizational practices depends on the social, organizational, and institutional context in which they are implemented. Kostova and Roth (2002) also show that the adoption of organizational practices by subsidiaries is influenced both by the host-country environment and by the subsidiary’s relationship with the parent company. In simple terms, a process that works well in the home market may still need adjustment before it works in a new setting. Recent studies confirm that the transfer of practices, knowledge, and routines is important for coordination and competitive advantage in multinational firms, but also requires interpretation, adaptation, and local acceptance (Fortwengel, Gutierrez and Kostova, 2023). Firms therefore need to manage common standards and local flexibility at the same time, especially when operating across different institutional contexts (Blind, Jastram and Müller, 2024).

Organizational flexibility and organizational learning are also important when firms operate in unfamiliar or changing environments. When a company enters a new market from scratch, its initial processes, roles, and routines may not fully match the reality of the market. Some things will work. Others will need to change. The company therefore has to gather feedback, revise decisions, learn from mistakes, and adjust its practices as it gains experience.

Organizational learning refers to the process through which organizations acquire, interpret, and use knowledge, changing their behaviour and practices on the basis of experience (Argyris and Schön, 1978; Fiol and Lyles, 1985). This is particularly relevant to internationalization, because knowledge about foreign markets is often gained gradually through experience and interaction with the local environment. Johanson and Vahlne's (1977) internationalization model emphasizes the role of market knowledge and experiential learning in shaping a firm's commitment to foreign markets. More recent approaches also show that organizational learning can influence internationalization performance, as it helps firms use experience from one market to improve later decisions and actions (Bingham and Davis, 2012; Kang, Zhao and Battisti, 2022).

At the same time, flexibility is needed because market conditions do not remain fixed. The dynamic capabilities approach argues that firms must renew and reshape their resources and capabilities in response to changing environments (Teece, Pisano and Shuen, 1997). For a company entering a new market, this means that organizational design should not be treated as something finished once the structure is created. It has to remain open to learning, adjustment, and practical improvement.

2.5. Organizational Culture and Corporate Identity

Organizational culture is a key concept in management and organizational theory. It refers to the shared values, beliefs, rules, symbols, and practices that shape how members of an organization think, behave, and work together. Schein (2010) defines organizational culture as a system of shared basic assumptions developed by a group as it learns to deal with problems of external adaptation and internal integration. This definition is useful because it shows that culture is not just a list of official values. It goes deeper. It

influences how people interpret situations, make decisions, and act in everyday organizational life.

Schein (2010) also distinguishes between three levels of culture: visible artifacts, stated values, and deeper underlying assumptions. This distinction matters because culture is not always immediately visible. It may appear in formal statements, office layouts, service routines, or symbols, but it also exists in less obvious habits and expectations. Organizational culture affects communication, collaboration, employee behaviour, decision-making, attitudes toward change, and customer service. Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv and Sanders (1990) also argue that organizational culture is expressed through shared practices and symbolic meanings that distinguish one organization from another. More recent reviews confirm that culture remains closely linked to performance, competitiveness, organizational behaviour, and the ability of firms to change (Paais and Pattiruhu, 2020; Bogale and Debela, 2024).

Creating organizational culture in a new market is not a simple transfer of values from the parent company. It takes time and everyday practice. New employees have to understand not only what the company says it values, but also how these values appear in work routines, communication, customer service, and cooperation. The literature on organizational socialization shows that employees learn roles, expectations, rules, and acceptable behaviours through training, onboarding, mentoring, and interaction with other members of the organization (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979; Bauer and Erdogan, 2011). Bauer and Erdogan (2011) emphasize that onboarding is not just about providing information. It is a process through which newcomers learn how to become effective members of the organization.

In a new country, culture has to be built through recruitment, training, communication of values, managerial example, service standards, and shared working practices. Still, this process cannot be taken for granted. Kostova and Roth (2002) argue that the adoption of organizational practices by multinational subsidiaries is shaped both by the host-country institutional environment and by the relationship between the local unit and the parent company. In practice, this means that the parent company's values and routines need to be translated into behaviours that make sense locally. Creating culture in an international setting therefore requires a balance between preserving the

core corporate culture and adapting to local work practices. Sackmann (2021) also notes that culture becomes especially important during periods of change, rapid growth, or organizational transition, because it influences how people understand and apply common practices.

Corporate identity and brand identity are also important for understanding how a company presents itself, differentiates itself, and creates meaning for both internal and external stakeholders. Corporate identity answers the question of who the company is and what it stands for. It includes values, mission, organizational personality, strategic direction, practices, and symbols through which the company becomes recognizable (Balmer, 2008). Balmer (2008) emphasizes that corporate identity is not one-dimensional. It is connected to organizational identity, corporate image, visual identity, corporate brand, and reputation.

Brand identity is more closely related to how the company wants to be perceived by customers and the wider market. Aaker (1996) describes brand identity as the set of associations that the company seeks to create and maintain. Kapferer (2012) links brand identity to personality, values, customer relationships, culture, and the image the company wants to project. In this sense, brand identity is not limited to logos, colours, or advertising messages. It expresses a promise: the kind of experience the company wants to offer and the kind of relationship it wants to build with its audience. Cornelissen, Thøger Christensen and Kinuthia (2012) also point out that strong brands are connected to values, culture, personality, and expertise, not only visual symbols.

International expansion creates a clear dilemma between brand consistency and local adaptation. On the one hand, consistency allows the company to maintain a unified identity, shared values, common service standards, and a recognizable image across markets. The global standardization approach argues that a common identity can strengthen efficiency, recognition, and international coherence (Levitt, 1983). On the other hand, full standardization is not always effective. Local markets differ in cultural values, consumer expectations, language, competition, and ways of interacting with brands.

Local adaptation allows the company to respond more closely to local customers, adjust its communication, and increase acceptance in the host country. The literature on international marketing strategy suggests that there is no single correct choice between

standardization and adaptation. The answer depends on the environment, the industry, the product, customer characteristics, and the level of competition (Jain, 1989; Hultman and Oghazi, 2024). Recent research also suggests that effective international branding often follows a hybrid approach: the core of the brand remains stable, while specific elements of communication, experience, and presentation are adapted to local conditions (Jeong, Lee and Kim, 2019; Schau, Akaka and Segabinazzi, 2023). In the retail sector, Schau, Akaka and Segabinazzi (2023) show that global brands can be localized through carefully designed in-store experiences that preserve global recognition while gaining local meaning.

2.6. Theoretical Framework of the Study

This dissertation draws on more than one theoretical perspective, because international expansion from scratch cannot be explained through a single lens. It involves strategy, leadership, organization, learning, adaptation, and identity formation. For this reason, the theoretical framework brings together five related areas of literature.

The first area is strategic management. This helps explain how firms make decisions about growth, allocate resources, and try to build competitive advantage. In this study, strategic management is useful because international expansion is not treated only as a desire to grow, but as a process of planning, implementing, and adjusting strategic choices over time (Mintzberg, 1987; Barney, 1991; Teece, Pisano and Shuen, 1997).

The second area is international expansion. This literature provides the basis for understanding why firms internationalize, how they enter foreign markets, what challenges they face, and why market knowledge matters. Earlier and more recent studies show that internationalization is shaped by experience, market selection, entry knowledge, and network capabilities (Johanson and Vahlne, 1977; Martín, Chetty and Bai, 2021). This is important for the present dissertation, as the focus is not only on the decision to expand, but also on how a firm learns to operate in a new environment.

The third area is leadership, especially strategic, transformational, and cross-cultural leadership. These perspectives are used to examine how leaders shape direction, make decisions under uncertainty, coordinate people and resources, guide change, and

respond to different cultural contexts. Strategic leadership is particularly relevant because it links leadership with organizational direction and action (Ireland and Hitt, 1999; Samimi et al., 2022).

The fourth area is organizational design and organizational learning. These concepts help explain how roles, responsibilities, processes, coordination mechanisms, and control systems are created when a company enters a new market. They also help explain how a firm learns and adjusts as it gains experience. The literature on organizational design shows that organizations need to be understood through the way structures, processes, and coordination mechanisms work together (Puranam, Alexy and Reitzig, 2014).

The fifth area is organizational culture and corporate identity. Culture is useful for examining how shared values, behaviours, and practices are formed within a new market. Corporate identity and brand identity, on the other hand, help explain how a company becomes recognizable, trustworthy, and differentiated in the eyes of customers and other stakeholders. This is especially relevant in retail, where identity is not expressed only through communication, but also through service, staff behaviour, customer experience, and everyday practices (Schein, 2010; Balmer, 2008).

3. Methodological Approach to the Case Study

3.1. Introduction to the Methodology

This dissertation uses a qualitative secondary case study methodology. This approach was chosen because it allows the study to examine a specific business case in depth and connect it with relevant theoretical frameworks and available secondary sources. A case study is useful for investigating a complex phenomenon in its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not completely clear (Yin, 2018). In a similar way, qualitative case study research makes it

possible to understand organizational processes, relationships, and decisions without reducing them only to measurable variables (Stake, 1995).

The study does not include primary research interviews, mainly because of practical and time limitations. Instead, it is based on secondary data, including academic literature, publicly available corporate information, business publications, and industry sources. This was also a methodological choice shaped by the nature of the case. Since the study does not have access to internal company data or the views of managers and employees, it does not claim to reconstruct iStorm’s internal decision-making process. Rather, it examines what can be understood from the publicly available evidence and interprets this evidence through the theoretical framework of the dissertation.

Secondary qualitative research can be a valid methodological approach when the data are used systematically, connected to clear research questions, and analyzed through an explicit theoretical lens (Heaton, 2008; Ruggiano and Perry, 2019). In this study, the case of iStorm is examined as an example of international expansion from the Greek market to the Cypriot market, with particular attention to organizational strategy, leadership, process development, knowledge transfer, and corporate identity formation.

3.2. The Case Study as a Research Strategy

The case study is a widely used method in qualitative research, especially when the aim is to examine complex social, organizational, and managerial phenomena. It is particularly useful when the researcher wants to study a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, and when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its environment are not completely clear (Yin, 2018). This makes it suitable for research on business decisions, organizational processes, strategic choices, and management practices, where the aim is not only to describe what happened but also to understand how and why it happened. Stake (1995) also emphasizes that case study research focuses on the particularity and complexity of a specific case, seeking to understand how it operates within its natural setting.

For this dissertation, the case study approach is appropriate because the research focuses on the international expansion of a specific company, iStorm, and the creation of

business presence in a new market. International expansion is not a single decision that can be examined in isolation. It involves leadership, organizational planning, process development, adaptation to a new environment, and the formation of corporate identity. The case study therefore helps connect the theoretical framework with a real business example. It allows the analysis to move from general concepts to a specific case, without losing sight of the wider theoretical discussion. Case studies are also useful for linking empirical observations with theoretical concepts and can contribute to theory development in organizational research (Eisenhardt, 1989).

The case study used here is secondary in nature. It does not rely on interviews or internal company data, but on publicly available secondary sources. This is a limitation, but it is also part of the methodological design of the study. Secondary data can be a valid choice when they are collected, evaluated, and analyzed systematically within a clear theoretical framework (Heaton, 2008). More recent methodological discussions also recognize that qualitative secondary research can draw on corporate information, publications, online sources, and other public material, as long as these sources are examined critically in terms of reliability, relevance, and limitations (Cheong et al., 2023).

For this reason, the iStorm case study does not aim to produce statistical generalizations. Instead, it offers an analytical understanding of how international expansion can be interpreted through the concepts of strategic management, leadership, organizational design, learning, and corporate identity. This is a more modest aim, but it is also a useful one: it allows the dissertation to examine what the available evidence can reasonably show, without claiming access to internal managerial decisions or experiences that were not directly researched.

3.3. Selection of iStorm as a Case Study

iStorm was selected as the case study because it fits closely with the focus of this dissertation: international expansion, strategic organization, and the creation of corporate presence in a new market. According to publicly available corporate information, iStorm is a technology retailer, part of the Quest Group, and operates as an Apple Premium Partner retail chain in Greece and Cyprus. The company presents its offering as more than the sale

of Apple products. It includes a broader purchasing and service experience built around the Apple ecosystem. This makes the case useful for examining the connection between corporate identity, customer experience, and retail operations (iStorm Greece, 2024; Quest Holdings, 2025).

The choice of a single case is appropriate when it helps connect theory with actual business practice and allows a complex phenomenon to be examined in context (Yin, 2018). In this dissertation, iStorm is relevant because its expansion from the Greek market to the Cypriot market brings together several issues discussed in the literature: international retail activity, the transfer of a retail model, service quality, customer experience, and the need to maintain a consistent corporate image. The literature on international retailing shows that retailers do not enter new markets only with products. They also carry with them a wider operating model, including processes, store design, service routines, staff behaviour, and brand experience (Alexander and Doherty, 2009; Dimitrova et al., 2018).

The iStorm case also allows the study to bring together the main theoretical areas introduced in the literature review: strategic management, international expansion, leadership, organizational design, organizational culture, and corporate identity. Case studies are especially useful when the aim is to understand organizational processes in their real-world setting, rather than to measure variables in isolation (Eisenhardt, 1989; Stake, 1995). For this reason, iStorm is not used here to produce statistically generalizable findings. It is used as an analytical case through which the dissertation can examine how a premium technology retailer may build business presence, organizational structure, and corporate identity when expanding from its base market into a related but distinct international market.

3.4. Sources of Secondary Data

This study uses secondary data drawn from academic and publicly available sources. Secondary data are appropriate here because the aim is to analyze an existing business case without collecting new primary data. As Heaton (2008) and Ruggiano and Perry (2019) argue, secondary analysis can be a valid research practice when the data are selected systematically, evaluated critically, and connected to a clear theoretical

framework. Cheong et al. (2023) also note that publicly available online data can support qualitative research, as long as the researcher is transparent about the limits of the material and assesses the reliability of the sources used.

The main sources for this case study include the official iStorm website, corporate information from the Quest Group, business press articles, industry material on retail and technology, and academic literature on international retailing, customer experience, and brand identity. Official corporate sources are used to provide basic information about iStorm’s identity, operations, and market position. For example, Quest Holdings presents iStorm as an Apple Premium Partner chain in Greece and Cyprus, while iStorm’s own corporate information helps clarify the company’s retail activity and connection with the Apple ecosystem.

Business press articles are used only as supplementary material. They help provide context about the timing, development, and business environment of the expansion, but they are not treated as sufficient evidence on their own. Where possible, such information is checked against official or more reliable sources. For example, reports in the Greek business press on Quest Group’s retail activity and the development of iStorm’s Apple Premium Partner stores are used to support the broader context of the case, not to replace corporate or academic evidence (NAFTEMPORIKI, 2023; Forbes Media LLC, 2023).

The analysis is also supported by academic literature on case study research, secondary qualitative research, international retailing, leadership, organizational design, and corporate identity. Yin (2018) emphasizes the value of using multiple sources in case study research, as this can strengthen the analysis and provide a fuller understanding of the case in context. No confidential company data, internal documents, or non-public information are used in this dissertation. The study is therefore based only on legally accessible secondary sources, which are evaluated in terms of relevance, reliability, and usefulness for the research objectives.

3.5. Limitations of the Methodology

Like any research method, the secondary case study has certain methodological limitations that need to be acknowledged. The most important limitation of this dissertation is the absence of primary research through interviews with managers, employees, or other stakeholders. As a result, the study cannot directly capture the personal experiences, views, or interpretations of the people involved in the expansion process. It also cannot examine internal managerial practices or informal organizational processes in the same depth that interviews might allow (Yin, 2018).

A second limitation is the lack of access to internal company data, such as financial information, internal reports, organizational charts, procedure manuals, or training material. The analysis is therefore based only on publicly available and secondary sources, including academic literature, industry material, business publications, official websites, and corporate announcements. These sources are useful, but they also need to be treated carefully. Secondary data may be selective, incomplete, or shaped by the purpose for which they were originally produced (Heaton, 2008; Ruggiano and Perry, 2019). Martins et al. (2023) also emphasize that publicly available and online data require critical evaluation, since they may be fragmentary or influenced by communication objectives.

Finally, the findings cannot be statistically generalized to all companies that expand internationally. This is not the aim of the study. The purpose of the case study is to provide an analytical understanding of a specific phenomenon within its own context, rather than to produce broad statistical generalizations (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). For this reason, the iStorm case is used as an interpretive example of how international expansion, organizational design, leadership, and corporate identity can be examined through secondary evidence.

4. Presentation of iStorm and the International Expansion Framework

4.1. Brief Company Profile of iStorm

iStorm is a technology retailer specializing in Apple products and services. According to publicly available corporate information, iStorm belongs to the Quest Group and operates as an Apple Premium Partner retail chain in Greece and Cyprus (iStorm, 2024; Quest Holdings, 2025). The company’s public profile presents it as a specialized retailer of Apple products, peripherals, accessories, technical support, and services related to the Apple ecosystem. Its official pages include products such as iPhone, Mac, Apple Watch, iPad, and accessories, as well as services connected to technical support and customer service.

iStorm operates within the field of premium technology retail. This type of retail is not limited to product distribution. It also depends on the creation of a specific purchasing and service experience. In this sector, customer value is shaped by the product itself, but

also by brand image, physical store environment, staff expertise, service quality, and after-sales support. The international retail literature also emphasizes that retailers offer more than goods. They create experiences, relationships, and customer touchpoints that influence how the brand is perceived and how the value of the purchase is understood (Verhoef et al., 2009; Grewal, Roggeveen and Nordfält, 2017).

The corporate image of iStorm is closely connected with its specialization in the Apple ecosystem and with the idea of a complete shopping and support experience. Quest Holdings describes iStorm stores as spaces that offer Apple products and accessories, high-level service, technical support, free training, and specialized staff. These elements support the company's position as a specialized technology retailer and make the case relevant for this dissertation.

From a research perspective, iStorm is useful because it combines international retail activity, premium brand experience, and structured corporate presence in more than one market. The case allows the study to examine how a technology retailer develops its brand, operational routines, and customer experience in a context where consistency, service quality, and corporate identity are central to differentiation.

4.2. The technology retail sector and the importance of the customer experience

Technology retail is a specialized segment of retail. It is not only about selling technology products, but also about providing guidance, technical knowledge, and reliable customer support. In many retail sectors, purchasing decisions may depend mainly on price or product availability. In technology retail, however, customers often need advice, comparisons between options, technical explanations, and trust in the person who serves them. For this reason, customer experience has become a central part of modern retail, as consumers evaluate not only the product itself, but the whole interaction with the business before, during, and after the purchase (Verhoef et al., 2009). This experience is shaped through several touchpoints, including the physical store, digital platforms, staff, customer service, product availability, and after-sales support.

The physical store remains important, even with the growth of e-commerce and digital channels. Grewal, Roggeveen and Nordfält (2017) and Roggeveen and Sethuraman

(2020) argue that physical stores are not only places of transaction. They are also places where customers can test products, receive information, experience the brand, and develop a stronger relationship with it. In technology retail, this is especially important. Customers often want to see, touch, try, and understand a product before buying it, because technology products can be complex and may require explanation. Research on the future of physical stores also suggests that retailers need to give customers reasons to visit the store beyond the simple act of buying. These reasons may include personalized service, advice, experience, and interaction with the consumer community (Gauri et al., 2020).

This sector also requires staff with specific knowledge and skills. Salespeople are not only salespeople. They also act as advisors, sources of technical information, and representatives of the company's identity. The quality of the interaction with staff can influence the overall shopping experience, brand perception, and consumer trust. The literature on retail customer experience shows that value is shaped through the store environment, operational processes, and employee interaction (Bueno et al., 2020; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). In premium technology retail, trust becomes even more important because products are often expensive, technically complex, and connected to wider ecosystems of services and support.

At the same time, technology retail is strongly affected by omnichannel strategies. The physical store, online store, digital communication, and support services need to work together as one connected experience. The literature on omnichannel retailing shows that consumers no longer see channels as completely separate. They expect consistency, continuity, and convenience across all points of contact with the business (Verhoef, Kannan and Inman, 2015; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Recent research also shows that retail technology can improve the customer experience by supporting the integration of physical and digital channels, personalization, efficiency, and access to information (Grewal et al., 2023; Berg, Nilsson and Liljedal, 2024).

The iStorm case is useful because it belongs to this context. Its corporate identity is not shaped only by the products it offers, but by the way the whole customer experience is organized. The physical store, specialized staff, technical knowledge, service quality, and

brand consistency are all important elements through which a premium technology retailer can build trust and differentiate itself, especially when entering a new market.

4.3. The Business Context of International Expansion

The decision to internationalize a technology retail company can strengthen its competitive position, diversify its operations, and expand its market presence. For firms in high-tech and premium retail, foreign expansion is not only about increasing sales or opening more stores. It also involves transferring an existing operating model to a new market, using know-how developed in the home market, and increasing brand awareness. International business research shows that firms often enter foreign markets in order to reach new customers, access growth opportunities, and make better use of resources and capabilities developed in their domestic environment (Dunning, 1993; Cuervo-Cazurra, Narula and Un, 2015).

In retail, international expansion has a particular character because companies do not transfer only products. They also transfer a commercial and experiential model. The retail format includes physical presence, in-store experience, customer service, operational procedures, staff training, and brand communication. When retailers enter new markets, they have to adapt this model to the conditions of the host country while also keeping the elements that define their corporate identity (Alexander and Doherty, 2009; Dimitrova et al., 2018).

For a technology retail company, the strategic benefits of international expansion may include a larger customer base, stronger brand recognition, a more visible presence in markets with demand for premium technology products, and better use of expertise in service, technical support, and customer experience. Expansion can also support organizational learning, as the company compares practices across markets, receives feedback, and adjusts its operations. Recent retail literature suggests that internationalization and digitalization can support each other, since retailers can improve customer experience by combining physical and digital channels (Batsakis et al., 2023). Research on retail technologies also shows that technology can improve the customer journey, reduce friction, and strengthen trust in the brand (Grewal et al., 2023; Berg, Nilsson and Liljedal, 2024).

4.4. Greece as the Base Market and Cyprus as the Expansion Environment

The analysis of the markets in which a technology retail company operates is important, because the market environment affects both strategic choices and everyday operations. According to publicly available corporate sources, iStorm belongs to the Quest Group and operates as an Apple Premium Partner retail chain in Greece and Cyprus. The official iStorm website presents a network of stores in both countries, while Quest Holdings also identifies iStorm as an Apple Premium Partner chain in these markets. This makes the case useful for examining two related but not identical operating environments: Greece as the company's base market and Cyprus as the market of international expansion.

Greece represents the main reference market for iStorm. It is where the company has developed its broader retail presence and where its operating model, customer experience, and brand identity have been established. In the Greek technology retail market, physical stores remain important, especially for high-value products. Customers often seek specialized information, the opportunity to test products, technical support, and confidence before making a purchase. For this reason, stores in strategic commercial locations can support brand recognition and help customers experience the company's products and services more directly (NAFTEMPORIKI, 2023; Papazoglou, 2023). Business press reports also connect Quest Group's retail strategy with the strengthening of iStorm's presence as an Apple Premium Partner in Greece.

Cyprus, on the other hand, can be understood as the international expansion market. It is close to Greece in terms of language and cultural familiarity, and this may make the transfer of communication practices, service standards, and corporate values easier. Still, Cyprus should not be treated as a passive extension of the Greek market. It is a smaller and separate retail environment, with its own consumer expectations, competitive conditions, purchasing patterns, and operational needs. The fact that iStorm has a distinct online presence in Cyprus and presents a local store network shows that the Cypriot market is approached as a separate operating environment, not simply as a continuation of the Greek one (iStorm Cyprus, 2024).

For the purposes of this study, the comparison between Greece and Cyprus is useful because it highlights the balance between corporate consistency and local adaptation. International retail literature shows that retailers expanding abroad need to transfer a coherent retail format, while also adjusting their operations to local market conditions (Alexander and Doherty, 2009; Dimitrova et al., 2018). This is especially important in premium technology retail, where the customer experience depends on the physical store, digital presence, specialized staff, technical knowledge, service quality, and brand consistency. The iStorm case therefore allows the study to examine how a company can preserve a shared business identity while adapting its operations to a related but distinct international market.

4.5. Establishing a corporate presence from scratch

Establishing a corporate presence from the ground up is one of the more demanding forms of international expansion. The company is not only entering a new market. It also has to build the organizational, operational, and symbolic foundations of its presence there. The literature on foreign market entry often links the creation of a new unit or presence through organic growth with a higher level of control, but also with greater demands in terms of resources, time, managerial attention, and local knowledge (Anderson and Gatignon, 1986; Brouthers and Hennart, 2007). A company may choose this route when it wants to transfer and control important intangible capabilities, processes, and operating standards. Brouthers and Brouthers (2000) suggest that firms with strong intangible capabilities may be better able to use them through greenfield entry, because they can shape the new operation more directly from the beginning.

In technology retail, building from the ground up involves much more than choosing the right store locations. It requires the creation of a local team, the definition of roles, staff training, knowledge transfer, operational procedures, and a customer experience that reflects the intended corporate identity. The company also needs procedures for inventory management, technical support, internal communication, problem-solving, and customer service. Organizational routines are important here because they provide stability, coordination, and learning. They help the company turn

strategy into repeated and reliable action (Nelson and Winter, 1982; Feldman and Pentland, 2003).

Knowledge transfer is also central to the creation of a new corporate presence. International firms need ways to transfer knowledge from the parent company to the new market through training, communication, guidance, and adaptation to local conditions (Kostova, 1999; Minbaeva et al., 2003). Research on multinational firms shows that internal knowledge transfer depends on factors such as the absorptive capacity of the local unit, the quality of relationships, and the ability to adapt knowledge to the local context (Michailova and Mustaffa, 2012; Castro and Moreira, 2023). Castro and Moreira (2023) also show that knowledge does not move only from headquarters to local units. It can also be created locally and then shared more widely within the organization.

For a company like iStorm, establishing presence in a new market is closely linked to the consistency of the retail format and the customer experience. The literature on international retail formats suggests that successful retailers often keep the core elements of their identity and expertise stable, while adapting specific elements to local needs (Swoboda, Elsner and Morschett, 2014). When a retail format is transferred to another market, its success depends on both internal processes and the way customers experience the brand externally.

For this reason, building a corporate presence from the ground up can be understood as both an organizational and an identity-building process. The company creates a team, roles, routines, and procedures. At the same time, it has to build trust with customers and make its corporate identity visible in the new market.

5. Analysis of the Case Study

5.1. The strategic rationale behind iStorm’s expansion into the Cypriot market

An analysis of the strategic rationale behind iStorm’s expansion must begin with the company’s specific operational context. iStorm is a subsidiary of the Quest Group and operates in the premium technology retail sector, specializing in the Apple product and service ecosystem. According to publicly available corporate information, iStorm has a presence in both Greece and Cyprus, with physical stores, an online presence, technical support, services, and specialized staff. In the context of this study, Greece is not treated as a “new international market” for iStorm, but rather as a home market and point of reference. In contrast, Cyprus is analyzed as a market for international expansion, into which the company transfers and adapts an already established business and commercial model.

This distinction is important because it allows for a more accurate understanding of the case. iStorm’s expansion into Cyprus should not be interpreted as a company’s general entry into two new markets, but rather as the transfer of an existing retail format from the Greek market to a related yet distinct international operating environment. The Cypriot market shares certain characteristics with the Greek market, such as linguistic and cultural proximity, but at the same time constitutes a distinct business environment, with its own market size, competitive conditions, consumer expectations, sales channels, and operational requirements. Therefore, the strategic rationale for expansion is not merely about geographic growth, but about the ability to implement, adapt, and leverage an already established business model in a new country.

The case of iStorm can be interpreted as a strategic utilization of existing resources and capabilities. The company does not merely bring Apple products to the Cypriot market, but a comprehensive value system that includes a physical store, an online channel, specialized service, technical support, after-sales services, and a specific customer experience. In premium technology retail, value is not created solely by the product, but also by how it is presented, sold, supported, and experienced by the customer. Thus, the expansion into Cyprus can be analyzed as an effort to transfer an organized operating model, which has already been developed in the home market and is adapted to the requirements of the new market.

This logic is linked to the resource and capability theory, according to which firms can create a competitive advantage when they leverage resources that are valuable, rare, difficult to imitate, and organizationally exploitable (Barney, 1991). In the case of iStorm, such resources include not only commercial partnerships or products, but also expertise in store operations, staff specialization, the ability to provide technical support, consistency in corporate image, and the creation of a premium customer experience. The expansion into Cyprus can, therefore, be seen as a way to leverage these intangible and organizational capabilities in a new international environment.

At the same time, the case is linked to the literature on internationalization. Firms do not expand internationally merely to increase their sales, but also to capitalize on growth opportunities, acquire new knowledge, strengthen their position, and transfer capabilities to new markets (Dunning, 1993; Cuervo-Cazurra, Narula, and Un, 2015). In the case of iStorm, Cyprus can be analyzed as a market that allows for the utilization of an already established premium retail model in an environment relatively close to the Greek market, but with enough differences to require adaptation. In this sense, the expansion is not a simple replication of the Greek experience, but a process of transferring and reshaping knowledge.

The strategic dimension of expansion is also linked to the importance of market knowledge. Johanson and Vahlne's (1977) internationalization model argues that firms increase their international engagement as they acquire knowledge and experience from foreign markets. In its most recent version, the model emphasizes not only knowledge but also the relationships and networks that allow the firm to reduce uncertainty and better

integrate into the new environment (Johanson and Vahlne, 2009). iStorm’s expansion into Cyprus can be interpreted through this lens, as the company is called upon to combine its prior experience in the Greek market with a gradual understanding of the specific characteristics of the Cypriot market.

Furthermore, international expansion in retail is particularly complex because retailers do not merely transfer products, but entire operational systems and customer experiences. The literature on international retailing emphasizes that the expansion of a retail business involves the transfer of retail formats, processes, service, store design, corporate image, and customer relationships (Alexander and Doherty, 2009; Swoboda, Elsner, and Morschett, 2014). This is particularly evident in the case of iStorm, as its presence in Cyprus cannot be limited to the sale of Apple products. Rather, it requires the recreation of a specific shopping experience, which is based on technical expertise, customer service, the store’s aesthetic, and the consistency of the corporate identity. Consequently, the strategic rationale behind iStorm’s expansion into the Cypriot market can be summarized as follows: the company leverages an already established operational and commercial model, which has been developed in the Greek market, and seeks to transfer it to a new international environment. Cyprus serves as an expansion market, where iStorm is called upon to combine brand consistency with local adaptation, the application of expertise with learning from the new market, and strategic intent with practical organizational implementation. In this way, expansion is not merely geographical growth, but a process of strategic resource utilization, knowledge transfer, and the establishment of a corporate presence in a new operating environment.

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5.2. iStorm’s physical presence and retail format in Cyprus

iStorm’s presence in the Cypriot market should not be analyzed merely as a commercial entry into a new country, but as the transfer and adaptation of a comprehensive retail format. According to publicly available corporate information, iStorm operates in Cyprus through physical stores and an online presence, while the company’s Cypriot website presents it as an Apple Premium Partner chain with 5 stores in Cyprus, offering Apple products, accessories, payment options, and services designed for the Apple ecosystem. At the same time, Quest Holdings presents iStorm as a chain exclusively for Apple products and an Apple Premium Partner in Greece and Cyprus, offering Apple products, peripherals, accessories, high-level service, technical support, free training, and specialized staff. These facts indicate that iStorm’s presence in Cyprus is not limited to product distribution but encompasses a broader retail experience system that combines physical space, services, expertise, and brand experience.

The physical presence is particularly significant for the analysis of this case. The opening of the Apple Premium Partner Store at the Mall of Cyprus in Nicosia was publicly presented as the first store of this type in Cyprus and as the fifth iStorm store in the Cypriot market. iStorm Cyprus itself states that with the opening of the first Apple Premium Partner Store at the Mall of Cyprus, “the ultimate Apple destination is created” in the Cypriot market. This phrasing is significant because it indicates that the store functions not merely as a point of sale, but as a space for experience, symbolic identity, and customer engagement with the Apple ecosystem. Therefore, iStorm’s expansion into Cyprus can be

interpreted as an effort to establish a premium retail environment, in which the physical store, customer service, and technical expertise are key elements of the value proposition.

This empirical picture aligns with the literature on international retailing, according to which retail companies, when expanding internationally, do not merely transfer products or brands, but entire retail formats. A retail format encompasses the store's layout and aesthetics, service procedures, operating standards, customer experience, level of control, branding, and coordination mechanisms (Alexander and Doherty, 2009). In the case of iStorm, this means that its entry into Cyprus cannot be understood merely as a geographical expansion of commercial activity. Rather, it must be analyzed as the transfer of a specific retail model, which has been developed around the Apple premium experience and requires consistency in presentation, service, and operational practices.

The importance of the retail format is even greater in the premium technology retail sector, where value for the customer does not stem exclusively from the product, but from the overall experience. The customer is not just looking for a device or an accessory, but for information, guidance, technical support, reliability, convenience, and a sense of trust. The literature on customer experience argues that the experience is shaped through multiple touchpoints, such as the physical store, interaction with staff, services, technology, and post-purchase support (Verhoef et al., 2009; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). For iStorm in Cyprus, these touchpoints appear to be a key part of its presence, as public sources emphasize not only the products but also the staff, services, and technical support.

iStorm's physical presence in Cyprus can also be linked to the logic of control. In international retail, the more important the consistency of the customer experience and corporate identity, the greater the importance of controlling how points of sale operate. The literature on entry strategies argues that firms choose forms of presence based on the degree of control, risk, resources, and the importance of the intangible capabilities they wish to protect or transfer (Anderson and Gatignon, 1986; Brouthers and Hennart, 2007). In the case of iStorm, the existence of physical stores and the emphasis on the Apple Premium Partner model suggest that the company requires a high level of control over the shaping of the experience: from the space and service to technical support and brand consistency.

At the same time, iStorm’s online presence in Cyprus complements its physical presence and reinforces the logic of a multichannel retail format. The company’s Cypriot website serves as a hub for information, product showcases, services, and store listings, bridging the in-store experience with the digital environment. This is important because modern retail is not based exclusively on the store, but on consistency between physical and digital touchpoints. The international literature on omnichannel retailing indicates that customers perceive the experience as unified, even when they interact with the business through different channels (Verhoef, Kannan, and Inman, 2015). Therefore, the case of iStorm in Cyprus can be analyzed as an effort to create a unified Apple experience through physical and digital retail environments.

5.3. Management Guidance and Coordination of the Expansion

iStorm’s expansion into the Cypriot market can be analyzed as a process requiring managerial guidance and systematic coordination, even though this study does not have access to internal decisions or executive interviews. Establishing a presence in Cyprus through physical stores, an online presence, services, technical support, and specialized expertise within the Apple ecosystem is not merely a commercial move. Rather, it requires the transformation of a strategic intention into organized operational action. This means that the company needs to coordinate people, processes, service standards, corporate identity, and control mechanisms between its Greek base and the Cypriot market.

On a practical level, expansion into Cyprus entails the need to create or strengthen a local team, train staff, transfer operational standards, and maintain a consistent customer experience. Staff in the Cypriot market need to understand not only the company’s products and services, but also how iStorm wishes to present its corporate identity through customer service, the physical store, and technical support.

Therefore, managerial guidance involves not only high-level decision-making but also ensuring that these decisions are consistently implemented in the day-to-day operations of the new market.

This case is linked to the theory of strategic leadership, according to which leadership plays a decisive role in shaping strategic direction, allocating resources, making decisions, and creating organizational conditions that enable growth (Ireland and Hitt,

1999) . Strategic leadership is particularly important in cases of international expansion, as the company is called upon to bridge the gap between its vision of growth and its practical implementation. In the case of iStorm, the expansion into Cyprus can be interpreted as a process requiring leadership skills to coordinate the parent company’s organizational structure with the local market, transfer know-how, and maintain uniform operating standards.

At the same time, expansion into a new market is linked to elements of transformational leadership. Creating or strengthening a local team requires communicating a shared vision, motivating, engaging, and supporting employees during a period of change. Transformational leadership emphasizes inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and personalized support for employees (Bass, 1985; Bass and Avolio, 1994). In the context of the Cypriot market, this can be interpreted as the need to align the local team with iStorm’s service standards, culture, and corporate identity.

Finally, managerial guidance is important because every new market involves uncertainty. Even though Cyprus shares linguistic and cultural similarities with Greece, it remains a distinct business environment, with its own consumer expectations, competitive conditions, and operational requirements. Leadership in such conditions must combine direction and flexibility: maintaining the company’s strategic identity while simultaneously allowing for adjustments where the local market demands them. The concept of sensemaking suggests that leaders help organizations interpret uncertain situations and coordinate collective action (Weick, 1995).

5.4. Organizational Design, Processes, and Operational Organization

iStorm’s presence in the Cypriot market requires a clear organizational design framework, as the company offers not only Apple products but a broader range of services, technical expertise, physical presence, customer service, and customer experience. The operation of physical stores in Cyprus, combined with the provision of technical support, after-sales service, and specialized customer guidance, creates a need for clear roles, allocation of responsibilities, and daily operational procedures. Therefore, the expansion cannot be understood solely as commercial growth, but as a process of establishing a local

operational structure that must be coordinated with the company’s central organizational base.

On a practical level, iStorm’s presence in Cyprus requires the management of many interrelated functions. The stores need sales staff, technical support, operations managers, receiving and inventory management processes, internal communication mechanisms, and reporting systems. At the same time, the quality of the customer experience depends on the consistency of these processes. For example, product information, customer guidance, complaint management, technical support, and after-sales service must follow common standards so that the corporate image remains consistent across all touchpoints. In this sense, processes are not merely internal administrative tools, but a fundamental mechanism for shaping the customer experience.

This case can be interpreted through the theory of organizational design. Organizational design concerns the way in which a business allocates tasks, defines responsibilities, creates communication mechanisms, and coordinates its individual activities to achieve its strategic goals (Galbraith, 1974; Mintzberg, 1979). In the case of iStorm in Cyprus, the expansion strategy takes practical form only when it is translated into specific operational structures: who is responsible for the store, who manages technical support, how information is relayed to central management, how inventory is tracked, and how consistency in service is ensured.

The theory of organizational routines is also particularly useful. Routines are repetitive patterns of action that allow organizations to operate with stability and predictability (Nelson and Winter, 1982). However, they are not static. Feldman and Pentland (2003) argue that routines can function simultaneously as a source of stability and change, as they adapt through their daily application. This is particularly important for iStorm in Cyprus, as the company needs to transfer operational models from its home market while also adapting them to local needs, customer expectations, and the specific characteristics of the Cypriot market. Furthermore, the operational structure is directly linked to the relationship between the parent company and the local

5.5. Knowledge Transfer and Organizational Learning from Greece to Cyprus

iStorm’s expansion into Cyprus can be analyzed as a process of knowledge transfer from the Greek market to a new international operating environment. According to publicly available corporate information, iStorm is owned by the Quest Group and operates as an Apple Premium Partner chain in Greece and Cyprus, offering Apple products, technical support, services, training, and a specialized customer experience. At the same time, iStorm’s Cypriot website presents the company as an Apple Premium Partner with 5 stores in Cyprus and services designed for the Apple ecosystem. Therefore, in this analysis, Greece can serve as the home market and Cyprus as the expansion market, to which an already established retail model is transferred and adapted.

The knowledge developed in the Greek market may pertain to multiple dimensions of the company’s operations: store layout, service standards, staff training, customer management, technical support, inventory management, and the overall brand experience. In the case of iStorm, knowledge transfer involves not only technical information about Apple products but also intangible organizational capabilities, such as high-level service, consistency in the corporate image, and the creation of an experience centered on the Apple ecosystem. This is particularly important in premium technology retail, where value for the customer is not created solely by the product, but by the entire shopping and support experience.

This process is linked to the theory of organizational learning. Organizations learn when they acquire, interpret, and utilize knowledge to adapt their behavior and practices based on experience (Fiol and Lyles, 1985). In the context of international expansion, experience from the home market can serve as an initial knowledge base, reducing uncertainty in the new market. The model by Johanson and Vahlne (1977) argues that internationalization evolves through the gradual acquisition of knowledge and experience from foreign markets. In the case of iStorm, the Cypriot market can be interpreted as a field where the company leverages its prior experience, but simultaneously acquires new knowledge regarding different consumer expectations, local conditions, and operational needs.

Knowledge transfer, however, should not be viewed as mechanical or automatic. Cyprus is closely related to the Greek market in terms of language and culture, but it remains a distinct business environment. Therefore, practices developed in Greece need to be adapted to the needs of the Cypriot market. The literature on knowledge transfer in multinational firms indicates that the effective utilization of knowledge depends on the local unit's ability to recognize, assimilate, and apply useful knowledge (Minbaeva et al., 2003). In the case of iStorm, this may involve the ability of the local team in Cyprus to adopt the company's operational and service standards, as well as to provide feedback on areas requiring adaptation.

At the same time, the Cypriot market can also serve as a new learning ground for the company itself. Through the day-to-day operation of stores, customer interactions, technical support, inventory management, and demand monitoring, the company can gain experience and improve its processes. Organizational learning, therefore, does not flow only from Greece to Cyprus but can also be two-way: experience from the Cypriot market can contribute to improving iStorm's overall operating model.

5.6. Corporate Identity, Culture, and Brand Experience in the Cypriot Market

iStorm's corporate identity in the Cypriot market can be analyzed by examining how the company presents itself to customers: as a specialized destination for Apple products, services, technical support, and a comprehensive experience centered on the Apple ecosystem. According to publicly available corporate information, iStorm operates as an Apple Premium Partner in Greece and Cyprus, offering Apple products, accessories, technical support, training, and specialized service. At the same time, the company's presence in Cyprus, through physical stores and an online channel, demonstrates that the customer experience is not limited to purchasing products but includes interaction with the space, the staff, the services, and the brand's overall image.

In premium technology retail, corporate identity is not an abstract concept nor is it limited to logos, colors, or advertising messages. Instead, it becomes visible through the day-to-day operations of the business: the way the store is organized, the behavior of the staff, the quality of service, technical expertise, the speed of problem-solving, and the

consistency of procedures. As an Apple-focused retailer, iStorm is expected to maintain an image of reliability, technical expertise, and a premium experience, which must be recognizable in both Greece and Cyprus. Therefore, corporate identity in the Cypriot market is shaped not only by the company's name but through every point of contact the customer has with it.

This significance is linked to the literature on brand identity and customer experience. Corporate identity concerns the way in which a business presents itself and differentiates itself, but also the way in which internal values and practices are perceived by external audiences (Balmer, 2008). Similarly, the customer experience is shaped by the totality of the customer's interactions with the business before, during, and after the purchase (Verhoef et al., 2009; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). In the case of iStorm in Cyprus, this means that the physical store, technical support, guidance from staff, and after-sales service all serve as carriers of the corporate identity.

Staff play a special role, as they act as living ambassadors of the brand. Employees do not merely represent the company at the sales level, but convey the company's style, quality, technical expertise, and values to the customer. In the Cypriot market, creating or strengthening a local team requires transferring culture from the home market to the new operating environment. This culture is not transferred automatically; it requires training, daily guidance, shared behavioral norms, and repeated operational practices. According to Schein (2010), organizational culture is shaped by shared values, assumptions, and behaviors that guide the members of an organization. Therefore, iStorm's culture in Cyprus can be analyzed as the result of the local team's systematic alignment with the company's standards of service, expertise, and behavior.

At the same time, the presence in Cyprus highlights the need for a balance between brand consistency and local adaptation. iStorm needs to maintain a unified and recognizable corporate identity so that the customer perceives a consistent experience in Greece and Cyprus. However, the Cypriot market has its own unique characteristics in terms of size, competition, consumer habits, and customer expectations. Consequently, the company needs to adapt specific practices without weakening the core of its identity. The international literature on retail indicates that a successful international presence requires a combination of consistency and adaptation, as retailers must maintain a

recognizable format while also responding to local conditions (Alexander and Doherty, 2009; Schau et al., 2023) .

5.7. Challenges and Critical Success Factors for Expansion into Cyprus

The case of iStorm in Cyprus demonstrates that even expansion into a market that is linguistically and culturally close to Greece is not a simple or automatic process. Cyprus can be considered a similar operating environment, as there are common linguistic and cultural elements; however, it remains a distinct market, with its own size, competition, consumer habits, retail outlets, and operational requirements. Therefore, iStorm’s expansion into Cyprus cannot be analyzed as a simple replication of the Greek model, but rather as a process of transferring, adapting, and testing a premium retail format in a new environment.

A first category of challenges concerns the strategic dimension of the expansion. iStorm is called upon to leverage the experience and know-how it has developed in the Greek market, while simultaneously assessing the particularities of the Cypriot market. The strategic challenge is not only the choice of market but the formulation of a market presence that combines growth, control, adaptation, and consistency. This ties into the literature on internationalization, which emphasizes that entering foreign markets requires knowledge, gradual learning, and adaptation to local conditions (Johanson and Vahlne, 1977; Johanson and Vahlne, 2009).

The second category consists of market and institutional challenges. Although Cyprus is close to Greece, the company needs to understand local consumer expectations, purchasing habits, the level of demand, competition, and the particularities of local business operations. The concept of “foreignness liability” suggests that companies operating in a new market face additional difficulties due to limited local knowledge, different institutional frameworks, and the need to establish legitimacy in the new environment (Zaheer, 1995). In the case of iStorm, cultural proximity may reduce certain difficulties, but it does not eliminate them.

A third category consists of organizational challenges. A presence in Cyprus requires clear roles, allocation of responsibilities, store operating procedures, inventory

management, internal communication, reporting, and coordination mechanisms with the Greek headquarters. An expansion strategy only gains practical value when it is translated into daily operational practices. Organizational design theory emphasizes that companies need structures, communication mechanisms, and coordination processes to effectively implement their objectives (Galbraith, 1974; Mintzberg, 1979). For iStorm, this is particularly important, as the quality of the customer experience depends on the consistency of processes.

The fourth challenge concerns human resources and training. In premium technology retail, employees are not merely salespeople, but bearers of technical knowledge, service, and corporate identity. The Cypriot team needs to understand iStorm’s products, services, service standards, and culture. Therefore, the selection, training, and ongoing support of staff are critical success factors. The literature on customer experience indicates that staff, the physical store, and service processes significantly influence the customer’s perception of the business (Verhoef et al., 2009; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

The fifth challenge is striking a balance between corporate identity consistency and local adaptation. iStorm needs to maintain a consistent image in Greece and Cyprus so that customers recognize common standards of quality, service, and experience. At the same time, however, the company must adapt to the specific characteristics of the Cypriot market. The international literature on retail indicates that successful expansion requires a balance between transferring a recognizable retail format and adapting it to the local environment (Alexander and Doherty, 2009; Schau et al., 2023).

6. Discussion

6.1. Linking the Case Study to the Literature

The iStorm case study analysis allows us to connect the theoretical themes from the literature review to a specific example of international expansion in the technology retailing sector. The case can be interpreted in accordance with the primary theories of internationalization, strategic management, leadership, organizational design, and corporate identity, despite the fact that this paper is based on secondary data and does not endeavour to empirically evaluate the internal decisions of the company.

Initially, the case corroborates the literature that posits that market knowledge and incremental adaptation to the new environment are necessary for international expansion. Internationalization is associated with the firm's growing dedication to foreign markets and the accumulation of experiential knowledge, according to the Johanson and Vahlne (1977) model. Likewise, Martín, Chetty, and Bai (2021) assert that the international performance is influenced by the knowledge of entering foreign markets, market selection, and networking capabilities.. This is the case of iStorm, which can be viewed through this perspective: the necessity of comprehending varying consumer behaviours, local expectations, competitive conditions, and operational requirements is a consequence of its presence in multiple markets.

Secondly, the case is relevant to the literature of strategic management, which posits that strategy is not limited to planning; it also encompasses implementation, monitoring, and adaptation. Mintzberg (1987) posits that strategy is not merely a predetermined plan, but also a pattern of action that is developed through practice. In the same vein, resource and capability theory posits that the firm's competitive advantage is attained by leveraging internal resources and organizational capabilities (Barney, 1991). In the context of iStorm, international expansion cannot be interpreted as a mere geographical expansion; rather, it is an endeavour to apply and capitalize on knowledge, operational processes, specialized services, and brand experience in new environments.

Third, the significance of organizational design is substantiated by analysis. In order for an expansion strategy to be implemented effectively, it must be translated into roles, responsibilities, procedures, communication systems, and coordination mechanisms.

According to the organizational design literature, organizations must have suitable structures and information-processing mechanisms to meet the demands of their environment (Galbraith, 1974; Mintzberg, 1979). Simultaneously, organizational routines serve as mechanisms for coordination, learning, and stability (Nelson and Winter, 1982; Feldman and Pentland, 2003). This is particularly crucial in premium technology retail, where the consumer experience is directly influenced by the daily consistency of processes.

Fourth, the case pertains to the leadership literature. In new markets, the necessity for decision-making, team coordination, and change management is exacerbated by the fact that you are starting from beginning. Strategic leadership is capable of connecting the vision with the organizational implementation (Ireland and Hitt, 1999; Samimi et al., 2022), whereas transformational leadership can enhance employee commitment, trust, and adaptation to change (Bass, 1985; Wang et al., 2011). This paper does not empirically evaluate leadership; rather, it emphasizes its significance as a critical factor in the transition from strategic decision-making to operational reality.

Ultimately, the case study corroborates the literature that regards corporate identity as the outcome of both internal and external practices. Corporate identity is more than just a logo or communication; it is associated with the consistency of the company's presence, employee behaviour, and the consumer experience (Balmer, 2008; Aaker, 1996). Brand consistency and local adaptation must be balanced simultaneously in order to expand internationally (Jain, 1989; Taufiqurrahman and Aslami, 2025).

6.2. International expansion as a process rather than a simple decision

The iStorm case demonstrates that international expansion should not be regarded as a singular strategic decision, but rather as a continuous process of identity, managerial, and organizational development. Strategic intent, operational implementation, team building, process development, market comprehension, cultural transfer, and corporate identity adaptation are all components of a more extensive journey that commences with the decision to enter a new market. Internationalization is a gradual process of increased

commitment to foreign markets and the acquisition of new knowledge, as per the classical theory of Johanson and Vahlne (1977). For instance, contemporary methodologies suggest that internationalization is not always a linear process, but rather a cyclical process that encompasses the entry, operation, reevaluation, adaptation, and ultimately the repositioning of the firm in the international arena (Romero, Durst, and Garcia, 2023). It suggests a most recent cyclical framework for internationalization (Romero, Durst, and Garcia, 2023), which analyzes the decision-making process and includes stages such as entry, de-internationalization, re-internationalization, and internationalized operation.

In this regard, the expansion of iStorm is not solely the construction of a store network, but also the execution of a strategic objective in operational actuality. In order to expand internationally in the retail industry, it is necessary to establish a local presence, establish teams, define roles, train personnel, manage inventory, provide customer service, and guarantee a consistent experience across multiple touchpoints. Consequently, the strategy is only viable when it is accompanied by implementation procedures and mechanisms. The current literature on strategy implementation indicates that numerous strategies fail not as a result of inadequate formulation, but rather as a result of implementation, coordination, and the establishment of suitable organizational mechanisms (Holm, Kringelum, and Anand, 2025). Holm, Kringelum, and Anand (2025) provide a framework for the successful implementation of strategies, which is based on a systematic review of 160 studies.

However, the process of international expansion necessitates organizational learning. Market contact, consumer experience, store operations, and interaction with the local environment are all aspects of the firm's learning process. Prior knowledge of market entry can be leveraged to enhance market selection, develop network capabilities, and enhance international performance (Martín, Chetty, and Bai, 2021). According to Martín, Chetty, and Bai (2021), market selection, networking capabilities, and international performance are all predicted to be influenced by prior experience in foreign markets. Consequently, the knowledge gained from one market can serve as a foundation for the development and enhancement of the subsequent one.

Lastly, the process of international expansion is also influenced by the development of identity. In addition to communication, the retail industry establishes corporate identity

through the daily experiences of consumers, the conduct of employees, the consistency of processes, and the local adaptation of the brand. According to the most recent research on glocal retail, international brands can maintain their shared identity elements while achieving local relevance by incorporating curated in-store experiences and adapting to the host environment (Tsougkou et al., 2024).

6.3. Theoretical and Practical Contribution of This Study

This thesis contributes to the theoretical and practical level by recognizing that international expansion is not a standalone strategic decision, but rather a multifaceted process that involves the formulation of corporate identity, learning, organizational structure, leadership, and strategy. The thesis connects various but related areas of the literature, including strategic management, international expansion, strategic and transformational leadership, organizational design, organizational culture, and brand identity, on a theoretical level. This link is crucial, as internationalization is frequently examined as a strategic decision or as a matter of market selection and entrance, with less emphasis on the incorporation of this strategy into ordinary organizational operations.

The present study's theoretical contribution is the multidimensional treatment of international expansion. Strategic management is beneficial for comprehending the logic of growth and the utilization of resources and capabilities (Barney, 1991). The internationalization literature emphasizes the importance of incremental commitment to foreign markets, experiential learning, and market knowledge (Johanson and Vahlne, 1977; Martín, Chetty, and Bai, 2021). In the interim, leadership theories elucidate the significance of managerial guidance in the context of vision, managing uncertainty, and motivating individuals during periods of change (Samimi et al., 2022). The operationalization of strategy is exemplified by organizational design and protocols, which are facilitated by roles, processes, and coordination mechanisms (Galbraith, 1974; Feldman and Pentland, 2003). Lastly, the literature on corporate identity and culture enables us to comprehend the process by which a company establishes a recognizable image and shared values in a new market (Schein, 2010; Balmer, 2008).

In practical terms, this study demonstrates that companies that establish themselves in new markets require significantly more than a business opportunity or a fundamental entry plan. They require systematic preparation, the capacity to learn from experience, the ability to plan organizational arrangements, the knowledge of the local market, trained teams, operational procedures, and feedback procedures. The most recent literature on strategy implementation emphasizes that successful implementation is contingent upon organizational mechanisms, managerial support, and continuous adaptation, in addition to strategy formulation (Holm, Kringelum, and Anand, 2025). Simultaneously, the customer experience and brand consistency are influenced by the consistency of customer touchpoints, personnel, physical stores, and service quality in retail (Verhoef et al., 2009; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1. Summary of the Thesis

The thesis examined the impact of organizational strategy and leadership on the development of a corporate identity and business presence in emerging international markets. The primary objective of the investigation was to evaluate the organization of entry into new markets from the ground up for a technology retailing company that lacks pre-existing local structures, teams, processes, and established brand recognition.

The study was a qualitative, secondary case study that focused on iStorm. The case was deemed suitable for this purpose due to the company's position in the premium technology retail sector, where the quality of customer service and experience, technical expertise, brand consistency, and operational organization are of the uttermost importance. The analysis was not conducted using primary data or interviews; rather, it was based on literature, publicly available corporate information, industry sources, and theoretical tools from the fields of strategic management, international expansion, leadership, organizational design, organizational culture, and corporate identity. In this manner, the investigation demonstrated that international expansion is not solely a matter of geographical expansion, but a multifaceted process of strategic implementation, organizational structuring, and identity formation.

This study's initial significant finding is that the process of international expansion from zero is a multifaceted managerial endeavour. It is not sufficient to select a country or establish stores in order to enter a new market. It is primarily concerned with the establishment of an operational foundation, local teams, processes, coordination mechanisms, and relationships of trust with consumers. It is more challenging for a company to establish its identity, establish its organization, and learn about the market when it lacks local infrastructure. Secondly, strategic decision-making in expansion necessitates robust organizational support. Regardless of the clarity of a strategic intention, it is impossible to execute it without specific roles, responsibilities, operational procedures, and control systems. An organization's strategy is only meaningful when it is implemented on a daily basis. This is particularly critical in the technology retail sector, as the consumer experience is directly influenced by operational consistency. Third,

leadership is a critical factor in situations of uncertainty and change. You require strategic guidance, a method of communicating a vision, a method of making decisions with limited information, a method of coordinating people, and a method of establishing trust when you are entering a new market. Leadership is the intermediary between strategic planning and organizational action, facilitating the efficient operation of teams in a novel and frequently unpredictable environment. Fourth, operational stability is guaranteed by processes. This enables the organization to ensure quality and consistency by establishing procedures for inventory management, reporting, internal communication, customer service, and staff training. Procedures should be perceived as a means of stabilizing, learning, and coordinating the new presence, rather than as bureaucratic devices. Fifth, the daily practice is the foundation of culture and brand. Not only does the company's visual image or communication disclose its corporate identity in the retail sector. It is evident in the quality of service, the physical store, employee behaviour, technical knowledge, and the customer experience. Ultimately, the investigation determined that local adaptation must be implemented in conjunction with identity consistency. A company that is internationalizing must preserve the fundamental elements of its corporate identity and modify specific practices to align with the local conditions, expectations, and requirements.

7.2. Practical Recommendations for Businesses

Some practical recommendations can be developed for businesses that are intending to expand into new markets from the ground up, based on the aforementioned analysis. Initially, it is crucial to have a comprehensive understanding of the external environment prior to entering a new market. The company must ascertain the scale of the market, the competition, consumer habits, regulatory requirements, labour practices, and customer expectations. This information mitigates uncertainty and facilitates more practical planning. Secondly, a comprehensive operational implementation strategy is required. When considering international expansion, it is crucial to consider not only sales and a commercial presence, but also daily operations. Roles, procedures, timelines, responsibilities, communication channels, and control mechanisms should be

incorporated into the plan. Third, it is imperative for organizations to establish explicit roles from the outset. Delays, coordination issues, and a decline in service quality may result from unclear responsibilities. Conversely, operational robustness is enhanced by a well-defined division of responsibilities. Fourth, it is imperative to prioritize staff selection and instruction. In retail, employees are the primary carriers of the corporate identity. Training should encompass technical expertise, as well as an understanding of the brand, communication style, service standards, and values. Fifth, it is crucial to establish a feedback system. In order to enhance processes and modify operations, the organization must gather data from the local market, employees, and consumers. Ultimately, it is imperative that organizations evolve without forfeiting their unique identity. Achieving successful expansion necessitates a delicate equilibrium between adaptability to local conditions and the consistency of the corporate image.

7.3. Limitations of the Study

When interpreting the conclusions of this study, it is important to consider a few limitations. The most significant limitation is the absence of primary research. The study does not include interviews with administrators, employees, or other stakeholders, and as a result, it does not directly reflect the experiences, opinions, and internal interpretations of the individuals involved in the expansion process. Internal company data, including financial data, internal reports, organizational schematics, procedure manuals, and training materials, were not accessible. The case was connected to the theoretical framework of the study, and the analysis was exclusively based on public and secondary sources. This is the reason why the findings of this investigation are interpretive and analytical rather than statistically generalizable. The thesis does not endeavour to demonstrate that all findings are applicable to all corporations or all instances of international expansion. Rather, it provides a theoretically founded comprehension of the iStorm case and highlights issues that can be used as a foundation for additional research.

7.4. Suggestions for Future Research

This paper has the potential to serve as a foundation for future empirical investigations into the international expansion of technology retail enterprises. The initial recommendation is to conduct qualitative research by interviewing administrators, managers, and employees who were involved in the expansion process. These interviews may offer a unique perspective on internal management practices, challenges, decisions, and experiences that are not obvious from secondary sources. A second suggestion is to compare iStorm to other retail or retail technology companies that have implemented comparable expansion strategies. A comparative analysis could identify the elements that are unique to iStorm's circumstances and those that are indicative of broader industry trends. Additionally, future research could concentrate on employees in emerging markets, investigating their perspectives regarding corporate culture, training, leadership, and procedures. It would also be intriguing to conduct a survey of consumers regarding their perceptions of the brand, service quality, and in-store experience. Lastly, a quantitative study can be conducted to investigate the correlation between the success of international expansion, organizational culture, and leadership. As a result, the analytical conclusions of this study could be empirically verified on a broader sample of companies and markets.

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