ISCTE ◈ Business School
Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

BRAND EXPERIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS
STRATEGIES

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BRAND EXPERIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS STRATEGIES

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Abstracts

Internationalization is a strategy that is well spread when companies want to expand and grow. Many studies have already been done on this subject but this research not only aims at illustrating and understanding the internationalization process but also at linking it to brand experience. This particular study focuses on La Fée Maraboutée, a French fashion brand which has expanded in the Middle East. Although this fashion company is focused on brand experience in its domestic market, it is crucial to understand different strategies when exporting the concept abroad. Therefore, this research focuses on determining the brand experience antecedents of La Fée Maraboutée in the Middle East and their link to the international business strategies. The identification of these links will assist the brand to have a better overview of its strengths and weaknesses which in turn will aid in creating decisions in order to further develop the brand and sales performance in the Middle East.

A Internacionalização é uma estratégia difundida quando os objetivos das empresas são a expansão territorial e o aumento do volume de negócios. Diversos estudos foram realizados sobre este tópico, no entanto, este trabalho de investigação não tem apenas como objetivo ilustrar e compreender o processo de internacionalização, mas também, relacionar o mesmo com *brand experience*. Mais especificamente, este estudo foca-se na La Fée Maraboutée, uma empresa francesa da Indústria da Moda, que expandiu a sua marca para o Médio Oriente. Esta marca foca a sua *brand experience* no mercado doméstico, consequentemente, aquando da exportação do conceito além-fronteiras, é importante perceber as estratégias adotadas para entrar no novo mercado. Assim, este estudo determina a *brand experience* da La Fée Maraboutée enquanto marca francesa e marca global no Médio Oriente e a sua ligação com as estratégias de *International Business*. Identificar o que relaciona a *brand experience* e as estratégias de negócio, permitirá distinguir, com maior precisão, as forças e fraquezas da marca. Influenciando, o processo de *decision making* na escolha de futuras estratégias com a premissa de desenvolver a marca e melhorar a performance de vendas no Médio Oriente.

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Figures and tables

Abbreviations

DNA: Desoxyribonucleic acid

TEAV: Thought-Emotion-Activity-Value

CBBE: Customer-Based Brand Equity

SME: Small and Medium Enterprise

OM: Owner Managers

SCPP: Structure-Conduct-Performance Paradigm

UAE: United Arab Emirates

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Executive summary

Growth in the fashion industry has decreased in the previous years and to solve it, brands had to find distinct ways to differentiate themselves from the strong competition. In order to do so, the brand experience concept has emerged and had grown in popularity. Through the studies already published, researchers and managers have identified antecedents and consequences of brand experience that allow them to focus on which levers to use in order to improve their presence and growth. Another way to expand is to internationalize. This is a decision that numerous companies take today to find other business opportunities and improve their performance. However, these decisions involve different parameters that are sometimes not well managed or not pre-planned due to cultural, procedural or business differences. In order to link both concepts and to illustrate it, the research focuses on a french fashion brand with a strong DNA, La Fée Maraboutée, and its internationalization in the Middle East.

In order to identify the brand experience antecedents of la Fée Maraboutée in the Middle East and of its overviews of the international strategies adopted regarding each antecedent, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews to drive it to directed content analysis. The findings showed that the concept of La Fée Maraboutée, which involves 5 brand experience antecedents with one added further to interviews and not based on the literature, cannot be implemented as it is in France to the Middle East. Some changes have been already implemented but some adaptations still need to be done to better fit the market requirements. Once these changes were analyzed and links to brand experience made, the researcher gives managerial recommendations to implement them with the aim to help the brand to better perform and increase the brand exposure and presence in the Middle East. The main changes to be done are mainly focused on the product and the use of technologies because of the specificities of the region.

The researcher derived limitations and perspectives from the findings. The small sample as well as the lack of experience with directed content analysis could have biased the results. However, future researches could quantify to validate or reject the findings. Extending this research to other fashion brands would contribute to a deeper understanding of the links between brand experience and international business strategies.

1.   La Fée Maraboutée

1.1 History

La Fée Maraboutée was established in 1996 in Roanne, the home of the French textile industry. Under the artistic direction of its founder, Jean-Pierre Braillard, the brand has maintained its uniqueness for almost 20 years in the place where it was established. Attached to its roots, La Fée Maraboutée is proud of its values. Today, M 95% of La Fée Maraboutée's items are made in Europe (85% in Italy and 10% in Portugal). To best fulfill its quality, ethics and responsibility requirements, La Fée Maraboutée has chosen to trust the know-how of its historical partners to whom are famous for their attention to detail and finishing touches. La Fée Maraboutée began to sell to multi-brand stores called wholesale businesses that echoes the retail business and in turn represents the stores labeled La Fée Maraboutée. The company has dramatically developed its retail network these last years but remains strongly connected to the wholesale concept.

In 2012, La Fée Maraboutée was sold to an investment fund, Silverfleet Capital, in association with its founder, Jean Pierre Braillard and its directors, Jean-Christophe Astruc and Thierry Pérusat. Currently, only Jean-Christophe Astruc remains as the Director of La Fée Maraboutée with Jean Pierre Braillard as its artistic Director. Silverfleet Capital has named Georges Spitzer, former Givenchy and "Du Pareil au même" President, to lead the Supervisory Board and guide its leaders.

1.2 The brand's DNA

La Fée Maraboutée offers a wardrobe that will never go out of fashion and that keeps building on itself over the course of seasons and years. It imagines and creates a timeless wardrobe, made of influences and contrasts, which mixes periods, volumes and materials with a touch of impertinence. In this spirit, the collections are designed to meet the needs of women in their everyday life.

The dress, the "must-have" item in every woman's wardrobe, is the core of all of the brand's collections. Patterned or in plain colour, short or long, loose or tight, with a low or high neck, La Fée offers a wide range of dresses for all occasions.

In plain colour, flecked, patterned or jacquard, the dress is featured in every season to create embracing, comfortable, urban and sophisticated looks. Collection after collection, La Fée has been focusing particularly on knitwear to offer the softest and most natural fabrics, such as cotton, linen, viscose, wool, cashmere and angora.

Original, lively and unique shops transmit the universe of the brand. Each of its boutique shops is characterised by an exclusive blend of different objects and pieces of furniture, painstakingly personalised to reflect the spirit of the city and place in which they are located. Comfortable, welcoming and unusual. Carefully decorated around a mixture of odds and ends, antique items, travel souvenirs, family furniture or industrial details. Cosy and warm interiors where the collections naturally find their place. These "Boutique Apartments" invite you to explore and wander.

1.3 Competition and positioning analysis

Figure 1: competition map

On this graph, we can see that La Fée Maraboutée is part of the middle/high women clothing market, where the competition is fierce. Its main competitors are Ba&sh, Maje, IKKS, Scotch

& Soda, as well as comptoir des cotonniers who are well established in France and internationally. To grow and keep market shares, it is crucial that La Fée Maraboutée has to maintain its spirit and roots to differentiate itself from the competition

1.4 La Fée Maraboutée's implementation

As explained before, La Fée Maraboutée follows a diversified distribution model, combining wholesale and retail businesses. On the graph, we can see that the biggest part is the wholesale business in France, representing 44% of La Fée Maraboutée's business with a presence in 556 multi-brand stores but closely followed by the wholesale at an international level.

Figure 2: Repartition of Silverfleet business

Source: Silverfleet (2014)
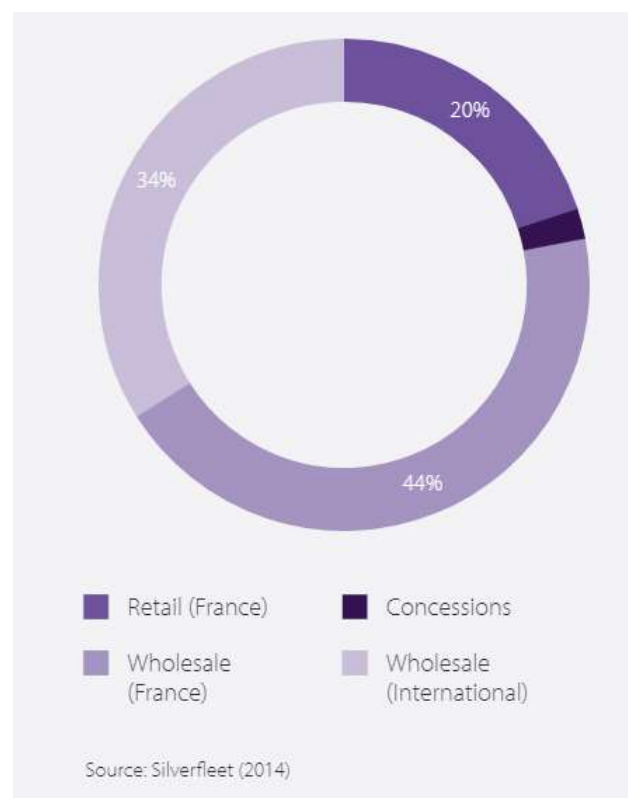
Today, La Fée Maraboutée has 85 stores in France divided into affiliates and branches, 6 corners in department stores like Galeries Lafayette or Printemps and it is also present in 6 e-shops: La Fée maraboutée website, la Redoute and Place des tendances.

Internationally, you can see on the map below that the brand is well spread over the world, especially in Europe and Asia.

Figure 3 : La Fée Maraboutée 's global presence

Company presentation- Map

2017: The brand counts 110 branded stores

	Wholesale	Retail
Europe		
France	556	94
Germany/Austria	222	-
Italy	120	5
Spain	178	2
Belgium/Luxembourg	130	9
Netherlands	112	-
Switzerland	36	-
Ireland	27	-
Russia	23	
Asia		
China	-	9
North America		
Canada		
South America		
Colombia		2
Middle East		
Dubaï		2
Qatar		1
Lebanon	1	
Saudi Arabia		1

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1.5 The issue

When I arrived in June at La Fée Maraboutée in June 2017, they just opened retail stores in Dubai (2 locations) and in Doha. I then followed the project almost from the beginning until now. As we can see above in the DNA, La Fée Maraboutée differentiates itself from its competitors by its brand experience offered especially in the stores where the customers can feel like at home while enjoying their shopping. The decoration is made with a mix of old and contemporary items like old vases or modern and stylish skull heads. Although this model of brand experience has proved its worth in Europe, the cultural differences with the Middle East could be an obstacle to the implementation of the brand because the customers may comprehend the brand differently. Indeed, the internationalization process of la Fée Maraboutée has been very quick these last five years and we can only wonder then if all the parameters have been analyzed before implementing the brand overseas in order to perform as well as planned and hoped

2.   Brand experience and internationalization

2. 1 Brand experience

There are several definitions of brand experience which can be defined for example as Brakus et al. did in 2009 by defining it as a "subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioural responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments". Through the subjective and the internal, the authors underline the personal and intrinsic character of brand experience. When studying brand experience, the concept of customer experience comes regularly. Customer experience itself is approximately the same as brand experience, the difference being the insistence of the personal interactions between a person and a company, its products or another organization (Gentile, Spiller and Noci, 2007; LaSalle and Britton, 2003).

When a comparison between the definitions is done, same ideas come up that lead to a summary of the concept: brand experience arises when there is a contact with a brand provoked by a stimulus that leads the consumer to intrinsically react to it involving emotional components.

In addition, brand experience occurs not only during the purchase or during consumption of an item but also whenever there is a contact with the brand.

2.1.1 Brand experience dimensions

Once the concept of the brand experience is defined, it is important to add the dimensions or measurements that are linked to it. Measurements can help companies to know in which way or on which part they can affect customers. In 1986, Hirschman and Holbrook created a model called Thought-Emotion-Activity-Value (TEAV). Thought refers to the cognitive process, Emotion to feelings, expressions (facial or gestural), Activity to both physical and mental events and Value refers to evaluation. Pine and Gilmore's dimensions are the four E's standing for Entertainment, Educational, Esthethic, and Escapist. In 1999, Schmitt designed a model in which brand experiences can take five dimensions. The first one is the SENSE referring to the senses that is to say the sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch. The goal is to differentiate itself from competitors. The second dimension is FEEL, in reference to feelings and emotions in

order to a create positive link towards the brand. The third one is THINK, which is more intellectual and require more creativity. The fourth dimension is ACT referring to physical changes such as changes in consumers' behaviours. Finally, the last dimension is RELATE, which is a mix of the four previous dimensions. It refers more to the desire of the ideal, how consumers can improve their life and how consumers want people to have a positive image of them (Cleff, Chun Lin and Walter, 2014). More recently, a brand experience scale has been developed which contains 4 dimensions that are sensory, affective, behavioural, and intellectual. They actually correspond to SENSE, FEEL, THINK, and ACT except that the fifth dimension of Schmitt's model is missing. (Brakus et al., 2009; Cleff, Chun Lin and Walter, 2014).

2.1.2 Antecedents of Brand Experience

In this second sub-part we will focus on the antecedents of offline brand experience by detailing them one by one.

Figure 4 : Brand experience scheme
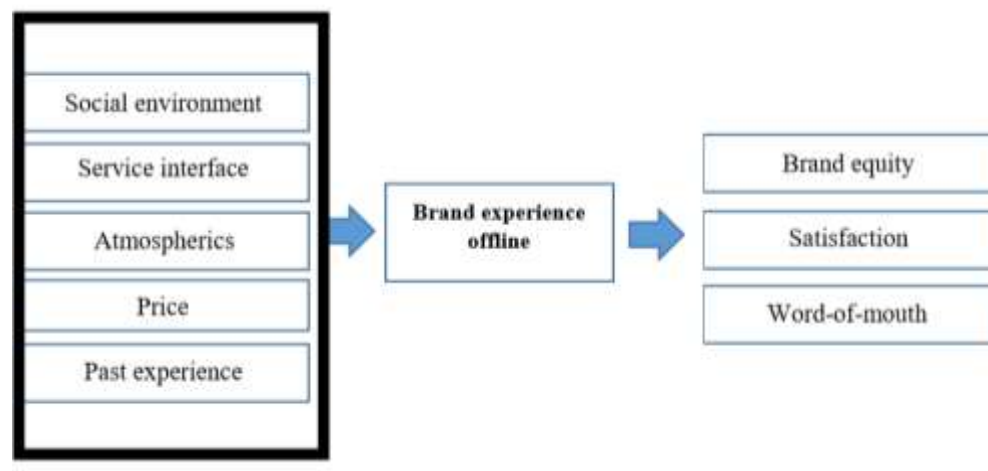
2.1.2.1. The social environment

The social environment can be defined by the people surrounding a consumer such as other customers, friends, or salespeople. The influence of salespeople on customer/brand experience is immediately obvious because it directly affects a persons' emotions and behaviours with a product, whereas other relationships or contacts among the customers themselves is less so. This interaction between the customers, called the *interpersonal*, is crucial to brand experience.

According to the need it refers to (need for control, inclusion or affection), it may have positive or negative effects. For example, someone with a need of control will perceive a crowded shop as negative whereas someone with a need of affection may see it positively because of the possibility that someone unknown in the fitting room will compliment her/him on how he/she looks.

2.1.2.2 Service Interface

Nowadays, physical settings are forced to adapt their brand to technology because their impact on the overall experience is crucial. Thanks to technology, customers can co-create and personalize their experience which in turn enhances the experience (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). However, the use of technology can also be disturbing for consumers and may lead to negative feelings and experiences. Indeed, when facing innovation and new technologies, consumers may see risks, insecurity, and discomfort but may also lead to optimism and excitement (Lam, Chiang and Parasuraman, 2008).

Thus, brands have to solve these apprehensions and improve on the positive feelings (i.e. optimism and innovativeness) in order to foster experiences (Elliott, Hall and Meng, 2013).

2.1.2.3 Atmospherics

Atmospherics refer to the sensory variables (auditory, olfactory, taste, tactile, visual) set by the brands in order to influence shopping behaviours through an affective and cognitive process. However, taste can't directly be associated to atmospherics since an atmosphere can only be "seen, heard, smelt, and felt, but not tasted" (Kotler, 1974:.51).

The auditory component of the atmospherics refers to the music and sound. Music can affect the state of mind through emotions since it impacts a customer's 'pleasure and arousal' (Dubé, Chebat & Morin, 1995) and reduces intense feelings such as fear or stress. The effectiveness of auditory atmospherics from an affective point of view is done through the stimulation. Furthermore, as music affects emotions, it also impacts customers' perceptions. For example, when having background music, customers tend to spend a longer time browsing (Holbrook and Anand, 1990; Donovan, Rossiter, Marcoolyn and Nesdale, 1994; Yalch and Spangenberg, 2000) and thus consume more than initially planned.

The olfactory atmospheric is the fragrance embedded in a physical environment and may be the lesser known component. The specificity of this atmospheric is that customers do not always perceive the fragrance and its impact on behaviours and emotions. It has been showed that scent has a strong power to evoke past experiences and can link it to enjoyable experience and emotions (Halloway, 1999). These emotions and pleasure points can reduce the perceptions of time spent in stores: a consumer in a scented environment will have the impression of less time spent than a consumer in a non-scented area since it also reduces the feeling of waiting (Spangenberg, Crowley and Henderson, 1996).

Tactile atmospherics can be defined, according to Kotler (1974) as the quality of softness, smoothness, and temperature. It has been shown that consumers prefer shopping in stores where they can touch the products especially in the clothing industry since it aids in making decisions and evaluating the product further. (Peck and Childers, 2003; Grohmann, Spangenberg and Sprott, 2007). As tactile atmospherics affect consumer's emotions and behaviours, thus it also affects their brand experience.

When entering in a store, lighting and colours are factors that can directly be noticed. Indeed, colours and lighting affect the level of stimulation (Spence, Puccinelli, Grewal and Roggeveen, 2014) and retailers manipulate it in order to subdue or increase the experience. In general, visual signals have positive effects on customer behaviours. The consequences of bright environments and some colours is that customers stay longer in stores and then tend to purchase more (Summers & Hebert, 2001). Furthermore, visuals are part of the brand and can facilitate their identification. Thus, shifting them can be disturbing and disconcerting because it changes the usual associations that customers have in mind which can then decrease brand experiences (Spence et al., 2014).

2.1.2.4 Price

Price is an antecedent of brand experience because of the programs led by retailers in order to retain customers and make them live a unique experience. The major part of this component is achieved by loyalty programs (LP) which rewards and thus encourages customers to engage in loyalty (Sharp and Sharp, 1997). At the same time, these programs involve different benefits such as utilitarian, hedonic and symbolic benefits.

Utilitarian benefits are more associated with financial or economic advantages because of the savings ensured which is the main motivation that makes consumers join loyalty programs

(Peterson, 1995). These utilitarian benefits lead to positive feelings and can have an effect on brand experience.

Hedonic characteristics deal with emotion, experience and may be important for loyalty programs because of the exploration and entertainment dimensions. Arnold and Reynolds (2003) showed that consumers animated by hedonic dimensions will achieve more positive experiences.

The symbolic dimension of loyalty programs refers to recognition and social characteristics. Being members of LP enables customers to distinguish themselves from non-members which in turn can make them feel privileged while also allows them to perceive that they belong to a group or community that is associated with a brand (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001).

2.1.2.5 Past experience

The experience lived yesterday will determine the experience of tomorrow and that is why managers cannot neglect past experiences and should try to deliver a homogeneity through the whole process that constitutes brand experience. Then, the crucial component for future brand experience is the expectations previously satisfied during the last experience (Verhoef et al., 2009). Bolton (1998) showed that accumulated satisfaction increases the length of the relationship and that several months' experiences strongly enhance satisfaction. However, satisfaction between past and future experiences can be deterred by critical incidents (CI) and may affect customer satisfaction and relationships with the brand (van Doorn and Verhoef, 2008).

2.1.3 Outcomes of brand experience

2.1.3.1 Brand equity

Brand equity has been defined by several authors. Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) defined brand equity as the customer's personal assessment of a brand composed of different components. Keller (1993) includes only brand knowledge that is to say brand awareness and brand image. While according to Aaker (1996) brand equity is composed of brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand associations and perceived quality.

Brand awareness refers to the customers 'ability to recognize and distinguish a brand among others (Biedenbach and Marell, 2010; Keller, 1993). This remembrance includes a trace in memory that leads to the brand identification. Brand awareness is positively linked to the formation of brand associations because it is the process that makes a customer recall a brand. Brand experience has a positive effect on brand awareness but it does not appear to be stronger than traditional branding options such as social media or other communication means (Cleff, Lin and Walter, 2014; Biedenbach and Marell, 2010).

Brand association is the whole information a consumer stores in their memory about a brand (Elangeswaran and Ragel, 2014). As consumers hold information in their memory, they will build their own perceptions about a brand thus that is called brand image (Keller, 1993). When speaking about the influence of brand experience on brand associations, Cleff, Lin, and Walter (2014) have found that brand experience has a positive impact on brand image, closely linking it to brand associations. This correlation between brand experience and brand image shows that a successful experience with the brand will improve the perceptions a customer has of a brand and affects customers' decision making because it will have an impact on the brand choice and preferences (Elangeswaran and Ragel, 2014).

Brand loyalty in its general definition is the consumers' repeated purchase of a same brand (Amine, 1998). For Amine (1998) and Jacoby and Kyner (1973), commitment is a crucial notion to take into account when speaking about brand loyalty because it is the central component of repeated buying. A positive brand experience will encourage customers to repeat their act of purchase and prevent them from switching to competitors. Furthermore, when being satisfied of their brand experience, customers who become loyal will have a higher willingness to pay a price premium, as they have a positive perception of the brand's performance. (Aaker, 1996; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Thomson, McInnis and Park, 2005).

Perceived quality is the last component of brand equity and can be defined as the consumers' performance perceptions of a product or service. Brand experience influences perceived quality because customers will evaluate the brand according to this experience and it will be then, a criterion for brand choice (Bendixen, Bukasa and Abratt, 2004).

2.1.3.2 Satisfaction

When there is a positive experience, the emotional responses are pleasure, joy and interest. On the contrary, when there is a negative experience, the responses are hostility, anger, disgust, fear, sadness, guilt, contempt, and shame. Thus, the emotional responses that lead to customer

satisfaction will have a major effect in enhancing the likelihood of repurchase intention (Bagozzi, Gopinath and Nyer, 1999). Another outcome of positive correlation between brand experience and customer satisfaction is that, from a vendor's view, satisfaction will enhance trust and reputation. A reputation's improvement is mediated by the effect of satisfaction on credibility (Ganesan, 1994).

2.1.3.3 Word-of-mouth, recommendations

If brand experience has been positive, it will create pleasure, positive feelings and satisfaction. It can even surprise customers enough that they will want to share and persuade other customers to relive that same experience (Dumitrescu et al., 2012). Indeed, consumers spread the word because of three main reasons: social, functional, and emotional. The mediator between brand experience and word-of-mouth is customer satisfaction because the feelings and emotions brought on by memorable experiences inspires customers to share their experience through word-of-mouth. A recommendation by word-of-mouth can encourage new consumers to engage with the mentioned brand, while in turn increasing the repurchase rates of the customers who generated the recommendation. (Nadiri and Gunay, 2013; White, 2010).

2.2 Fashion brand experience

In the previous part, we have defined brand experience. When applied to the retail fashion industry, it highlights the fact that it is a synchronization between brand equity and "consumers' cognitive, affective and behavioral experience perspectives" (Kim, H. 2012: 420). The affective dimension is crucial within the fashion brand experience because it is created by the consumers' perceptions of the brand image, their feelings towards the brand and the relationship between the consumer and the brand. The cognitive experience is created by the brand performance or perceived quality for example and is a necessary condition to affective experience.

As mentioned in the issue definition, cultural aspects are very important when speaking about fashion brand experience because they comprehend a brand differently according to their values, norms, beliefs and mental systems that differ from one culture to another which could affect their brand experience.

If in the brand experience we have seen that brand equity is composed of 4 components, within the fashion brand experience framework, the notion of Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE)

(Kim, H. 2012) is the reference involving 6 components that have been for some already been defined above:

- • Brand Awareness
- • Brand Performance: Refers to the inherent part of the brand that mainly focuses on the product characteristics. It is then important to know how the customer perceives the brand and the product.
- • Brand Image
- • Customer Judgement: It is the reliability the customer puts in the brand to perform. Keller (2001) identified 4 types of judgements: quality, credibility, consideration and superiority.
- • Customer Feeling: It refers to the positive emotional responses to a brand experience.
- • Resonance: This last component refers to the relationship created between the brand and the customer. It is the synchronization of all the previous components.

In order to better visualize the CBBE model, here is a graph conceptualizing the fashion brand experience framework:

Figure 5: brand experience dimensions
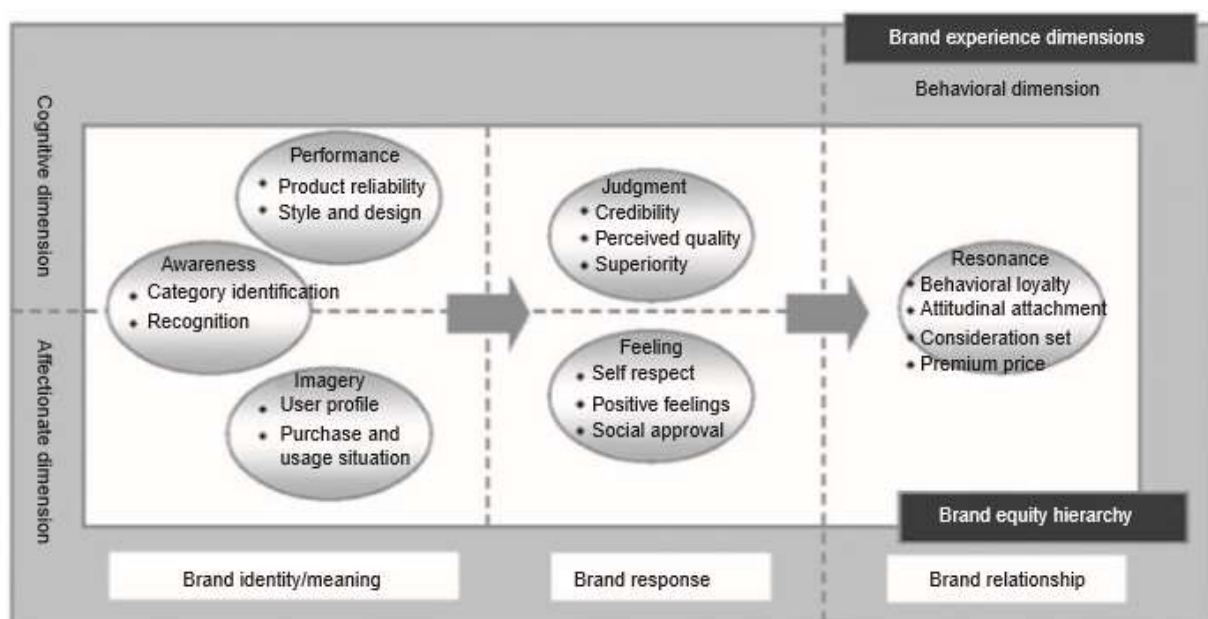
Source: Kim, H. (2012)

2.3 SME's, internationalization and the Middle East

2.3.1 SME's retail brand management

SME brand management is composed of different dimensions (Mitchell, R. et al. 2015; Mitchell et al., 2013)

- Brand strategy
- Brand identity formation and coordination
- Mechanisms for evaluating brand equity
- Brand marketing support
- Brand management structure

2.3.1.1 SME's brand strategy

Retail SMEs have different challenges such as limited resources and a firm centric approach. Indeed, a SME's owner managers (OMs) are more focused on the operational rather than the strategic or branding parts to which can be harmful for the brand and company, since for most of SMEs (except for manufacturing SMEs), the brand name is the company name (Omar and Fraser, 2011). The OM plays then a crucial role in the branding development of a firm. (Mitchell et al., 2015)

2.3.1.2 Brand Identity

As we have seen before, brand identity is a unique bundle of brand associations that defines the existence of the brand and what differentiates it from others. When speaking about retailing, this bundle is strongly impacted by the store environment and how the company communicates internally (Fernie, Moore, Lawrie and Hallsworth, 1997). Within the SME context, once again the OM has a central role because they often shape a brand's associations and with that the SME's brand identity (Craig, Dibrell and Davis, 2008). While at the same time the complexity of retail brand identity makes the challenge of OM retailers even harder to form a coherent brand identity (Kent, 2003).

2.3.1.3 Evaluating brand management performance

Brand performance management is usually measured thanks to brand equity evaluation. Many tools have been developed for appraising brand equity but when it is in the context of SMEs, it may become problematic. Indeed, the measurement of brand equity in retailing mainly focuses on how well the costs of developing private labels are recovered by the brands. However, in most of SME cases, OMs do not use these methods but rather adopt intuitive and non-formal methods (Spence and Essoussi, 2010; Wong and Merrilees, 2005). Thus, the SMEs' brand equity appraisal is mainly set by the OM's vision and ideas which can be seen as hazardous. It may also cause a problem of control and monitoring in order to improve it

2.3.1.4 Brand marketing

Usually, a SMEs' brand marketing is not well developed because of limited resources, time, expertise and an OM's lack of interest for marketing issues (Carson and McCartan-Quinn, 1995; Mowle and Merrilees, 2005). Thus, SMEs have to find other ways to develop their brands and mark the customers. Usually, the retail store environment is a key component of SME brand marketing because it creates an experience and then impacts the brand associations. They also impact the turnovers as we have seen above in the outcomes of brand experience. Word-of-Mouth is also an important element of SME communication that it is not easy to master.

2.3.1.5 Brand management structures

It has been found that the structure of brand management has an effect on how successful a brand is (Low & Fullerton, 1994). In SMEs, the organisation levels are reduced and usually the Owner Manager is also the brand manager. This allows a coherent, coordinated and facilitated control of the brand decisions. Yet, this practice may be in contradiction with the operating reality.

It has been shown that internal and external stakeholders are needed in order to have an effective management. Internally, the staff may play an important role by participating in the creation of brand associations while externally, manufacturer and suppliers' networks can also help the SMEs in value co-creation (Pettinger, 2004; Varley and Rafiq, 2004).

We have seen in this part how a SME usually deals with its retail brand management and what they should do according to their constraints and advantages.
In the following part, we will then study how SMEs can expand their business internationally.

2.3.2 Retailing SMEs internationalization process

2.3.2.1 Drivers of SMEs' internationalization

Drivers for retail internationalization have been separated into many different categories but we will take the most recent categorization that deals with the reactive/proactive approach (Evans et al., 2008).

The reactive approach, which uses the Uppsala internationalization model, mainly focuses on the fact that when the domestic market is saturated, companies have to go internationally (Johanson and Vahlne, 1977). In most SME cases, they investigate the domestic and international markets at the same time because even if their development is crucial, their attachment to their roots is equally important.

On the other hand, the proactive factors favour the internal & external factors that makes the foreign market interesting. Indeed, if a country offers special fiscals or economic advantages for business development, it may encourage a company to enter this market and especially in the cases of SMEs that are constrained to their limited resources. Internal factors can be the specific skills and competencies of the managers or employees to work abroad and bring an added value to the company internationalization (Vida et al., 2000).

More recently, Hutchinson et al (2006,2007) found that other factors may be taken into account by SME retailers when internationalizing. In fact, the brand itself can be a driver of internationalization because its desirability may push the management to explore opportunities in foreign markets. Furthermore, he also highlighted that the decision and process of internationalization depends on the founder and the management's vision and personality.

2.3.2.2 Obstacles to SMEs' internationalization

There are two main categories of obstacles to internationalization. The first one concerns the impediments that may arise before or during the initial internationalization phase. It first involves an internal element that refers to the management (Gardo, Garcia and Descals, 2015). Certainly, SMEs' managers may be an obstacle themselves because of their lack of information about the markets and the associated procedures which can work against them. The managers' attitude, their risk aversion and lack of ability to manage international teams can also be failure factors (Hutchinson et al., 2006; BICE, 2007).

The second category focuses more on the process of internationalization and especially the environmental factors that are external to companies. Indeed, many external elements such as the legislation, economic/political instability or high, fluctuating exchange rates can be crucial factors that can jeopardize an internationalization process (Alexander, 1997; Myers and Alexander, 2007) Furthermore, cultural and social elements can also be obstacles. Cultural or language differences, if not accepted or adopted, can lead to misunderstanding, non-comprehending situations and over time, failure (McGoldrick, 1995).

2.3.2.3 International business strategies

Once having studied the motives and obstacles of SMEs internationalization, it is crucial to focus on the business strategies these previous elements influence.

According to the company's vision, resources, capabilities and strategy, it will opt for the adaptation or standardization strategy.

Standardization or global strategy can be defined as the harmonization of a firm's marketing activities so that the elements of the marketing mix (Pricing, Product, Promotion, Place) is the same across all markets where the firm is active (Krupka, Z., Ozretic-Dosen, D. and Previsic, J., 2017; Johansson, 2006). In basic terms, it is the duplication of a concept in different countries. However, on the contrary, the adaptation strategy is focused on the adjustment of the marketing mix elements according to the customers' specific requirements and needs of individual foreign countries.

Along the years, there has been a debate in the literature onto which strategy is the best when internationalizing. Further to these discussions, some models have been developed to find the most effective choice such as the Structure-Conduct-Performance Paradigm (SCP) also called the Bain-Mason paradigm. It represents the interconnection between the environment (Structure) of the firm, the strategy (Conduct) chosen by the management and the performance resulting from this mix (Bain, 1968). This paradigm argues that the market environment (structure) is directly impacted by the firm's strategy that then has an effect on the performance. Furthermore, it also claims that it involves feedback effects that is to say that performance also influences a firm's strategy and environment.

These implications are crucial for the further development of this paper because it will define one of the central elements that will find our hypothesis and results.

2.3.3 Fashion retail market in the Middle East

When speaking about the Middle East market, we will define it as the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia as these are the countries where La Fée Maraboutée is active.

In 2016, Muslim consumers spent $230 billion (State of the Global Islamic Economy report, 2015-2016) on clothing and this number should reach $327 billion by 2019. These figures show the potential growth of the Middle East fashion market. To show the importance of this part of the world, the Arab Fashion Week has become one of the biggest fashion weeks worldwide (Forbes Middle East, July 2017). However, before entering this market, it is essential to understand it.

Women in the Middle East are very well represented at work and have a strong purchase power and personality that enable them to create their own style. According to the countries or regions, women's styles may differ. In multicultural cities such as Dubaï or Doha where people are exposed to western influences, women like mixing global and local brands. It may explain why many designers have flourished these last years in the Middle East (The Online Industry, October 2015). Brands coming from Europe or the US have then to adapt their products and marketing activities to deal with this melting pot of cultures, nationalities, religions, identities and the current Islamic fashion trends.

In this second part of the work, we will now focus on the conceptual framework where we can draw the literature review and hypotheses settings so that we can proceed to the methodology and be able to analyse the results.

In these last parts, the researcher described the context of the study and then defined the different concepts that are at the core of the thesis in order to base its study on it. Once the basis is defined, it is crucial to remind the aim of this thesis and then show the process that will allow the researcher to answer to the problem.

Since this thesis tries to identify which antecedents of brand experience applies to La Fée Maraboutée and if these experiences work the same in France as well as when internationalizing, specifically in the Middle East, it is therefore crucial to set hypotheses and to visualize the framework studied.

The first part of the hypotheses concerns the relevance of antecedents when applying to La Fée Maraboutée. The researcher collected all the antecedents found previously in the literature review and have assessed their influences on the brand experience at La Fée Maraboutée. Thus, atmospherics, service interface, past experience, social environment and price are tested. The second part of the hypotheses and research refers to the capacity of these antecedents to be duplicate or not when internationalizing. If found that they cannot be duplicated, the business strategy will logically be adaptation. However, if they can be duplicated, the business strategy is therefore standardisation.

Hypotheses:

H1: What do influence customers' brand experience in the Middle East when shopping at la Fée Maraboutée?

H1a: Atmospherics influence customers' brand experience
H1b: Social environment affects customers' brand experience
H1c: Service Interface affects customers' brand experience
H1d: Price influences customers' brand experience
H1e: Past experience influences customers' brand experience

H2: What are the impacts of brand experience on internationalization business strategies at la Fée Maraboutée?

H2a: Brand experiences antecedents favour adaptation strategy
H2b: Brand experiences antecedents favour standardization strategy

Figure 6: Hypotheses scheme
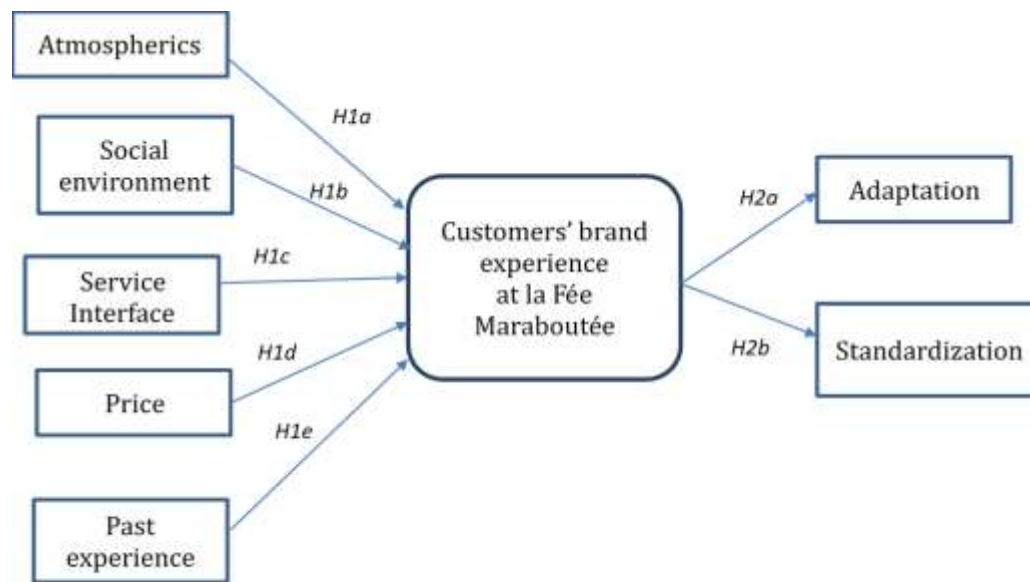
3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction of Research Design

Researchers select qualitative studies to explore and reach an in-depth understanding of an unknown topic in order to develop a theory (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). The main goal of this study is to determine the antecedents of brand experience at La Fée Maraboutée and if, during the internationalisation process, they can be applied to other countries and especially in the Middle East. There is a need to describe the phenomenon and to determine the importance of each antecedent found in the literature when applied to La Fée Maraboutée's brand experience, as well as their potential of duplication (or not) when internationalizing. As the literature is insufficient and underdeveloped, a quantitative research will not benefit the analysis, as it is meant to correct the current theory. The advantages of qualitative research rely on the unexpected, as these studies usually contain information that were unforeseen and that add value to the current research.

As a non-numerical study, it is crucial to adopt an interpretive research philosophy to acquire knowledge through a broad overview of the phenomenon in order to detect evidence beyond the current literature. In this case, the researcher is part of what is observed and collaborates with the sample. The research is thus rather explorative and descriptive in order to understand

the concept as well as to identify future research directions. Hence, the exploratory study will develop a theory, which quantitative studies can test in the future. This thesis is based on in-depth interviews guided by questions that will create a conversation between the subjects and the interviewer. The variables in the study are experimental as the researcher controls them to guide the interviewee to a desired path in order to acquire the desired information. Experimental variables support the analyst in the discovery of interrelation between the variables. For this thesis, the researcher decided to apply the case study method, where the subject is asked to explain a situation they engaged with a brand. The lack of budget and time did not allow the author to conduct the interviews thoroughly. Thus, the study was organized only once for each subject, i.e. cross-sectional study. The researcher decided to use qualitative content analysis to proceed and analyze the data collected. The qualitative content analysis is a systematic approach which consists of creating codes and categories in order to explore and determine linkages, relationships and structures of a phenomenon (Mayring, 2000).

Hsieh and Shannon (2005: 1277-1288) distinguishes three different approaches of qualitative content analysis: conventional, directed and summative. What differentiates these three approaches are the coding methods, their origins and values regarding their limitations and reliability. The conventional approach aims at creating coding categories directly from the raw data. The directed content analysis' codes is built on already existing studies and findings that will guide the analysis. Finally, summative approach uses "comparisons and counting" in order to interpret the data. As the researcher decided to base their analysis on previous studies as a guide to elaborate the coding, it seems obvious that directed qualitative content analysis is the most adapted methodology to analyze the data. Based on this methodology, it will help the researcher to base its framework on solid bases to give the meaningful insights to La Fée Maraboutée's managers and as well as future research directions (Zang and Wildemuth, 2005)

3.2 Sampling Method and Presentation of Interviewees

Since the thesis try to identify the motives behind decision-making of consumers and managers to define their business strategies, it seems coherent that the unit of analysis is customers and managers hence, relates to the decisions level. Following the previous section, qualitative researches imply non-probability sampling. This means that the sampling method was non-random, which used subjective procedure in terms of the selection. Furthermore, the researcher followed a restricted approach as additional controls were introduced: working or having

experience in the fashion retail industry within the Middle East. The analyst checked these variables prior the selection and restated the conditions at the beginning of the interview. Hence, the sampling design was purposive as the elements of the sample were selected based on judgement. The author firstly asked her colleagues and the contact person in the partner company in Dubaï but as the sample was not sufficient, she decided to extend the research to acquaintances. The analyst asked the partner to help her finding other potential interviewees within its company in Dubaï. However, only 10 participants were retained as they were complying to the control variables. In semi-structured interview, it is crucial to build trust so that the interviewees feel comfortable to share their experience without the feeling of being judged. Since the subjects were either ex-colleagues or familiar with the brand, the concern regarding the trust issue was not relevant. Furthermore, prior each session, the analyst asked for the consent of the participants to check if they were ready to share their experience for the study. Only 3 subjects didn´t accept to be named or published but agreed on the fact that their answers can be analyzed. The sample includes 10 participants: four male interviewees and six female interviewees (see Appendix 1), which shows a relatively fair repartition of gender. This inequality can be explained by the industry this master thesis is related with, i.e Fashion. The average age of the respondents is 38.3 years old with an outlier (48 years old). Four participants come from France, one come from Switzerland, two from UK and the three remaining participants come from UAE. This multiplicity of nationalities is due to the cultural diversity and expatriation phenomenon in UAE i.e. the experience is not only biased on any cultural values or behaviours. However, if 60 percent of the sample is currently living in the Middle East, the remaining participants have all have experiences with the Middle East. Lastly, 100 percent of the samples are executives and decision-makers. These characteristics will support the analysis and provide limitations regarding the overall results of this thesis. The next session will describe the method of data collection in more details.

3.3 Method of data collection

Most of the interviews were conducted via video because of the distance constraints, except for four, which were organized at La Fée Maraboutée´s office in Paris. The video surveys were either via Skype, or FaceTime because of UAE´s ban of Skype. The general environment of the interviews was crucial so that the interviewer and the interviewee could see each other in order to build more trust. Moreover, the author could adapt its attitude towards the subject by

analysing the body language and facial expressions. This position was important as the researcher could better revise their questions when it was evident that the respondent did not understand. Prior to each session, it was clearly stated to the participants that there were no right or wrong answers and that the researcher was there to facilitate the discussion. Furthermore, the analyst informed the interviewees that the conversations will be recorded when the meeting was set as well as during the small talk before each interview. The appointments were scheduled over two weeks due to the venues of the Middle East partner in Paris. Nevertheless, the transcriptions were completed maximum 3 days after each session in the means of not losing any additional information, which would be indispensable for the interpretation and analysis.

The directed content analysis is a guided method to conduct semi-structured interviews, which includes open questions as well as specific ones corresponding to the predetermined categories (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). This method creates the right environment to explore the respondent's viewpoint regarding his or her experience relevant to the research question as well as guiding the respondent to focus on the categories mentioned. The structured design of the questions list is meant to let subjects follow their own thoughts, while still reframing the discussion, when it becomes not relevant for the topic. The researcher developed an interviewer guide (see Appendix 3) to cover the main topics. Furthermore, even though the interviewer focused on one brand during the session, it was usual to ask the participants on other brands to make comparisons or generalize some facts. Each appointment was organized in the same way. Firstly, the interviewer thanked the interviewee and established the setting of the interview. Even though the participants and the researcher were often acquainted, the interviewer decided to introduce themselves to specify the reasons behind their thesis. Then, they explained the case to the participants before letting them introduce themselves as they wished. When the case was unclear, the researcher summarized the whole situation by interpreting questions and allowing the interviewee to explain the elements which were misunderstood. The analyst asked mainly probing questions to understand the concept and the viewpoint of the respondent deeper but also employed follow-up questions to clarify a vague concept.

Finally, the interviewer closed the interview with kind acknowledgements.

3.4 Analysis of the interviews

3.4.1 Definition of codes

Directed content analysis as well as the other qualitative content analytic approaches follow the same methodologic steps such as defining research questions, choosing the sample, collecting data from the sample, defining categories and the coding process, applying the coding to the data collected, testing the validity and reliability and finally analyzing the results thanks to the coding process. What differentiates the direct content analysis from the previous is the coding process since the codes are usually already predefined before starting coding the data. It is not an ongoing coding as it is the case for the grounded theory for example.

As stated above, the researcher defined the codes before starting the coding process based on the literature. Thus, as previous studies found that there are five antecedents of the brand experience and two main international business strategies, the researcher decided to use these elements to code the data collected through the interviews. These antecedents and business strategies constitute the main labels/concepts/categories. Sub-categories have also been defined prior to interviews but changes and additions have been made through the coding process for sub-categories as well as main ones. The main categories are:

- Price
- Social environment
- Atmospherics
- Technologies
- Past experience
- Adaptation
- Standardization

All the antecedents have been defined in the first part of this paper so it has been judged not necessary to explain them again.

Once these main categories are defined, the researcher attributed a code in order to facilitate the coding process when analyzing data. These codes must be easy to remember and also follow a logic regarding the main category's full label. The codes for the main categories are:

- Price => PRI

- Social environment => SENV

- Atmospherics => ATMOS

- Technologies => TECH

- Past experience => PE

- Adaptation => ADA

- Standardization => STAND

Thanks to the definitions of the antecedents found in the literature, some sub-categories have been logically deduced. Then, for social environment, the sub-categories staff and relations have been *a priori* chosen. Staff relates to the salesperson in the shops that serve, advice and help customers whereas relations refer to the family, friends or other customers around that may advise the customer. The sub-code for staff is STA and REL for relations. For price antecedent, price positioning has been logically deduced from the literature and coded as PP. By price positioning, it means competitive price positioning in comparison with the other brands which can then affect the brand experience. By simple explanation, if the customer feels that it is a fair price, it will improve the brand experience. Regarding the atmospherics, it has been deduced that the decoration and all elements that refer to visual incentives are also sub-categories since it has been studied previously by researchers that it affects brand experience. The code linked to this sub-category is IA standing for interior arrangements. Finally, for the service interface/technologies antecedent, a sub-category deduced was the digital tools in the shops such as tablets, e-shops … and thus coded with DBE for digital brand exposure in stores. For the business strategies, we can deduce from the literature that uniformization is a sub-category since they are the basic strategies used by firms when internationalizing. Then, the code is UNI. For all the other categories, we cannot deduce from the literature any sub-categories where they have been created during the analysis of the texts. Therefore, after the reading of all the data, new subcategories and categories appeared.

Indeed, after the first step of reading and underlining all the recurrent categories aside from the ones already predefined, an extra main category emerged. The category "product" seemed to be obvious to add since it appeared in every interview. The code used to define this category is PROD. The experts interviewed were quite unanimous to say that product highly influences brand experience since customers become satisfied or loyal when they like the products or services offered. However, different aspects appeared when classifying these reasons. Thus, subcategories have been used to differentiate them. The first product subcategory that appeared

most frequently is the "collection." It can be well identified and holds its own style. As the sales director noted, the designer of a collection remains the same and a customer can have the feeling of that same DNA which can then influence them to buy or repurchase. Thus, COL has been chosen to code this subcategory. Another strong element of La Fée Maraboutée's DNA is the special print on their dresses. The Middle Eastern customers tend to admire the prints since it is noticeable by everyone. As Melissa Edwards said in her interview, because these women are quite conservative in terms of lengths and style "they are looking for things that are printed" which can then allow them to stand out. Print therefore will be coded PRIN. Another important element that goes with the prints is color. Indeed, colors are also important for customers of Middle Eastern because it is first a country where it is warm and people usually do not wear dark colors such as black daily. They rather prefer colorful clothes and La Fée Maraboutée answers this need according to most of our interviewees. Thus, the researcher coded it with COLO to differentiate it from the code used for collection. The third subcategory that came regularly is the style and that has been coded with STY. Indeed, la Fée Maraboutée has its own touch regarding the design of their collections. This can be explained by the fact that although he is no longer the director of the collection, Jean Pierre Braillard is still supervising the whole collection design and is in charge of the contacts with suppliers. The last subcategory of the Product group concerns the quality coded with QUAL. In fashion, quality is a parameter that can be particularly assessed thanks to the material used. As many interviewees said, this is particularly true in the Middle East because of the climate. In warm regions, some material such as Polyester are not well appreciated for example because people tend to sweat more in Polyester clothes.

Another main category mentioned that must be added is the adaptation one, coded ADA. Indeed, different adaptations has been mentioned but 4 subcategories have emerged. The first one and the most recurrent one refers to product changes, coded PC, that differs from Europe to Middle East. The second one concerns the merchandising change that have been done in comparison to the standards we have in France to adapt to the Middle Eastern countries and culture. The code used for merchandising change is MC. Another adaptation that appears is the staff because the procedures and staffing knowledge are different in the Middle East due to the multiplicity of cultures and nationalities in this region that lead to different levels of standards. Staff changes has been coded with SC.

In the previous coding explanation, we have defined the codes of categories and subcategories that have been already found in the literature and also introduced an extra main category and

its subcategories. We have to now define the subcategories that appeared along the reading of the interviews that were not directly linked to previous studies.

Within the main category Price, price positioning has been detected as subcategory. Another one is also part of this main category and concerns the price-quality ratio and has been coded thanks to PQR. As mentioned above, quality is very important for customers and even more when it goes upmarket because people are ready to pay more for it. Thus, the price-quality ratio is a good parameter for customers to judge both price and quality which can then influence them to buy. Regarding the main categories, decoration has appeared to be a logical subcategory thanks to the existing literature that relates to the visual sense in brand experience. Through the reading of the texts, two more subcategories emerged. The first one is the space dimension, coded as SPA. Many interviewees, especially the merchandising managers interviewed, mentioned that the stores in the Middle East are much bigger than in France because of the different way of buying. For example, in the Middle East, women shop in groups and spend far more time in one store than the European customers. Thus, in order to have enough seats for all customers and enough space to move in the store, space becomes a crucial element in the Middle Eastern market. This element is linked to the third subcategory that deals with atmosphere. The researcher coded this element ATM to not confuse it with atmospherics. Atmosphere is related to the feelings or impressions that emanate when entering a store of La Fée Maraboutée. All the interviewees said that it is a cosy place where you feel at home and where you would want to spend time which of course influences the brand experience. When moving to service interface or the technology category, one subcategory that emerged in all interviews is the importance of social media especially in the Middle East. The code assigned to this subcategory is SM. According to all managers interviewed working in the Middle East, Instagram, twitter, Facebook… are the strongest way to communicate between a brand and customers in this region. Thus, interacting on social media highly influences the brand experience in the Middle East.

In this latter part, the codes have been defined so that the researcher can better distinguish and start deeper analyzing the links between all elements.

3.4.2 Testing the codes

Once the codes have been described and explained, the researcher decided to proceed to a test to assess code consistency before starting coding all the transcriptions. For doing so, the researcher decided to use an independent analyst to test the "interrater reliability" of the codes

(Conger, J.A (1998). Qualitative research is the cornerstone methodology for understanding leadership (*Leadership Quarterly*, 9: 107–121). The independent researcher received the codes and the sample of data without any definitions so that no biases can intervene during the testing. The task was to try to code the data given with the ones offered. If the external rater didn't agree on some codes, they had the possibility to rename them or introduce new codes.

After processing this test, it appeared that all the codes were understandable except one, which is the digital brand exposure. The independent rater said that he doesn't see the difference between this subcategory and social media. Following the test and remarks of the independent analyst, the subcategory digital brand exposure has been renamed digital sales interface in reference to e-shop or digital tools that can be used in shops for staff and customers.

3.4.3 Coding process and analysis

3.4.3.1 Categorization matrix

As the deductive analysis was chosen, the next step is to build a simplified categorization matrix. It can have different formats but has to list all the categories and subcategories.

	Prix- PRI
Price positioning - PP	2
Price-Quality Ratio - PQR	2
	Social environment - SENV
Staff - STA	6
Relations - REL	4
	Product - PROD
Collection - COL	8
Print -PRIN	6
Color - COLO	6
Style - STY	3

Quality - QUAL	3
	Service interface/Technologies - TECH
Digital sales interface - DSI	3
Social media - SM	9
	Atmospherics - ATMOS
Interior arrangements - IA	4
Atmosphere - ATM	6
Space - SPA	3
	Adaptation - ADA
Product change - PC	13
Merchandising change - MC	7
Staff change - SC	5
	Standardization - STAND
Uniformization	2

Once this categorization matrix done, it is crucial to validate it. Schreier (2012) defines a categorization matrix as valid if the categories fit with the concepts described in the literature and when the matrix matches what was intended at the beginning. It seems that all the subcategories fits the main one. Only the product category was added but it does not constraint the validity of the categorization matrix since it is an intended parameter and all its subcategories suits the main one.

Once the validity of the matrix categorization is set, the researcher went through the interviews where they underlined the category and subcategory related. After that, the analyst counted how many times the same subcategory appeared. This count will help then to highlight the relevant data.

3.4.3.2 Analysis of content

Once the categorization matrix is finalized, validated, and the counting done, we can start to deeply describe the coded part in depth. This phase can also be done as a structured matrix because we choose some aspects in the data (Sandelowski, 1993) but the researcher preferred to proceed to the analysis thanks to the in-depth description rather than in the matrix. The researcher decided to follow the category order of the categorization matrix to analyze the link between the brand experience antecedents and the international business strategies i.e adaptation or standardization strategies chosen in the Middle East by La Fée Maraboutée.

The price is a brand experience antecedent already found in the literature. As the categorization matrix shows, two subcategories have been deduced thanks to the data collected and coded. The first one is price positioning. Through the interviews, the local managers as well as La Fée Maraboutée's managers insisted that the prices set by La Fée Maraboutée are in line with the Middle Eastern market and brand positioning. This price consistency influences the customer's brand experience because they judge it as fair. This feeling of fairness is also due to the consistency of prices of the brand all over the world and not only in the Middle East. As local managers as well as La Fée Maraboutée's managers said, the population of the Middle East is very diversified, composed of locals, expatriates and tourists. The strategic geographic and logistic position of Dubaï for example make people travel a lot and then a price comparison of the brand in different locations is easily made. Thus, it is crucial that the brand assures the same price range all over the world. The fact that the prices are similar in all La Fée Maraboutée's stores shows that the price positioning tends to be standardized. Before concluding that the prices are uniformed at La Fée Maraboutée, the researcher must first analyze the price quality ratio antecedent link. The price quality ratio was mentioned especially by Melissa Edwards, brand manager of La Fée Maraboutée in the Middle East. She is the manager with the best expertise because of her experience in the Middle East and with La Fée Maraboutée. She insisted on the fact that due to the climate in the region, customers pay attention to the material used (polyester, cotton…) and the price related to the product. However, the criteria judged is not just the quality but rather more the price they would be ready to pay for a certain type of clothing while taking into account the material parameter. As the prices and the collection are the same in all La Fée Maraboutée's stores, the standardization conclusion can be drawn. Therefore, the researcher came to the conclusion that the price is a brand experience antecedent that is standardized at La Fée Maraboutée.

Secondly, the researcher analyzed the link between social environment antecedent and the two international business strategies. As shown in the categorization matrix, two subcategories composed this main category: staff and relations. According to the local managers in the Middle East, staff is really important because local customers of the Middle East are used to be served and have their request be readily answered by the present staff. Thus, the staff are the image of the brand and they can set the standards of the brand in the region. For the tourists or expatriates, the staff is a piece of the brand everywhere in the world. The salespersons represent La Fée Maraboutée and must follow the rules and standards by the brand but also deal with the cultural differences. As noted by Melissa Edwards, the brand manager, and Jean Mousa, the sales director of La Fée Maraboutée, the staff in the Middle East is quite difficult to handle; In fact, in the Middle East, many employees come mainly from neighbouring Asian countries such as the Philippines, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India…and their level of education is heterogeneous. The staffing selection is crucial because of the diversity of cultures and nationalities coming to the Middle East which impose language knowledge such as Arabic and English. Once selected, as the interviewees said, it is also important to train them so that they learn the sales methods but above all learn the codes of the brand. Since they assume the brand representation, as well as learn the prices, a certain consistency must be followed over the world. Training at the beginning as well as regular ones are needed to enable this consistency. It is quite clear that some changes are required regarding the staffing to fit the Middle Eastern market. Therefore, adaptation strategy seems to be the most suitable international business strategy regarding the staff. Before making any conclusions on the social environment, we have to analyze the relationship between relations and international business strategies. Relations as well as the staff, as we have noted previously, are important because they also convey the brand image. Indeed, relations are all the people surrounding the customer and as the local managers said, Middle Easterners like to shop in groups with friends or family. Therefore, their relations will highly influence the final customer in their final purchase decision. Even after the purchasing action, the relations will still be important for the brand because if they had a positive brand experience, they will spread the word to other relations and may also communicate it through social media. La Fée Maraboutée is aware that their existing customers are very valuable. With the researcher's working experience at La Fée Maraboutée, the brand organized several events for customers such as private sales or special rebates for them and their friends so that they can bring new customers and increase their relationship with the brand. In the Middle East, things are different since the relations come themselves to the shop by tradition. So most of the action takes place in the stores. Thus, relations need to feel comfortable

in the store, be relaxed and be satisfied so that they can spread the positive words. La Fée Maraboutée has to then change its way of welcoming Middle Eastern clients in terms of seats and in-store service because, as previously mentioned, they spend much more time in shops than Europeans. After having analyzed both staff and relations, the researcher deduced that the social environment antecedent is clearly linked to the adaptation strategy because the brand has to make changes to improve itself in the Middle East.

The third main category that has to be analyzed is the product that which contains four subcategories. The first one is the collection. It is the heart of each fashion brand. La Fée Maraboutée's individual prints and dresses are the distinguishable elements that makes the brand recognizable and distinctive from its competitor brands. It is quite rare for a brand to retain its original DNA through the years as new designers and artistic directors come and go. For La Fée Maraboutée, although Jean Pierre Braillard is no longer the CEO, he is still deeply involved in creating all collections and thus with each decision, he carries through the brand's original DNA. Furthermore, the collection, in comparison to other competitors, is varied and diverse. As local manager Melissa Edwards said, a variety of choice is important for customers in the Middle East. However, according to the merchandising or brand managers in the Middle East, a certain selection in each collection should be developed just for the Middle East as they have special occasions such as Ramadan or Eid. For Ramadan, women tend to seek for long, elegant and classic dresses that they can wear from day to evening. In contrast, for Eid, they tend to buy dresses that are colorful, have tresses, … to wear for parties or events for an unlimited budget. Not having these capsules could have the outcome of missed business opportunities and also missed opportunities for brand image. Therefore, though the collection should offer a variety of choices while keeping to the style guideline, some aspects should still be adapted to the region specificities. Hence adaptation is the most suitable business strategy regarding the idea of collections. The next subcategory composing the product main label is the print. As mentioned above, prints and dresses are the essences of La Fée Maraboutée. The Middle Eastern customers really appreciate these aspects as the brand or merchandising managers in UAE reported. Print preferences differ from country to country but due to the variety within each collection, there is not a strong need to change or adapt prints to the Middle East. Thus, the subcategory print is linked with uniformization or standardization business strategy. When moving to the third subcategory that concerns color, the researcher analysed the impact of this parameter on brand experience and relation to international business strategies. The Middle East is a warm region. People, even the women, enjoy wearing colorful clothes. However, due to the religion, they may wear traditional dark clothing on the outside.

Yet, they still tend to relish in colorful clothing as it makes them recognizable and makes them stand out. Therefore, the colorful clothes offered by La Fée Maraboutée perfectly suits the Middle Eastern customers. In an international business strategy point of view, there is no adaptation needed for the subcategory, uniformization, as it is the most adapted strategy. Before drawing any conclusions, the researcher still has to analyze two other product subcategories. The fourth product subcategory is related to style. This parameter defines the design of the clothes but also the shapes, cuts of the clothes. European women like very feminine cuts such as V-necks or décolleté for tops and dresses or skirts. Furthermore, as the European women are in general not so curvaceous, the sizes begin with a 34 or 36 and ends with 42 or 44. This style criterion does not apply to the average Middle Eastern customers. In actuality, the women in this region are the opposite: they are curvaceous and quite conservative about the cuts and shapes of their clothes. Therefore, changes have to be made to fit their requirements. Tops must have long sleeves to cover the whole body and décolleté is not allowed. The same for dresses or skirts, they have to be long so that no body parts is shown. Furthermore, because the women in the Middle East are more full-figured, the range of sizes must be made to differ from the European standards. This information must be transmitted directly to the creation and design department so that they can take these changes into account to construct future collections. Thus, it is obvious that the subcategory style is linked to adaptation´s international business strategy. The last subcategory concerns the quality of the products which is different from the subcategory price quality ratio as explained before. The quality of products can influence the brand experience because the customers tend to feel satisfied with their purchase only when they are able to try the clothes in the store. In warm countries such as in the Middle East, the quality of the material as well as the choice of material is very important. Indeed, customers are not fond of polyester as people tend to sweat more in clothes made of this material. Therefore, when selecting the products, the brand manager has to be careful about the material used as well as the cut, shape and length of the products. We can conclude then that adaptation strategy is the most suitable strategy for the quality subcategory.

If we sum up the brand experience antecedents of the product category, it has been analyzed that 3 out of 4 are related to adaptation strategy. Therefore, the researcher arrived to the conclusion that product antecedent is mainly linked to adaptation international business strategy.

The next main category to analyze is the so-called service interface or in other words, the role of technologies. As mentioned above, this category has been reviewed by an independent rater during the testing phase of the coding. The first subcategory has been turned to digital sales

interface. It includes all the technologies used either by the customers or staff to interact with the brand. At la Fée Maraboutée, the technologies in-stores are not well implemented as the different interviewees said. For example, there is no tablet where the customers can find an item or order it online and pick-up in-store. If it is a choice of the brand in Europe to not introduce technologies, but in the Middle East, due to the diversity of nationalities and the supremacy of internet and smartphones, the brand should change and add another way to communicate with its customers and attract new customers. Thus, the best international business strategy for this subcategory is the adaptation strategy. Regarding the second subcategory of service interface, social media, the researcher analyzed the influence of this antecedent on brand experience in the Middle East and its impact is huge, far more as in Europe. All interviewees and especially the managers based in the Middle East insisted on the fact that social media are crucial for a brand to develop and interact with the customers. Instagram, Facebook, Twitter… all these media are the key to succeed in the middle East. La Fée Maraboutée needs brand exposure as Nicole Vuilleumier, the export manager at La Fée Maraboutée, said and social media is one of the main solution the brand should consider. Therefore, it appears clear that the brand has to adapt its communication strategy to the Middle East. To sum up, the service interface antecedent is strongly linked to adaptation business strategy.

The last antecedent of brand experience is atmospherics that include the subcategories decoration, atmosphere and space.

Decoration is a crucial element in La Fée Maraboutée's brand experience. All stores are different from one another but they all have the same roots that is to say a mix of vintage, bric-a-brac and new items. Every new store opening is thought by the merchandising manager in cooperation with the management in France so that the codes of the brand are followed and a consistency is respected. The Middle Eastern customers also really like the decoration and there is nothing to change on this matter. The only thing to adapt which is also part of the environment is the merchandising plan. Indeed, the items on the mannequins have to be changed in comparison to the merchandising plan the European stores have. The Western country will have v-neck t-shirt in summer or middle/short dresses whereas it is not possible to highlight these items in windows in the Middle East because of the religious and ethical codes of the region. Then, the merchandising layout has to be carefully thought and planned to fit the ethical requirements. The researcher deduced that interior arrangement has to be partially adapted because of the different choices of the clothes shown in windows and in the stores. Thus, the strategy would be adaptation. Regarding the next subcategory which is atmosphere,

it describes the feeling that all senses can provide when being in la Fée Maraboutée´s stores. All the local managers who don't directly work with the brand reported that the atmosphere in the stores is cosy because of the colors, light or decoration and make people feel comfortable. These facts will make customers come more regularly o spend more time in shops which also means that they will tend to spend more money. There is no point to change the atmosphere in other countries or especially in the Middle East because all the interviewees said that customers really like it. Therefore, the international business strategy for atmosphere is standardization. The last subcategory of atmospherics is space. Indeed, this parameter could be seen as unimportant but some countries such as the Middle Eastern countries, it is not. As it has been already said, women in those regions shop in groups and spend far much time than European women do. So more seats are needed in the shops which it takes space. Therefore, the stores have to be bigger in the Middle East in order to take into account these requirements. This extension is also possible because the stores in these regions are in malls and not in city centers where the space is more limited. Thus, the international business strategy that has to be adopted is adaptation. However, this adaptation doesn't affect La Fée Maraboutée because the brand has already take this aspect into account when designing the stores in the Middle East so it will not be included in the implementation strategy.

Once having evaluated all the antecedents of brand experience, the researcher summed up all the adaptations and standardizations analyzed and came up with three different adaptation subcategories and one standardization subcategory: product change, merchandising change and staff change. In order to not repeat all the analyzed changes, the researcher decided to only do a summary of each subcategory.

Regarding the adaptation, the first subcategory concerns the changes that has to be done regarding the selection of the collection. The collection itself must be reformed or selected exclusively based on shape and cut because of the cultural and different customer profiles. The second one, concerning visual merchandising, has a direct connection to the previous category. There needs to be changes as the merchandising for the windows and shops in Europe cannot be the same for the Middle East. For example, due to the ethical rules that forbids showing the arms, neck or legs, a specific selection of items respecting these codes can only be shown in the windows. However, in contrast, many tourists and expats also visit stores in the Middle East and therefore there must also be a selection of pieces that suits their wants. The third subcategory of adaptation concerns the staff. As mentioned before, the staffing has to be better trained to fit the Middle Eastern standards and match the expectations of local customers.

Although links to adaptation strategies have been made between antecedents and international business strategies, standardization should also not be exempted. The researcher analyzed that the price positioning was approximately the same between Europe and the Middle East which ensures a brand consistency. The decoration also follows the same spirit for all the stores in the world. Each store design is done by the headquarter team to ensure that the brand DNA is consistent and respected. The third link is with the print. The print remains as a strong element of the brand and because of its great response from the Middle Eastern customers, there is no need to change it.

Through the analysis of the data collected, the researcher has been able to make the link between brand experience antecedent and international business strategies at La Fée Maraboutée within the specific region which is the Middle East. It appears that the main business strategy that La Fée Maraboutée has to apply is adaptation due to cultural differences and environmental parameters. Before drawing any conclusions and sketching the final framework, it is crucial to follow the qualitative research procedures and test the trustworthiness of the study.

3.4.4.3 Testing the trustworthiness of the directed qualitative research

In all researches, it is crucial to ensure a certain level of quality. Even if the test of quality has been more studied and developed in quantitative research, qualitative research is not exempted. In qualitative content analysis, procedures to perform content analysis are standardized which is not the case for the qualitative content analysis which uses deep descriptions of phenomenon in order to understand it and create a model from it. Different terms can be used to assess the effectiveness: credibility, trustworthiness, validity, reliability. (Elo et al., 2014). However, the most well spread and used system is the one created by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The goal is to check that the data and processes used during the research are valuable. Lincoln and Guba (1985) based their study on four criteria to assess the trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. Later, they added a fifth criterion which is called authenticity.

3.4.4.3.1 Credibility

Credibility assesses the accuracy of the findings and can be gauged through different techniques. The first one is the prolonged engagement and refers to building a relationship of

trust over time between the researcher and participants in order to understand multiple aspects of the phenomenon. The second technique is the persistent observation to identify in depth the characteristics and elements of the phenomenon through a focused attention to details. One of the most well-known techniques is triangulation. It involves the use of different data sources in order to be sure that the findings are solid, rich and comprehensive (Merriam, 1995). The fourth technique is the peer review. As Lincoln and Guba argued, "It is a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 308). This method uses an external member to identify biases that the researcher itself would not have seen. The next technique is a negative case analysis or a deviant case analysis and consists of finding contradicting aspects that do not support the patterns or findings. It helps to develop, correct, revise or confirm them. Referential adequacy is another credibility technique and involves the archiving of a selected portion of data that will be not analyzed in the first step and then analyzing the remaining data in order to find out results and to finally come back to the archived data and analyze it in order to test the validity of the first findings. Member checks is one of the most relevant techniques for credibility testing according to Lincoln and Guba (1985). This method involves third parties in a formal or informal way. They may be asked for example to read their own transcribed interviews and give their opinion about what they said during the interviews. Another example would be to ask participants what they may think about a certain statement. Finally, the last technique possible for credibility is thick description and consists of deeply describing the phenomenon and data in order to ensure the most valuable results (Tracy, 2010).

For this research about La Fée Maraboutée, the researcher opted for member checks techniques by sending the transcripts to some of the interviewees and ask for comments in order to improve the results. It appeared that the participants agreed on their recorded responses and transcriptions. Therefore, it can be deduced that the credibility test has been passed.

3.4.4.3.2 Transferability

Transferability aims at showing that the research can apply to a wide population. In qualitative research, it is often complicated to fulfil the transferability criteria because it usually focuses on a specific environment or population. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argues that the researcher

has to provide enough information about the context to enable the transferability. Therefore, the appropriate technique is the thick description as described above.

When applying the transferability test to the research, as it is based on a company case, it seems that the transferability criteria does not fit. However, this research could apply to other French fashion companies that want to expand in the Middle East and in that sense, the transferability test is valid because there are enough details and description to apply to other French fashion companies.

3.4.3.3.3 Dependability

Dependability is linked to reliability and tests if the data and findings are stable over time or in different conditions. The most relevant technique to improve dependability is inquiry audit as Lincoln and Guba reported (1985). Inquiry audit involves an external researcher that was not part of the original research process. They are tasked to study the data and the processes in order to validate it if they support the data supporting the findings (Merriam, 1995). As stated in the testing of the categorization matrix, an independent researcher was involved to ensure the good processing and consistency of the research and therefore the dependability criteria is respected.

3.4.3.3.4 Conformability

Conformability is related to objectivity. It tests if the results describe the reality and not the expectations of the researcher. Seven techniques may be available. The first one is an audit trail which is a description of all steps followed from the beginning. The second one is raw data which displays the audit trails as well as the notes or others measures taken. The next possible way is data reduction and analysis of the products that consists of summarizing information, notes… The fourth possibility is data reconstruction and synthesis products and refers to structuring the information, findings, results… Process notes are all the notes that can be taken. The fifth possibility is to collect the materials used to process such as proposals, personal notes… Finally, the last possible technique is the implementation of instruments such as pilot test, schedules… The technique applied in this research is audit trails as the entire process is being described from the very beginning.

During the latter part, the researcher analysed the data in order to make the link between brand experience antecedents at La Fée Maraboutée and the international business strategies if launching abroad, especially to the Middle East.

Furthermore, the researcher tested the trustworthiness of the research with the aim of delivering qualitative results and studies.

In this next chapter, the researcher will give managerial recommendations to La Fée Maraboutée so that the company can improve its performance and further its successful development in the Middle East.

4.   Discussion

4.1 Managerial recommendations

After having analyzed the content of data, the researcher introduced recommendations for La Fée Maraboutée's managers that take into account the difficulties and learnings of the analyzed interviews.

The first implementation that has to be done concerns the communication with the partners and in the case of the study, the Middle Eastern partners. However, before deciding on changes, it is crucial that La Fée Maraboutée's managers and Al Futtaim's brand managers who are responsible for the French brand communicates together to decide what are the strategies to adopt in order to increase the performance in the Middle East. The Dubai partners have to feel involved in the rethinking to commit in the projects and improve the relationships between the two companies. Indeed, not only is management necessary for these meetings but also the design and collection managers are required because most of the changes concern the product itself. Therefore, the design team has to collaborate with the partners to know the needs and specificities of the Middle Eastern market. It is not possible for the design team to create a collection for the Middle East without having the necessary knowledge and feedback about this market. This can be applied to all foreign markets since every country have their differences even if they are more or less from the other. Thus, before the start of a new collection, both Al Futtaim and La Fée Maraboutée's management and design teams should meet to debrief about their expectations and wishes regarding the new products and collections. Besides this annual summit, regular meetings have to be fulfilled to maintain a good communication and working relationship. The Middle Eastern managers should visit Paris and also Roanne to see the headquarters to discuss and vice versa for the French managers. Together they can benefit by

letting them assess the competition and reality in the field. Communication is a key element to ensure long term business relationships especially as the relationship is abroad. The second recommendation is linked to the latter and concerns the collection itself. Thanks to the data analysis, it has been deduced that the product has to be adapted to the Middle Eastern market because of cultural and customer differences. As Middle Eastern customers on average are more curvaceous than Europeans, the sizes and shapes should be adapted. The cuts of the clothes also have to be rethought to match the locals tastes and preferences, meaning long clothes, without décolleté and long sleeves. Furthermore, the religious holidays in the Middle East should be taken into account. Therefore, special capsules in the collection should be created especially to fill in the gap existing today at La Fée Maraboutée stores. However, it is crucial that the adapted products keep to the DNA of the brand as consistency must be ensured in all items. It is also essential that parts of the regular collection at La Fée Maraboutée are displayed in the Middle Eastern stores for tourists or expats. Thus, the researcher would recommend to split the collection for the Middle East into two parts: one that meet the needs and requirements of locals and another one that may please all the rest of the customers. The first part of the collection must be, as said above, designed in collaboration with the partners in Dubaï.

The third topic and change to implement is as said before, the brand exposure, especially in the Middle East. As La Fée Maraboutée is not very well-known abroad, a strong effort has to be made in developing the presence of the brand through all possible channels, especially on social media. Nowadays, bloggers and influencers drive a lot of traffic to brands and the first step to develop brand presence would be to contact well-known bloggers and influencers specialized in fashion to promote the brand. However, it is crucial to select them according to the target audience the brand aims to focus on such as millennials. The export manager should also push Al Futtaim to communicate more on social media and organize events. Customers should be educated with the products and the brand and for that, marketing is essential. Then, a marketing plan should be set by La Fée Maraboutée and Al Futtaim in order to be able to follow the process of brand exposure and measure the impacts and results (see example appendix 6).

The last final important topic is the staffing and recruitment. The problem of the staff in the Middle East is the education and training of vendors in the stores. Indeed, the customers visiting the stores in the Middle East may be locals, expats or tourists and therefore, the staff must adapt their behavior to each of them. It is crucial to first recruit the staff on certain criteria such as languages. All the persons employed should speak fluent Arabic and English. It is essential to be able to understand the customers and their needs easily. Moreover, an experience in sales in

the Middle East must be required because the way to handle their way of shopping is different from the Western countries. Once the recruitment done, it is crucial to train them which involves educating them about the brand. The staff is the carrier of the brand image and therefore knowing the brand's codes, DNA, collection and processes should be learnt. Then, an ongoing training should take place to be sure that the learnings from the beginning are followed, assist the staff in improving, and answering to their personal needs regarding knowledge, personal development… The staff is the key of the sales and turnover and the management should care for them to get the best results.

The researcher detected four main topics to be changed according to the results found in the analysis. These are managerial recommendations that can be implanted by La Fée Maraboutée in order to solve the problems currently existing and assist them in improving the performance of the brand in the Middle East.

4.2   Limitations and future investigations

This study has some limitations. First, as mentioned in a previous part, the researcher focused on one company and one specific industry which is fashion. Therefore, the transferability to other industries is biased. Furthermore, the explanatory dimension of the study may involve subjective interpretations and can influence the final results. Therefore, a qualitative research may be needed to fill in the gap.

Semi-structured interviews have advantages and also some drawbacks as it misses some information. Indeed, the researcher faced some issues during the sampling method since some interviewees, as described, are not fully working for La Fée Maraboutée. Secondly, due to budget and time constraint, the size of the sample was limited which could affect the results and information.

The researcher had little experience with qualitative researches and directed content analysis which may affect the result's interpretation. Therefore, a further research or additional study should be conducted to explore deeper the subject thanks to more participants.

A quantitative research should also validate the the link between brand experience and international business strategies. A further research with other industries and other countries should also be conducted because each country or culture has different values and thinking processes.

5.   Conclusion

The main purpose of this thesis was to determine the antecedents of brand experience when shopping at La Fée Maraboutée and their link to international business strategies. This in-company research should help the brand to better define which antecedents impacts their brand experience and to allow them, according to the findings, to decide on which business strategies to adopt when internationalizing in countries with strong cultural differences such as the Middle East. According to the strategy chosen, adaptation or standardization, some changes must be implemented to improve the presence and performance of the brand in foreign countries. Brand experience in the fashion industry is a subject that draws many companies' and researchers' attention because it highly influences customer behaviors and which can then affect sales performances. Thanks to the literature, five antecedents can influence brand experience. The researcher found that only four of them influence the brand experience at La Fée Maraboutée while one other has been found essential for the brand. The social environment definitely influences brand experience because the staff working in the stores reflect the brand and therefore can impact how customers will behave that is to say their loyalty, amount purchased, and amount of shared recommendations to other potential customers. Furthermore, the persons (friends and family) surrounding the customers are also part of the social environment and have an impact on the final customers because of their shared advices and word-of-mouth that can spread ideas about the brand. At La Fée Maraboutée, it has been found that adaptation strategy is the right decision linked to this antecedent because the staff must be better trained to fit the Middle Eastern specificities while also forcing them to better manage the relations surrounding the customers due to the cultural differences.

Atmospherics is the second antecedent that influences brand experience at La Fée Maraboutée. The whole interior concept including decoration, space and atmosphere highly influences the brand experience at La Fée Maraboutée. The related strategy is adaptation but as it has been said before, it does not affect the current status as they have already been implemented during the initial launch of the stores in the Middle East. Indeed, the increase of the stores' space and number of seats were one of the few examples done to fit the local requirements.

Service interface strongly influences brand experience especially in the Middle East due to the importance of social media in these countries. Unfortunately, La Fée Maraboutée's digital presence is not very well developed in this region. Social Media is the main channel for a brand to increase their brand presence and so the international strategy that La Fée Maraboutée should

adopt is an increase in their digital development to target more of their preferred audience in the Middle Eastern market. Furthermore, social media, if implemented successfully, can have the potential to spread the word to other regions internationally. The fourth antecedent that impacts La Fée Maraboutée's brand experience is price. Price positioning and customer perception can have a great influence on a customer's loyalty and relationship to the brand especially if they regard the price of the brand as fair and and the quality trustworthy. Fortunately, the price of the collections at La Fée Maraboutée does not require any changes as its positioning and price-quality ratio perfectly fits the market. Yet, standardization still needs to be carefully followed in order to ensure a consistency around the world.

The last antecedent has been added throughout the study because it is a factor that highly influences brand experience in the Middle East. Due to the cultural diversity and religious differences of current and potential customers, the products and collections should be adapted to fit their needs. Adaptation is the right international business strategy to implement in the Middle East regarding this antecedent. It includes internal and organizational upheavals for both the French and Middle Eastern sides. Although it will be a lengthy process, changes are necessary to be put in place in order to further develop the brand in the market and therefore the sales.

This research highlighted the links of the existing brand experience and international business strategies of La Fée Maraboutée and has brought further perspectives to help the brand to proceed towards in the Middle East but gives the brand also trails when developing in other countries.

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Appendix

1: Descriptive statistics

Name	Mean	Mean (details)	Gender	Country of residence	Nation ality	Position
Jean Moussa	Face-to-face	Office	Male	France	French	Managing director
Nicole Vuilleumier	Face-to-face	Office	Female	France	Swiss	Export manager
Noémie Lauth	Face-to-face	Home	Female	France	French	Merchandising manager
Melissa Edwards	Face-to-face	Office	Female	France	British	Brand manager
Abood Faisal	Video	Facebook	Male	Emirates	Emirati	Visual merchandising manager
Emma Pazalka	Video	Skype	Female	Emirates	British	Marketing manager
Jennifer Fall	Video	Skype	Female	Emirates	French	General manager Robinsons
/	Video	Whatsapp	Male	Emirates	Emirati	General manager
/	Video	Whatsapp	Male	Emirates	Emirati	brand manager
/	Video	Skype	Female	France	French	Merchandising manager

Appendix 2: Marketing Plan

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept.	Okt	Nov.	Dec
Social Media												
PR												
events												
Advertising												

Social Media results

January

	Instagram	Evolution	Facebook	Evolution	Twitter	Evolution
Nr. of posts						
Nr of likes						
Nr of comments						

Appendix 3 : Interview guide

<u>To Middle East professionals:</u>

1. Can you introduce yourself? What is your experience in the Middle East?
2. What is your relation with La Fée Maraboutée?
3. How do you consider the fashion industry in the Middle East?
4. What are the specificities of the customers?
5. What are the weaknesses of La Fée Maraboutée according to you in the Middle East?
6. What are the strengths of La Fée Maraboutée?
7. In your opinion, what makes la Fée Maraboutée special ?
8. What should be done to make La Fée Maraboutée more effective in the Middle East?

Atmospherics !

Price

Social environment

Service interface

Past experience

<u>To La Fée Maraboutée professionals:</u>

1. Can you introduce yourself? What is your experience in the Middle East?
2. What is your relation with La Fée Maraboutée?
3. How do you consider the fashion industry in the Middle East?
4. Which process has la Fée Maraboutée chosen to internationalize in the Middle East?
5. What are the weaknesses of La Fée Maraboutée according to you in the Middle East?
6. What are the strengths of La Fée Maraboutée?
7. What should be done to make La Fée Maraboutée more effective in the Middle East?

Atmospherics !

Price

Social environment

Service interface

Past experience

<u>To La Fée Maraboutée merchandising professionals:</u>

1. Can you introduce yourself (personal) ?

2. What is your relation with La Fée Maraboutée?
3. What is your experience in the Middle East?
4. How do you consider the fashion industry in the Middle East?
5. How do you design windows and merchandising in the Middle East?
6. What are the specifities of the merchandising in the middle East in comparison to Europe?
7. I know that the analysis of the competitors is important in the merchandising, what does differentiate La Fée Maraboutée from the competition?
8. Do you duplicate the merchandising done in France to the Middle East Market or do you make changes? If yes, what kind of changes?

Appendix 4: Transcriptions

Interview 1: Melissa Edwards, Regional Manager Middle East Alfuttaim

Morgane Jégu: Thank you for accepting this interview. So this interview is within the framework of my master thesis about brand experience through the internationalization process with a focus on the Middle. Could you please first introduce yourself?

Melissa Edwards: okay so my name is Melissa Edwards, I am the regional Brand Manager for La Fée Maraboutée in the Middle East.

MJ: And what is your experience?

ME: So I am originally from the UK, I am experienced in retail, so I have worked in retail for 20 years and I started in a retail management program in the UK with a company called John Lewis who are a very reputable retailer in the UK. I worked with Harvey Nichols, I worked with multibrands experience in the Middle East with Vila Moda, which was a local multibrand it was the equivalent of Harrods of the Middle East, the first that bring luxury brands to the Middle East and then Boutique One, which was also a multibrand retailer. And more recently Prada group, so Prada and Miu Miu for 4 years as well and then I moved in to Alfuttaim 1 year ago.

MJ: Okay, And so what is your relation with La Fée or what is the relation of La Fée Maraboute with the Middle East?

ME: Oh… La Fée Maraboutée perfectly suits the Middle East, the collection is very wide, there are lots of print, lots of color, the shape and styles are very appropriate for the Middle East. The brand is still relatively new to the market but I would say that o far that the interaction with the brand has been very positive: we have a strong repeat and loyal client and we have just launched in Saudi Arabia in December and the responses have been very strong so I think that step by step with the growth and exposure of the brand, the business will come stronger and stronger.

MJ: So you are responsible for Dubaï, Saudi Arabia..and ..?

ME: Qatar, Bahrein, Koweit soon we are looking out for options for Koweit so I cover the whole Middle East region.

MJ: And how do you consider the fashion industry in the Middle East?

ME: Ah mmm… so now it is becoming more a mature market. I have been there for almost 13 years so I have seen the evolution of this emerging market. It is becoming a fashion capital

actually, you know Dubaï has been built into a city in the last decade when I first arrived in Dubaï there were maybe 10 stores in the whole market where everyone shops. Now there are 4 significant malls. Dubaï Mall is one of the leading malls internationally, it is one of the largest mall in the world, they had 18 million visitors last year. I would say in the beginning it was more luxury focused but now it is diversifying a lot. There is a huge mass market composition and also luxury is now very much of represented but I think there is now a new era of new brands, emerging brands, local designers, definitely more focus on fashion, art, music, culture mmm.. a more a fashion-lifestyle approach rather than fashion being and identity product. So the market is changing a lot.

MJ: But what works the most? Luxury brands or mass market brands?

ME: mm… depends: luxury has been very successful because historically you know it is an oil-rich environment, lots of disposable income even the local market of expats with high salaries so luxury was very exposed, very successful but again, there is another client inside the region that everyone forgets about which is the normal client working in a regular position so mass market is also quite popular but again all clients now neither luxury or mass market are looking for something different.

MJ: But how would you position La Fée Maraboutée in this market? Between mass market or luxury or how…?

ME: ..I would say it is a bridge brand. It is a contemporary style, very market- appropriate but in terms of price point, it is very interesting, we definitely see a comparison to Zara Indetex but also Maje Sandra..so in terms of shapes and styles, it is somewhere in between.

MJ: and now concerning the customers, what are the specificities of the customers of the Middle East, if you compare to the European customers for example?

ME: .. in terms of the preferences?

MJ: Yes.

ME: euh.. ok.. so Middle East is quite diverse but if we talk about Dubaï, we have quite a wide range of clientele so we have the local market which are looking for things that are more conservative in terms of shapes and styles, definitely are more curvaceous so again they like to sensuate the west, they don't like to show the décolleté, they wouldn't like to show arms, legs, expose themselves, particularly in the region, their behaving can be different from any travellers of the seas for example because they are wearing the buyer and definitely their behaviour is more conservative inside of their home country. But also in Dubaï, we also have an expat client: we have Lebanese, French, British, we have European clients who are more open to wearing revealing clothing. Let's say stronger colors, they go out to party in the evening

so their attitude is very different. Then If you move outside of Dubaï, into Qatar, definitely conservative, Bahrein, conservative also Saudi Arabia, again very conservative so they are looking for things that are printed colourful however covered so no exposed in arms, legs, covering décolleté, luxurious fabrics are very much appreciated, metallic, , they love silver, gold, Swarovski , embellishments, details…

MJ: … So they need to show off..

ME: Absolutely. And even their attitude to the buyer is changing in the market. It has always be known historically that ladies would dress under their   because they dress for themselves in the end even though inside the country, they can't necessarily show. But now more and more the attitude is to leave the buyer a little bit more open. So ladies are starting to show a little bit more what they are wearing underneath… So now they really care obviously about the pieces they are having..

MJ: … and how do they behave in the stores? Do they behave differently than Europeans, or do then need more privacy?

ME: It is quite interesting because they have an approach where they are used to being served: in general they have staff at home, they have nannies, they have gardeners, drivers euh.. and there is definitely an attitude towards the service and staff inside the stores. They will be on hand and they will service them: give me this size, get me a coffee, process this sale.. We are going through a stage to educate our sales associate and management to be able to propose but also there is an attitude from the client as well wherein they prefer to shop themselves so we are trying to a way…

MJ: And do they shop alone or do they shop with friends or family?..

ME: It depends... yeah, a lot of them prefer to shop in groups. Definitely they would go with their sisters. A man there has several wives for example the groups of wives make out their shopping together so it is very important to have seatings inside of the store because they spend a lot of time shopping and their average shopping time versus shopping time in Europe is far much longer.

*MJ:*Okay.

ME: So their approach to shopping is to relax, to shop, to get confirmation from their friends, of what they would like to purchase whereas European clients wouldn't or would be out of the shops within 30min.

MJ: Ok, and what are the weaknesses of La Fée Maraboutée in the Middle East now? It can be improved but only now.

ME: I would say, as we 've discussed, we need to be mindful of quality, we need to be mindful of finishing of products, teachings, button details, the way that the form is cut. We need to look at development because the body shape is quite different: the ladies tend to be larger, more curvaceous, than Europeans clients. Arm details have to be adjusted…

MJ: So it is more product-oriented..

ME: .. yeah..

MJ: Okay and does the price fit or is it a strength or weakness?

ME: The price is a strength. The quality has to match the price, this is the challenge. For example, on knitwear and coats, there is no price objection at all, the client feels it is qualitative. In terms of Polyester, it judges less qualitative fabrics then then the price has to be adjusted accordingly.

MJ: Are the customers loyal? Do they come often, as you said, you have loyal customers. Is it regular that customers from the Middle East are loyal?

ME: They do become loyal. Especially I think with la Fée. One of the strength is that the collection is wide and they have a lot of variety so the client isn't necessarily bored of same shapes and styles. I would say an opportunity for development is definitely more exposure of the brand. You know in Paris, it is very popular. We are still very new in the market so we have a long way to go in terms of the brand exposure in events, activities, in positioning ourselves with the influencers, bloggers but the product is very strong for the region.

MJ: Okay.. and Do do you think for example that technologies in shops would help?

ME: Definitely. Yes absolutely because, as we have discussed earlier, the consumption of Middle Eastern clients with Instagram, Facebook is one of the highest in the world. So, they love gadgets. It is comparable to Asia in terms of technologies I mean. EVERYONE is following someone on Instagram: following brands, following trends, following celebrities. We are known in the region as followers, whereas I would say the trend setters and the image definition is more US, Europe. Middle East, we are followers. So definitely the exposure through digital, through image rates, through PR campaigns, through having technologies inside of the stores, would be very strong for the market.

MJ: And concerning the stores inside. How do ou consider it. Do you think adaptation or any changes should be done? I mean when you compare to the shops in Europe of La Fée Maraboutée.

ME: They love the concept. Our stores are slightly larger in the region anyway which allows us to have the seating area that we need. Again, the strength of the brand is a very warm environment, very comfortable. It is a place someone wants to spend time in, it's like a loft

apartment so this suits very much the taste of the region. And there is also touches that very Moroccan, very Middle Eastern mood with a nice contrast with Europe so it is very much appreciated.

MJ: Do you communicate the fact that it is a French brand? Is it important for them?

ME: Yes, absolutely. France is a fashion capital. So for them, immediately, if they know it is a French brand and the production of many of the pieces are European, immediately for them it is qualitative.

MJ: Okay.. I think I am finished with questions. Would you like to add something on the subject maybe?

ME: No, I think we have spoken about everything important to know about the Middle Easter fashion.

MJ: Then, I would like to thank you again.

ME: It was my pleasure !

Interview 2: Jean Moussa, Sales Director at La Fée Maraboutée

Morgane Jégu (MJ): Thank you for accepting this interview. So can you introduce yourself?

Jean Moussa (JM): Si my name is Jean Moussa, I am 46 years old, married, father of 2 kids and graduated from MSG, Master degree in Lyon. I am in this business now since more 22 years, fashion retail business and with more experience in terms of foreign market.

MJ: Do you have experience in other countries than France?

JM: I have always been based in France but travelling all over the world. Of course in European countries is something which is.. due to the fact that it is not so far from the French market, it is something which I am used to it. Now I know almost all the countries of the world except the Indian market, Brazil and let's say the African market, which I have never been there.

MJ: And what is your professional experience? I mean the companies you worked in?

JM: Ah yeah, .. before la Fée Maraboutée, I was working for Gérard Darel Company which is more for contemporary mature women, for Pablo brands as well which is a more young and contemporary brand. Before that, I was in Vivarte Group in which I was used to have almost 22 brands like Chevignon, NafNaf, more retailers; I was in charge of the development of several brands of this group over 10 years. I was at Christian Lacroix for 2 years, launching the kids department and before I started in this business, it was in NafNaf company always in the export department, international sales development.

MJ: Okay fine. And what is your relation with the Middle East? Do you know this market very well?

JM: I am originally Lebanese so I speak Arabic fluently, it's my mother language so this Middle East market is quite familiar in terms of the culture, the language and the behaviour of the people. I have been always travelling there and I saw in the past 20 years all the improvements that happened in this market in all the terms, structuring, malls, the professionalization of this business so I am quite familiar to this region due to all these facts.

MJ: and how do you consider the fashion industry in the Middle East in comparison to the European one?

JM: Yeah… it is… let's say it is something which is younger in terms of the relationships between the consumers and the product. In Europe, the people get used and ready to wear fashion items since long time ago due to the history of the fashion in France, Italy or UK whereas in these countries of the Middle East, the culture and knowledge of this business have arrived recently because it is a new market open. But they learn fast and they are very demanding in terms of … what are the trends, what is the fashion because they want to identify themselves to these products and lifestyle so these are the main reasons. Now, they are big consumers, they consume a lot in the fashion industry in comparison to the European now. Maybe in these countries, the fact that there are lots of malls, the temperature, which is quite high in the summer so the people who, let's say naturally shop in malls so they spend money consuming in the food industry and fashion retail.

MJ: Is it more difficult to convince these consumers because they have plenty of choices, they are rich, they have the money.

JM: They have the money of course, they can buy, now nowadays, they are getting used to what people in Europe are wearing due to internet and everything so there are no more several markets. There is one market with the process called "mondialisation", which that means that they are aware of what's going on and what is working well in other market and so on so when you launch a brand, they are already aware of this brand because they have seen it on Internet, Instagram or social networks. So, they know that. Now the main difference is concerning their culture such as the need of long sleeves, long skirts specific fabrics, materials like everywhere, they are gonna have more prints, more colours so there are specificities we have to take into consideration and of course in terms of logistics. It is something very important for the summer which is longer than the summer you can have here in Europe and how long does the winter last to make the product categories fit the seasons. So if you don't take it into consideration, you will not be able to succeed in this market. Something that is also happening there is the

tourism that is really important in Dubaï for example, there are lot of tourists coming and you have to take them into consideration in the selection of the products you decide to put there and decide in which malls you want to be: which malls are more for locals, which malls are more for foreign people. It is then more challenging to make a selection than for a town like Bordeaux. Of course, it is also different when you select products for Paris or in other regions in France but it becomes quite similar to that. (7min41)

MJ: And to internationalize in Middle East, what kind of process did you use? Did you use joint venture for example or…?

JM: There are several options actually…

MJ: But I meant the one chosen by La Fée Maraboutée

JM: The one for La Fée Maraboutée is a local distributor who is covering all the region because as you may know, recently with what happened in Qatar politically, it is not easy to solve this problem so you cannot… In fact it is completely different between countries in terms of cultures, mentalities between Qatar and Saudi Arabia and Saudi Arabia compared to Emirates. Before it used to… euh.. If I had any advice to give it would be to have a local distributor for each country. The issue is that the potential of each country is not too high: Qatar is limited in terms of potential, Bahrein as well, Kuwait as well so you cannot have any region which is like this one 5-6 distributors. Nowadays, there are a lot of distributors covering all the markets and have local divisions in each country. This is interesting because now you have to see if those people want to work with you because they are quite big, too big and they are looking only for brands that are international and big enough to have relationship with them. So the best way is maybe to have regional distributor, healthy enough, covering all these countries in order to go with them and if it is not the case you have the option to find a distributor in each country or sometimes one distributor covering 2-3 countries and so one.

MJ: So now, what do you think about the weaknesses of la Fée Maraboutée in the Middle East?

JM: The weaknesses of La Fée Maraboutée is that the market is that becoming more and more challenging. In Dubaï for example, it is not only influenced by the European market, it is influenced, by European, American, Asian markets, locals, Australian market. So this market specifically becomes more and more challenging in terms of competition. The major malls in terms of real estate is really really high. Due to changes in politics and geopolitics issues right now, the region is suffering a lot regarding consumption so there are less and less cash and investments in these countries so the margins are becoming less important due to the real estate increase, VAT which is now excessing since months and months, the oil prices decreasing which makes all of this more and more difficult.

MJ: And what are the strengths then?

JM: Before anything, it is the fact that it is a brand established since more than 20 years, the design has remained stable, the designer in charge is here and still behind the collection which is not often the case in this business because unfortunately, the designers in charge and stylist move a lot and when it happens, the designs changes and the DNA of the brand loses sometimes the force of the brand and so on. In our case then, it is not what's happening because Jean Pierre is always in charge of the design, the suppliers are still the same since always so they know him very good and know exactly our needs. So, this is for the product side. The collection is starting to be reduced which is quite good in terms of the force and impact of the collection. The campaigns start to be structured since the fact that the investment fund came and give more investments to the company in terms of structuring, warehouse, IT systems, to the management of course. Now the brand has more than 90 stores in France so in terms of retail structure and reputation…

MJ: …But when we focus on the Middle East?

JM: All of this will be beneficial because there are lots of improvement that are happening internally. Before going externally, it is always a question what you would make internally before going abroad. If you arrive to a certain level of maturity in terms of everything, it is not only the product, it is product, price, process, merchandising, the concept itself, the architecture, the fitting, the quality.. All of this when you measure all of these issues, it is gonna be beneficial for your development and the brand is ready now to go abroad and exportable and I always think what you cannot go abroad if you are performing bad in your own market. It means that you first have to show what the brands can do outside but if you are facing some issues internally, you will not be able to succeed in other markets. So this is the force of the brand after the positioning in itself with the prints, the colors, with the dresses which is a category that is very feminine. The women in those regions are looking for those kinds of things. What is feminine in terms of style and collection as well, the price positioning is also very good knowing that is a price-oriented market. The products made in Italy for this price range is really a good advantage for this brand… euh..

MJ: Do the store, its atmosphere are advantages?

JM: Of course, the concept in itself is a strength: a lifestyle place to relax, in which you feel good like in an apartment with some vintage style, typically a French apartment also gives a style that is different from other brand concepts. Mixing all these elements: the product that I have told you, the concept, the style, the French style with femininity, the price positioning and of course the fact that we have the major distributor AL Futtaim who have the major brands in

the region, financially structured, competition, the team there, are quite wonderful with experience in retail, department stores in Europe so they understood the market needs locally so it is a real big advantage to be in good hands in the region who is able also to invest when things need to be accelerated.

MJ: And the staff in the stores, is it local?

JM: The staff is a mix, more expats from India, Philippines, Arabic from Morocco or Tunisia but of course in groups like this, lots of training are done in terms of retail, of sales. The majority come from this business already so now they are becoming more and more professional and of course it is gonna be adapted or changed to the malls and where the malls are located. In those countries, it is one of the big issues to find professional staffing because they are really demanding: you teach and then then go somewhere else. When you are big groups like this, they are gonna be attached to these kinds of group because they give them the chance to improve and get a better position so it is a big advantage to join a group like Al Futtaim.

MJ: And as the last question, In your opinion, what could be done so that La Fée Maraboutée is more effective in the Middle East?

JM: Now the first step was to have a good location with this partner, it is really what you need to have. Now the second step is to work on the selection and product needs and start promoting the brand so you need to show that the brand is more visible and the locals and consumers have to know what is the force of the brand and getting more and more clients and especially loyal clients. So, we are on this direction right now, unfortunately the region faced these last 6 months big issues in terms of consumption and traffic. Now, things are getting better at the moment and I hope we are on the right place to catch this and make this brand succeed.

MJ: Thank you very much!

Interview 3 : Nicole Vuilleumier, Export manager at La Fée Maraboutée

Morgane Jégu (MJ): Good afternoon, thank you for accepting this interview. So can you please introduce yourself?

Nicole Vuilleumier (NV): Good afternoon. So I am Nicole Vuilleumier, mother of a girl and originally coming from Switzerland. At la Fée Maraboutée, I am the Retail Export Manager, in charge of Belgium Concessions called INNO, Spanish stores & concessions such as el Corte Inglés as well as export franchises such as Lebanon and Middle East.

I don't have a business background but rather a master in art history from la Sorbonne. I worked for projects in museums or for art coordinator such as le Palais de Tokyo in Paris for example. In 2011, I had an opportunity to get part of the business world by becoming the country manager for Switzerland at Gérard Darel, a French women fashion company owned by the family Darel, and having stores worldwide. I was responsible toenter the market and develop the presence of Gérard Darel there. With the experience, I took over the Marketing Coordinator functions for our strategic partners. My experience with the Middle East was about giving brand information to the partner (Dubai Holding) and the person in charge of PR for the brand communication in the country. I also participate in selling the collection.

Today at La Fée, I am the contact person for our partner Alfuttaim. I coordinate the different departments of the HQ and do the buying with the brand manager. It means that if the brand manager needs any special products for some events as we are doing now for Eid in Middle East which is a very important one, I take care of the project in relation with the product department in our Head quarter in Roanne, next to Lyon. Another example is the coordination of deliveries in the different stores in the Middle East and also the payments. So that are my tasks basically today regarding the Middle East.

MJ: and how do you consider the fashion industry in the Middle East?

NV: Well… Consumption has a big place in Middle East, so fashion too. First of all, you have to consider that you face three groups of customers: the locals, the expatriates and the tourists. According to each group of customers, the needs are totally different. Locals like to show off with stresses, prints, colors, they need long sleeves, no décolleté, .. whereas expatriates or tourists prefer sober clothes, elegant clothes, V-neck, …So you have to offer a selection in line with this, so, to propose your collection as well as specific items. The fashion industry is rather complex because of the different customer profiles (local, tourists, expatriates) and contrary to what people think, there are not only rich customers who buy everything without counting. The proportion of rich people is small in comparison to the major part of our customers who can't afford luxury. So we have to take all these components into account when working with the fashion industry in the Middle East.

MJ: Okay, and which process has la Fée Maraboutée chosen to internationalize in the Middle East?

NV: EUh.. La Fée is present in the Middle East through a franchise. When the project of collaboration with the Middle East started, I was not already in the company, I mean regarding all the procedures that need to be done to effectively open stores there. La Fée Maraboutée get in touch with a big, strong and very well-known partner in the Middle East called Alfuttaim. This big player in this region has a huge influence on the markets, get easily good locations and stores in order to build up the brand. So for a brand as La Fée Maraboutée it was a very good opportunity to enter this market which is culturally different from Europe and the standards we are used to.

MJ: okay, so you said that the consumption is huge in the Middle East, and how important are stores in this region?

NV: Shopping in the Middle East is a very important activity in locals but also expatriates and tourists' lives. It is so important because of the weather. In the summer, it is not possible to be outside so they all go to malls where they can spend a lot of time because of the numerous attractions there. So it is a rather important window on the world as there are many people (tourists and expatriates) from everywhere. Malls like Dubai Mall where we have a store have a huge traffic, so in term of money, it can be very lucrative.

MJ: and you speak about the stores but how important is the staff in the Middle East?

NV: You mean in the stores?

MJ: Euh yes in the stores.

NV: They are very important like in each store. But the problem is, that in general the sales assistant are not very well considered in ME. Their knowledge in terms of sale, business, KPI and fashion is quite low and the turnover of staff is high. So this is a problem for the stability and building up of a loyal customer network. It is then very important to select them properly and give them a very good training because most of the time, they come from countries like Philippines, India... and even the language skills are sometimes limited. So the staff selection and training is very important in the Middle East like in every other country but with additional constraints.

MJ: In your opinion, What are the weaknesses of La Fée Maraboutée according to you in the Middle East?

NV: euhh… for me, the problem is that La Fée Maraboutée is a new brand in the region and not very well known. So it gains to be known but for that, it is important to increase the brand awareness by doing PR campaigns, events, be in collaboration with bloggers, youtubers, on the social media. I really think that today social media are very important and especially in the

Middle East. When you are in Dubaï mall for example, it is quite impressive to see how people are on their smartphone, taking pictures and so on.. so for me the real weakness of la Fée is the brand awareness and the lack of communication to expose the brand. The second one is the adaptation of our products to the requirements of the Middle East such as the long sleeves, no décolleté. I was in charge to coordinate with the product team a special line for the Middle East that fits their requirements.

MJ: all right and the strengths then?

NV: The first big advantage of la Fée is the wide offer because the collection is composed of about 400 references. So the customers have plenty of choices and there are then more probabilities that they find something they like. La Fée maraboutée is also very well known for its prints that are very appreciated in the Middle East. And there are many blouses, quite large cloths that suits the Middle East's preferences. So concerning the products, it really fits the Middle East. Second, the price is an advantage because we all well positioned in terms of pricing in comparison to the competitors. All these elements make me believing that La Fée Maraboutee has a great further development potential in the next years even if these last months, the business in Dubaï for example has been a bit slowed down because of the political issues in the region.

MJ: So we have spoken about the weakness and strengths, but what should be done to make La Fée Maraboutée more effective in the Middle East?

NV: As I said in the weaknesses, we have to work on the brand awareness to make the brand more well known. It is in my point of view also very important that we take the requirements of this region into consideration when creating the collection and especially for particular events such as Ramadan, Eid. The women wear during these religious events special clothes that follow some rules. For example for Ramadan, our partner in Dubaï asked us long dresses, very elegant whereas for Eid, she wanted long dresses but with stresses, paillettes etc.. So if we want to fit the region's standards, we have to create capsules for the Middle East region. The last recommendations I would do is maybe to better train the staff so that they can be able to deliver right information to the customers and we have to support Alfuttaim with that.

MJ: Ok thank you, do you want to add something maybe? …

NV: Euh.. no I thin we have well covered the topic! =)

MJ: Then thank you very much again.

Interview 3: Abood Faisal, Visual merchandising manager, Al-Futtaim

Morgane Jégu (MJ): Good afternoon, thank you for accepting this interview. I know your time is limited and I really appreciate that you took time to answer to my questions.

Abood Faisal (AF): No problem, it´s a pleasure.

MJ: So let´s start. Could you please introduce yourself?

AF: Yes of course. So my name is Abood Faisal, I am 32 years old, and I have been working in the fashion industry for more than 10 years now. I am quite new at Al-Futtaim because I arrived last August. I started my career after having studied advanced visual merchandising at London college of Fashion within the Alshaya Group. I was Visual merchandising supervisor of the brands H&M and Pottery Barn in the Middle East. It is a very big group such as Al-Futtaim with a strong expertise in retail. I worked then for Chalhoub Group taking care of the brand Ralph Lauren also as visual merchandising manager. This group is famous for the Middle East for luxury retail. In Al-futtaim now, I am covering not only the Middle East as I used to but also Africa.

MJ: … and do you see a difference in your work between Africa and Middle East?

AF: Euh well, in Africa, we also are in big malls. I usually use lot of prints and colorful items to do the storefronts. So the difference is not so big but it is more some details that differentiate the 2 regions.

MJ: ok… and if we now focus about La Fée Maraboutée, what is your relation with the brand?

AF: Euh.. I know La Fée Maraboutée because it is a brand carried by Al-Futtaim and I have already worked on some projects for the windows of the brand as a support but I don´t fully work for La Fée Maraboutée, sorry, it is not easy for me to pronounce…

MJ: haha, no problem, you said it well. And what is your exact experience in the Middle East.

AF: Well I come from the Middle East even if I studied visual merchandising in London so I am a native here. Second, I have always worked for Middle Eastern markets in fashion so I think I know this region quite well.

MJ: well then thanks to your experience, how do you design windows in the Middle and what are the specificities to do so?

AF: Hum.. of course it depends for what kind of brands you work for. The merchandising has to follow the codes of the brand to not disrupt the customer. However, in the Middle East, it is important, especially for woman fashion industry, to wear clothes that are remarkable. So, I would say that in the Middle East, it is important to have prints, colors or glitzes, at least one item in the window. Furthermore, as social media are very important here in the Middle East, I also look at the trends or if some looks or outfits have been published for the brand so that I

can highlight them in the windows. I think this strong link to social media is something very special from Middle East, which is not so strong in Europe. The last thing I am thinking of are the importance of the religious event such as ramadan for example. We create then special windows because it is super important for woman to wear very elegant clothes, especially dresses. …

MJ: all right, are there any other religious event that are important for locals here?

AF: … Eid is also very important but the outfits are different. For Eid, women were more fancy clothes. They want to kind of show off during parties, they want to stand out.

MJ: Ok, and then when you do a competition analysis between la Fée Maraboutée and the competition, what differentiates the brand from the others?

AF: Well, la Fée maraboutée collection is very large which is good because customers have many choices. From a merchandising point of view, this large choice is not always easy to handle, ahah. La Fée Maraboutée also has many prints and woman from Middle East really like that. Also the fact that it is French adds something special in comparison to other European brands because you know, people think about haute couture, Paris, elegance and they relate these images to France.

MJ: I am always quite impressed to hear the image people have about France, haha. I know that you don´t have a full overview of the merchandising work done for La Fée Maraboutée but do you generally duplicate the merchandising done in France to the Middle East boutiques or do you make changes to adapt them?

AF: Usually, and what I also did in my previous experiences, we take inspiration from the original merchandising briefing sent but we make some changes regarding the colors or the prints chosen or other details. We use more prints in the windows than in the original briefings and change skirts, dresses or trousers when they are too short on the mannequins because people here don´t show their legs or arms, that´s a rule. However, he also have to take care that it suits the preferences of expatriates because there are not only Emiratis here but also people coming from all over the world for work or travelling. So the crucial thing is to make a mix between traditional style of locals here and Western style of expatriates and tourists.

MJ: All right, thank you very much… I have no more questions or remarks to add but maybe you have?

AF: mmm… no I think I said everything.

MJ: Then thank you again and I wish you a nice end of the day.

Interview 4: Emma Pazalka, Regional marketing manager Fashion, Al-Futtaim

Morgane Jégu (MJ): Good afternoon Emma, thank you for accepting this interview.

Emma Pazalska (EP): Good afternoon, no problem, I also studied and it is always a pleasure to help.

MJ: haha, thank you for comprehension. If you are ready, we will start: could you please introduce yourself?

EP: yes of course. So my name is Emma Pazalska, I come from Scotland and arrived here in Dubaï …. 6 years ago … yes 6 years ago… time flies, incredible! I graduated from Glasgow Caledonian University with Bachelor or Honours in international fashion business. I started my career in Glasgow as a PR manager in a a retail company called Cruise. It is a multibrand UK retailer offering luxury fashion items. I carried on then at House of Fraser, very popular departments stores in UK and then I decided to move more to marketing and to do so, I came to Dubaï where I had the opportunity to develop my competencies and career at Boutique 1. Boutique 1 is a luxury fashion group in UAE. I was there senior marketing manager where I managed and coordinated the PR and communication of the different brands we had. In 2016, I left Boutique to Al-Futtaim where I am now and work as a regional marketing manager. For brands like Sandro, Claudie Pierlot for examples.

MJ: All right, so you have been quite focused on the luxury sector then?

EP: Yes, exactly, even if now, I don´t anymore. I started from the beginning working with luxury brands and I naturally carried on after. Now, I deal more with Middle-High end fashion but not luxury, which is actually very interesting because the codes are different.

MJ: which differences for example?

EP: the requirements are different in terms of communications, events or rules to follow for example. With the brand I am taking care of now, of course there are rules but I am freer to make proposals and the contact is friendlier. I don´t know if I prefer luxury or not, I can only say that it is different.

MJ: ok… always interesting to have different point of views.. and how do you consider your experience in the Middle East?

EP: mmm… you mean if I know the market or knowledge about it?..

MJ: yes…

EP: ok.. mmm.. So as I said I have 6-years experience in the Middle East which has brought me a nice overview of the fashion industry in this market. I am now used to people´s consumer behaviors, which was not easy at the beginning to handle.yes…

MJ: ok.. and what is your relation of la Fée Maraboutée?

EP: Well… La Fée Maraboutée is quite in the same range as Maje that I handle so I know the brand because of competition analysis and it is one of Al-Futtaim´s brand. But I didn´t know the brand before coming to Al-Futtaim to be honest.

MJ: all right... and how do you consider the fashion industry in the Middle East?

EP: well… in the Middle East, the fashion industry is very diversified because you have so different profiles of people shopping. And so are the brands. You have all American and European retails or brands that are implanted in UAE or Dubaï that have a western style but recently, new designers and creators are coming and develop small brands in UAE which become popular. So I would say that the fashion industry here is very diversified and suits all kind of customer profiles.

MJ: ok.. and for the European or American brand coming to Middle East, how important are the stores there?

EP: mmm… stores are mostly in malls and malls are very important in Dubai people´s life especially women. So more than offering clothes or whatever, it is a place where they can meet, have fun, and relax. So stores are very important, it is kind of a second home, if I can say that.

MJ: all right and in the stores, how important is the staff?

EP: mmm… the staff is essential. They first represent physically the brand and embody its values and messages the brand wants to give. Some women don´t like to be advised about this or that outfit but usually, women like to feel important, advised, and served. And without staff, the brand would lose so much in terms of identity, image and sales of course.

MJ: yes, and in marketing, it is of course important. What about technologies?

EP: what do you mean?

MJ: how important are the technologies in stores, social media etc… ?

EP: As a marketing manager in the Middle East, I can say that technologies and especially social media are super important. It is incredible how people are connected nowadays and we have to adapt to this trend. Thus, Instagram, facebook, twitter etc.. are our work tools to promote a brand and rise brand awareness. However, it can also destroy a brand so quickly because everything is viral. So we have to use social media and technologies intelligently to empower brands. Now, people buy according to what has been said on social media and that´s why the power of bloggers, youtubers or other influences has risen so much.

MJ: Yes, that´s true… and now if we come back to la Fée maraboutée, what are the weaknesses of the brand in the Middle East?

EP:.. um I would say brand awareness.. as I told you, I didn´t know this brand before being at Al-Futtaim. I actually think that the clothes are nice and the stores are really nice. I went 2 weeks ago in one and I really liked the atmosphere inside. So I would say brand awareness.

MJ: and other strengths except the stores themselves?

EP: mmmm…. I also like the French style of the collections. There is something different from the other brands that make the brand recognizable and I think it is important for the Middle East market. People are surrounded by so many brands offering the same style of items and when they see a brand that differentiates from the competition, they will be attracted or it will attract their attention.

MJ: So according what you said before, what should be done to make La Fée Maraboutée more effective in the Middle East?

EP: increase the brand awareness and from my marketing perspective, they should engage more on social media to gain brand exposure but also create a stronger link with its customers. It is really important. Brand awareness is not so easy to create, as we could believe. It is something that takes time but at the end, it is the key of a brand´s development.

MJ: all right, I have no more questions for now but maybe you want to add something?

EP: mmm… no I think that´s all on my side.

MJ: Then, I would like to thank you for the interview and wish you a nice day.

Interview 5: Jennifer Fall, General Manager Al Futtaim Retail, ROBINSONS Department Stores Middle East

Morgane Jégu (MJ): Good morning

Jennifer Fall (JF): Good morning

MJ: Thank you for accepting this interview.

JF: My pleasure

MJ: Well, to start, could you please introduce yourself?

JF: yes. So, my name is Jennifer Fall, I am French, from Paris. I studied international business in Paris and I started my career at Galeries Lafayette, which is one of the biggest department

stores in France. I started there as an import manager for Galeries Lafayette´s own brands. I had then the opportunity to deepen my knowledge in marketing since I was marketing coordination manager. I really enjoyed it but after 3 years, I wanted to come back to sales and my studies background so I have been International commercial manager the, still a Galeries Lafayette for 6 years. Euh… after that, as I dealt with partner in Europe, Asia etc… I had the opportunity to move to Hong Kong where Galeries Lafayette has stores there. It was a very nice experience, different culture, and people. And after 12 years at Galeries Lafayette, I wanted to change the environment and start a new challenge and Al-Futtaim offered me the opportunity to start as General Manager for Robinsons mall. I already knew this mall because it is the biggest and most popular one in Dubaï and within the fashion retail and luxury industry, everyone knows this name. I have been working for Al-Futtaim for a bit more than 2 years now and I really like it.

MJ: It must be very different than Paris no?

JF: mmm… the weather is different! Haha! And the infrastructure too. Here, the malls are very important and it is not like in Paris where you walk in the streets and do shopping. The culture is also different but it is actually very interesting.

MJ: haha… yes the weather.. and … what is your relation to La Fée Maraboutée? Do you know it, have you ever worked for the brand…?

JF: As a french woman, of course I know la Fée maraboutée and there are in Galeries Lafayette stores. I also have clothes from La Fée Maraboutée actually. … But I have never worked for the brand directly. When I organized events in Galeries Lafayette, the brand was there but it is not like I have been in charge of these brands for example.

MJ: All right… mmm… and after some years in the Middle East, how do you consider the market?

JF: It is a huge market. Because it is not only Dubaï but it concerns Lebanon, Kuwait, Bahrein, Saudi… so the potential for brands in this region is big even if I think that it is becoming more and more saturated. All the brands are coming there and it is not easy to differentiate. The thing is that lot of people come to Dubaï, either for business, holiday or just have a connection in Dubaï to go somewhere else. So it brings lot of people from all over the world. There are lot of French expats here in Dubaï for example.

MJ: French people are everywhere! Haha! And for you who know the department stores well in different continents and countries, how important are they in the Middle East?

JF: You mean for brands?

MJ: mm.. for brands but also in general for customers…

JF: so for brands, having a store at Robinsons for example is a very nice window for them because as I said, there is a huge traffic and it is also has an image of prestige. Stores are also a way to communicate Stores are also a way to communicate with their customers all over the world and keep a certain connection all over the world and keep a certain connection with their customers.

MJ: …and for customers?

JF: euh…. For customers, it is a place where they can relax, shop with their friends, family…

MJ: what what do you think about La Fée Maraboutée´s stores in the Middle East?

JF: I personally really like the stores of La Fée Maraboutée, you feel like at home. I really think it is a big asset for the brand and woman here really like spending time in stores so the concept fits the needs. It is totally different from us in France for example. When we go shopping, we usually go alone with 1 or 2 friends in stores, look for products, you quickly try and then either you buy it or you leave the store. The women in Dubaï can spend the whole day shopping. They are usually minimum 5 and try on several clothes, having advices from their friends, try on again… So it is important that the women feel comfortable and relax because it is also a way for brands to earn more money. The more time spent in a shop, the more the money customers will spend.

MJ: and you said that their friends give advices about the outfits, how important is the staff in your opinion?

JF: The staff is also important because it reassures people and has an expertise. Also, they bring something unique, the DNA of the brand. As I said, there are many expats and tourists in the Middle East so the staff is there to advise the customers who want or need and also transmit the values of the brand. Maybe I speak too much as a previous marketing manager but that is really, as it works! Haha!

MJ: You are not the only one having done this remark so don´t worry! Haha. And what about the role of technologies, social media etc…? and how is it at la Fée Maraboutée?

JF: They are also important. In the Middle East, I think even more than in Europe. When I worked in Hong Kong, people were very connected on their smartphones and so on, but it was before coming here. … I don´t see La Fée Maraboutée a lot on social media or doing something at Robinsons for example… and maybe they should..

MJ: so you think it is one weakness of La Fée?

JF: Yes, I think so…

MJ: Are there any other weaknesses of the brand you think about?

JF: eummm…. It goes with what I said before but I would say advertising more. Because I am French, I know the brand etc.. but for foreigners and locals here, the brand is not so well known and I think there is a nice potential.

MJ: ok.. and what are the strengths of the brand for you?

JF: mmm…. As I said before their stores.. they are very nice… and then the products themselves, they usually have nice collections. It can satisfy a large target of people. So for the Middle East, it is a good point….

MJ: ok.. .. then.. do you want to add something before finishing?

JF: mmm no.. maybe good luck for the rest of your master thesis..

MJ: haha, thank you! And thank you again for the interview.

Interview 6 Noémie Lauth, ex-merchandising manager at la Fée Maraboutée

Morgane Jégu (MJ): Thank you for accepting this interview, I know you have a train after that so I will try to keep it effective.

Noémie Lauth (NL): no problem.

MJ: so to start, could please introduce yourself?

NL: yes… so my name is Noémie Lauth, I am now a free-lance as visual merchandising and decorator. I studies Visual merchandising in Paris. I worked then for several companies as Visual merchandiser manager. I started at Promod, then I worked for Soleil sucré, an underwear company, and I moved to Sinéquanone, which is French fashion retailer where I have worked for 5 years and my last job was visual merchandising manager at La Fée Maraboutée. Now I am my own boss and work on different projects from design Christmas windows to helping brands during the fashion week.

MJ: all right, and what is your relation with La Fée maraboutée?

NL: I have worked for La Fée Maraboutée for 3 years as visual merchandising manager. I followed the openings of new stores in France but also abroad such as in Dubai, Doha or China. La Fée maraboutée is a quite small company so I was the only one taking care of the merchandising. I know the brand well because to create windows, outfits etc.. you need to understand the brand very well.

MJ: and you have just said that you have been to the Middle East, how do you consider the market for fashion?

NL: mmm… the fashion in the Middle East seems to be close to the European market because you can find all the brands we have in Paris: Sandro, Maje, Claudie Pierlot, Lacoste… but in

real, it follows some rules because the windows, the mannequins have to be in line with the religious norms here.

MJ: what do you mean by religious norms?

NL: you have to show in windows long dresses or no v-neck because women have to wear clothes that don´t show their body. And as the outfits in the windows are the first thing consumers see, it is crucial to respect theses codes.

MJ: oh all right.. so how did you exactly design windows in the Middle East?

NL: euh… when I went there, the first thing I did was to look at what the competitors or boutiques surrounding ours did. It gives you a first impression of the expectations, standards. Then, I analysed before the trends in the Middle East and the tastes in order to find pieces in our collection that could look the same. Once having done that, I started design and creating the windows. The window space in Dubai and Doha is much bigger that we have in France, so it was another thing I had to think about. For the first window, we wanted something special to attract the attention of customers. I wanted also something that represent the French elegancy so I designed a background made with paper flowers. Oh yes It was for the spring/summer collection by the way.

MJ: haha, yes, it can be useful =)

NL: yes exactly.. so the outfits were highlighted by this background. I decided to choose one outfit that also was in France and two others that suited more the Middle East with long sleeves but light material and elegant to remind the French touch. Haha!

MJ: haha. Always important! and you said that you began by looking at the competitors around, so after this competition analysis, what differentiates La Fée Maraboutée from the others?

NL: If we take Maje, Bash for example as a basis for comparison, our DNA are the prints and very large collection. And also the stores' decoration, which is very different from the other brands and quite unique.

MJ: And is the concept and merchandising done in the Middle East a duplication of the one in France ? I mean all the stores are the same or there are changes?

NL: Even if France, not all the stores are the same. The wall papers and the decoration items are different from one store to another. So for the stores themselves in the Middle East, we just thought the decoration a bit differently because they are bigger but the basis is the same. Only the merchandising and how to display the collection is different from France. So it is more adaptation I would say rather than big changes.

MJ: I see, and in your opinion, what are the strengths and weaknesses of La Fée Maraboutée?

NL: euh.. let´s start with the weaknesses to finish on something positive: I think La Fée Maraboutée has to better rethink the collections offered. Not necessarily the design but more the material used, For example in the Middle East, it was problematic because we had a lot of polyester and in such country where it is hot, polyester is not really appreciated. Even in France; Polyester is not very famous because people usually sweat in polyester clothes. So I think some efforts have to be done. Concerning the strengths, I think the concept is nice and due to the fact the collection is wide, it may reach a lot of people yes…

MJ: ok… euh.. do you want to add something more before ending?

NL: mm.. no, I think that´s all.

MJ: ok then thank you again for the time you dedicated to the interview.

NL: It was a pleasure.