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1ST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

COMPUTER SCIENCES AND MANAGEMENT

WHERE DIGITAL & BUSINESS BECOME HUMAN

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**1st INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON COMPUTER SCIENCES & MANAGEMENT TOUCHPOINTS,
WHERE DIGITAL AND BUSINESS BECOME HUMAN!**
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**BRAND INTEGRATION AND CONSUMER PERCEPTION IN POST-MERGER SCENARIOS: THE
CASE OF ONE ALBANIA'S CUSTOMER-CENTRIC MARKETING STRATEGY**

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Abstract

This paper examines the strategic brand transformation of ONE Albania, following the merger of ALBtelecom and One Telecommunications under the 4iG Group. In response to the rebranding, the company adopted a marketing strategy that departs from traditional ideals of perfection in service delivery, focusing instead on authenticity, transparency and continuous improvement. Set against a cultural backdrop of widespread scepticism toward telecom providers, the study explores how ONE Albania's brand philosophy—grounded in honesty, transparency, and customer centricity—was designed to rebuild trust and establish credibility.

*This research employs a qualitative case study approach, supported by secondary data from ONE Albania's internal marketing reports and customer satisfaction studies, including measures such as NPS and TRI*M Index, to enrich and triangulate qualitative findings.*

Results demonstrate that a customer-centric brand philosophy, if consistently communicated and emotionally resonant, can foster trust recovery and consumer loyalty in post-merger telecom markets. The case illustrates how honesty and responsiveness are more impactful than polished brand ideals in credibility-deficient environments.

The study offers a practical model for telecom operators and marketers navigating post-merger brand integration in low-trust markets, emphasising the importance of strategic alignment,

emotional engagement, and cultural sensitivity in brand repositioning. Future research should explore the long-term sustainability of such repositioning efforts and conduct comparative studies in similar market contexts.

Keywords: Brand Integration, Consumer Perception, Post-Merger Marketing, Customer-Centric Strategy, Rebranding, Telecommunications Industry

I. INTRODUCTION

In the current competitive telecommunications landscape, mergers and acquisitions (M&A) are a prevalent strategic choice for companies seeking growth, innovation, and increased market presence (Wilcox, Chang, & Grover, 2001; Gantumur & Stephan, 2012). While such transitions offer potential benefits, they also pose significant challenges, particularly in aligning brand identity and managing consumer perceptions (Steigenberger, 2017). These challenges are amplified in environments characterised by historical scepticism and low institutional trust (Alam & Torany, 2023). Studies show that neglecting consumer sentiment during M&As can erode brand equity and negatively impact customer behaviour (Thorbjørnsen & Dahlén, 2011). Effective brand integration, therefore, requires strategic alignment to preserve brand integrity and promote customer loyalty, especially in low-trust contexts (Kernstock & Brexendorf, 2012; McLelland, Goldsmith, & McMahon, 2014).

Mergers and acquisitions (M&A) in the telecommunications sector, inherently multifaceted and context-dependent, are influenced by variables such as market structure, regulatory environment, cultural expectations and consumer behaviour (Fruits et al., 2020; Kargas, Argyroulis, and Varoutas, 2023). In Albania, despite its small market size, the telecommunications sector has undergone significant changes and seen growing consumer demand. However, public trust has declined due to broken promises, inconsistent service quality and lack of transparency (Shyle & Xhelo, 2017; Mario, 2019). The merger between ALBtelecom and One Telecommunications, which culminated in the creation of ONE Albania within the 4iG Group, is a prime example, highlighting how a post-merger identity can be rebuilt through a customer-centric strategy (one.al).

More than a technical integration, the birth of ONE Albania required a complete redefinition of brand identity, values, and consumer engagement. Facing deep-rooted scepticism, the company adopted a bold communication strategy based on authenticity, gradual progress and openness, eschewing conventional marketing ideals of perfection.

By analysing this case, the study offers insights on how brands can effectively reposition themselves in contexts where consumer trust is fragile. Furthermore, it outlines the brand's communication

journey, highlights alignment with consumer values and evaluates measurable results. Therefore, three guiding questions structure the inquiry:

- A. *How can post-merger brand integration strategies be designed to build consumer trust in low-trust markets?*
- B. *What are the essential components of a customer-centric communication strategy that support successful brand repositioning?*
- C. *How do cultural dynamics and consumer perceptions influence the effectiveness of brand repositioning in post-merger scenarios in the telecommunications industry?*

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

II.1 Brand Integration and Consumer Perception in Post-Merger Scenarios

In the telecommunications industry, mergers and acquisitions (M&As) have long been instruments for growth, innovation, and market expansion (Wilcox, Chang, & Grover, 2001; Gantumur & Stephan, 2012). However, the success of such initiatives depends on effective brand integration, often the most complex aspect of organisational restructuring (Yang, Davis, & Robertson, 2012). This process requires deep value alignment, consistent communication, and active stakeholder engagement (Kernstock & Brexendorf, 2012; Balmer & Gray, 2003).

Misaligned integration can dilute brand identity, confuse consumers, and weaken market positioning (Thorbjørnsen & Dahlén, 2011). The challenge intensifies when merging companies have distinct cultures or target different customer segments, making strategic clarity and cultural sensitivity essential (Steigenberger, 2017). In such contexts, consumer perception becomes crucial, and emotional attachment to traditional brands can strongly influence openness to change, especially in contexts characterised by low trust (Basu, 2006; McLelland, Goldsmith & McMahon, 2014).

This is particularly relevant in economies in transition or in sectors such as telecommunications, where unmet expectations and inconsistent services have fueled consumer scepticism (Alam & Torany, 2023). Post-merger branding must therefore go beyond functional messages and focus on rebuilding trust through credible and consumer-centric narratives. Research highlights that demonstrating service continuity and improvement is crucial to mitigate concerns about monopolisation, pricing, and quality degradation (Fruits et al., 2019; Kargas, Argyroulis & Varoutas, 2023).

To address these needs, customer-centric strategies have gained great importance, prioritising listening to one's feelings, offering iterative improvements, and integrating brand authenticity as a long-term trust-building mechanism (Vũ & Moisescu, 2013; Steigenberger, 2017; Kernstock &

Brexendorf, 2012). In fact, Vü and Moisescu (2013), while classifying integration models by brand merger level, recommend that the choice be guided by the relative strength of the brand, market expectations, and cultural context.

Ash (2023) emphasises the need for continuous assessment of brand equity after the merger, to ensure that strategic decisions translate into lasting value. Yao and Wang (2018) also argue that when a weaker brand is involved, authenticity in communication can significantly improve purchase intention. Kernstock and Brexendorf (2013) emphasise that brand integration should be systemic, rooted not only in communications but also in organisational culture and leadership philosophy.

Pre- and post-merger brand identity alignment is critical to consumer acceptance. Rieck and Doan (2009) note that customers evaluate new brand identities through the lens of continuity and credibility. When mergers are viewed as power consolidations rather than consumer-oriented transformations, the risk of brand equity erosion increases significantly.

II.2 Branding Challenges in Telecommunications M&A

Mergers and acquisitions in the telecommunications industry present unique challenges due to the industry's regulatory sensitivity and the direct impact on consumers. Although consolidation offers operational and financial benefits, it also raises concerns about competition, service quality, and consumer trust (Shruthi, 2018; Gantumur & Stephan, 2012; Wilcox et al., 2001). Research emphasises that to preserve brand value, telecommunications companies must invest not only in operational integration, but also in customer communication, digital service continuity, and reputation management (Wilcox et al., 2001; Gantumur & Stephan, 2012).

Brand perception in the telecommunications industry is particularly vulnerable in the post-merger phase. Inconsistencies in service quality, pricing, and network performance can quickly erode trust, even when internal synergies are successfully realised (Kargas, Argyroulis, & Varoutas, 2023). Warf (2003) notes that previous merger waves prioritised scalability over customer experience, often resulting in dissatisfaction and regulatory scrutiny. In contrast, current best practices emphasise service reliability, price transparency, and authentic communication as key elements of brand repositioning.

The emotional and functional dimensions of telecom services, such as consistent connectivity, billing transparency, and perceived fairness, make customers highly responsive to brand narratives that promise stability, improvement, and personalisation (Vü & Moisescu, 2013; Kumar, 2012). However, overpromising or being inauthentic can backfire, especially in high-involvement service industries. Ash (2023) emphasises that post-merger brand assessment must incorporate not only tangible performance indicators but also consumers' perceptions of trust and reliability.

The challenge is compounded in emerging segments such as industrial wireless networks, where mergers introduce brand complexity into B2B environments. Jacobsson and Rickhammar (2022) emphasise the dual need for operational excellence and a coherent brand identity that resonates with both industrial customers and end users. Similarly, Srinuan and Srinuan (2023) point out that in mobile telecommunications, consolidation often fuels consumer concerns about reduced competition and innovation, necessitating clear communication and regulatory sensitivity.

For lasting success, brand integration must be embedded across all business functions, not limited to marketing (Kernstock & Brexendorf, 2013). In telecommunications, where disruptions are highly visible, alignment between internal operations and external brand promises is critical. Therefore, telecom companies must navigate a complex matrix of efficiency, compliance, cultural awareness and emotional engagement.

II.3 The Albanian Context: Market Dynamics and Public Trust

Although modest in size, the Albanian telecommunications sector is characterised by competitive dynamism, digital progress and increasingly sophisticated consumer expectations. The sector has contributed significantly to the national economic development and digital integration with the EU (Jorgji, Kristo and Matraku, 2024). However, despite visible infrastructure investments, consumer trust has not kept pace. Studies cite persistent dissatisfaction with inconsistent service, opaque pricing and over-promises in marketing (Shyle & Xhelo, 2017; Mario, 2019).

This trust deficit represents a major obstacle to post-merger brand integration. Albanian consumers are particularly sensitive to service inefficiencies and prioritise transparency over brand loyalty (Braumllari & Nerjaku, 2021). With high price sensitivity and low emotional engagement with the brand, marketing efforts need to go beyond functional guarantees to build perceived authenticity and long-term trust.

As Kasapi (2024) shows, consumer satisfaction is closely linked to network speed, coverage, billing clarity, and customer support. Even when service quality improves, a lack of transparent communication hinders perception. Therefore, a customer-centric strategy is not optional; it is essential. Demographic segmentation is also key: younger users prioritise digital performance and data access, while older demographics value price stability and consistency (Terezi et al., 2016; Kasapi, 2024).

Historically, Albanian telecommunications have favoured bundle offers and flexible pricing, achieving short-term competitiveness but limited brand loyalty (Gjoni, 2018). At the same time, the sector's importance to the national economy raises the stakes. Although indicators show its contribution to GDP and digital infrastructure, consumer confidence remains fragile, posing a risk to sustainable growth (Leskaj and Lazimi, 2023).

The 2023 merger of ALBtelecom and ONE Telecommunications, which created ONE Albania under the control of 4iG Group, offers a case study of brand repositioning in a low-trust environment. The new entity prioritised rebuilding trust, restoring credibility, and redefining its relationships with the market (Tirana Post, 2023; one.al). In line with Kasapi's (2024) findings, ONE Albania focused its brand identity on service quality, network reliability, and customer support, combining functional benefits with emotional relevance.

Unlike many internally focused mergers, ONE Albania adopted an externally focused strategy that emphasised audience perception and credibility. This transformation was designed to mark a clear break from previous industry practices, anchoring the brand in accountability, transparency and innovation. On the other hand, internal operations and customer-facing touchpoints were aligned to ensure consistency across all channels: retail, digital and communications. This holistic approach to merger integration reflects a commitment to both structural coherence and emotional resonance.

Overall, the case of ONE Albania illustrates how brand integration, when rooted in cultural awareness, message transparency and customer-centric values, can effectively counter market scepticism and foster long-term consumer loyalty in transition economies with historically low institutional trust.

II. METHODOLOGY

Aligned with Yin's (2018) case study methodology, this research uses multiple data sources to ensure analytical rigour and contextual depth:

A. Primary Data: These insights were integrated with ONE Albania's internal campaign documentation (2022-2024), providing strategic clarity on the corporate brand platform, positioning framework, and campaign objectives:

- *Pre-Rebranding Focus Groups (October 2022):* 8 (eight) sessions conducted in Tirana, Shkodra, and Fier, explored brand perception, fusion expectations and campaign concepts.
- *Retail-based Focus Groups (September 2022):* 15 (fifteen) sessions in Tirana, Shkodra, and Korçë examined communications strategies for fixed-mobile convergence (FMC).
- *Post-Rebranding Surveys (March & October 2023):* Two national survey waves (1,000 representative respondents) evaluated: Brand awareness, Changes in satisfaction, loyalty, and trust; iii) Assessment of brand attributes post-integration.

B. Secondary Data:

- Industry data from AKEP and INSTAT for broadband market trends.
- Academic literature on post-merger brand integration, consumer trust, and market behaviour in Albania and internationally.

Key Evaluation Metrics and Tools: To assess the effectiveness of the post-merger marketing strategy, the following key performance indicators (KPIs) were analysed:

Metric	Source	Purpose
Net Promoter Score (NPS) & TRI Am Index	One Albania	Consumer loyalty, referral likelihood, satisfaction and emotional alignment
Brand Tracking	One Albania	Assess awareness, brand image, equity, and positioning strength
Market Performance Indicators	AKEP	Broadband growth, market share, and customer churn behaviour

Table 1. Key Evaluation Metrics and Tools

Source: Authors processing

III. RESULTS

III.1 Pre-Merger Brand Associations and Public Sentiment (2021)

Drawing on Kantar Hoffman's 2021 regional study in Albania, Hungary, and Montenegro, widespread distrust of telecom operators emerged, especially among Albanian millennials and families. Participants expressed scepticism that providers truly understood or responded to their needs, sometimes confirming broken promises and a lack of transparency. The two traditional brands, ALBtelecom and ONE, elicited contrasting associations (Figure 1):

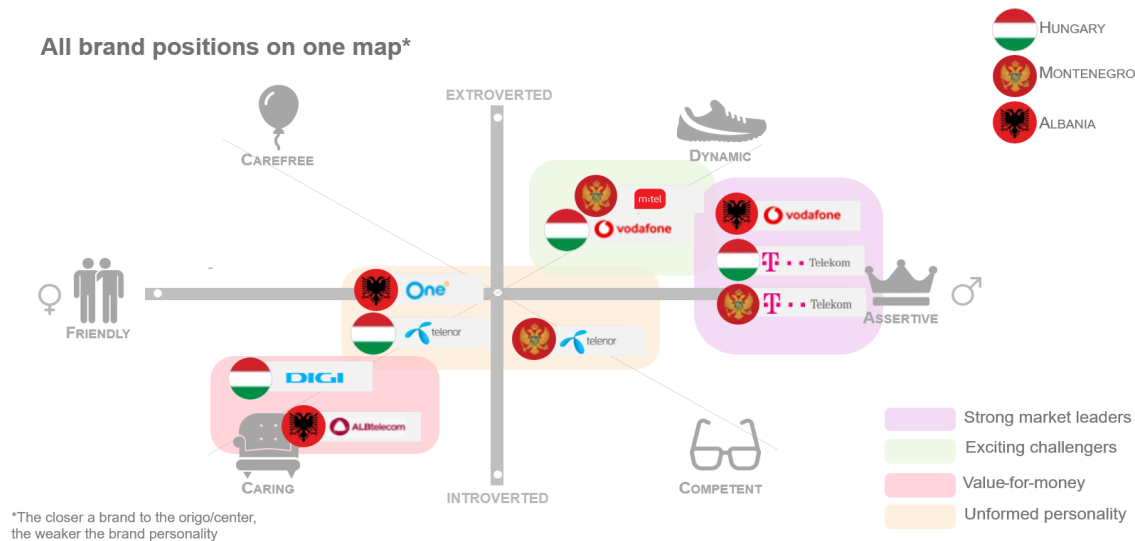


Figure 1. Regional brand positions map
Source: Kantar Hoffmann (2021)

ALBtelecom was perceived as convenient but outdated and traditional, while ONE was seen as modern and agile, although lacking a strong emotional connection:

Brand	Perceived Attributes
ALBtelecom	Best price, but seen as old-fashioned, traditional, and lagging in innovation
ONE Telecom	Modern and customer-oriented, but lacking a strong or consistent brand personality

Table 2. Brand and perceived attributes

Source: Authors processing

The 2022 merger announcement sparked a mix of surprise and nostalgia, especially among ALBtelecom users who lamented the demise of a long-standing national brand. Across all consumer segments, there was considerable concern about reduced competition, with fears that the merger would consolidate market power, limit consumer choice, and lead to higher prices. Many interpreted the merger as a strategic power shift: a younger, more dynamic operator absorbing an established but declining incumbent.

"There will only be two competitors in the market. Competition will decrease, and this will increase the risk of high prices." — ALBtelecom user, 40-54, Shkodra.

III.2 Strategic Repositioning and Brand Identity Reframing (2022)

The rebranding strategy for ONE Albania, launched in September 2022, involved a coordinated communication effort supported by IPSOS Albania, including 15 focus groups in Tirana, Shkodra, and Korçë. This phase aimed to identify the optimal positioning for the new integrated brand, combining ALBtelecom's extensive infrastructure heritage with ONE's more modern, agile market image.

Figure 2 captures this transformation, in which consumers consistently interpreted the merger narrative as the acquisition by the modern, international ONE of the traditional ALBtelecom, creating a more serious and larger competitor in the market. While this was associated with expectations of innovation and improved service quality, it was also accompanied by concerns about market concentration and loss of brand diversity.

Positive Associations	Concerns Raised
Higher service quality	Fewer operators → reduced competition
Increased innovation	Potential monopolistic behaviour
Better customer care	Loss of familiar ALBtelecom identity

Table 3. Associations and concerns raised

Source: Authors processing

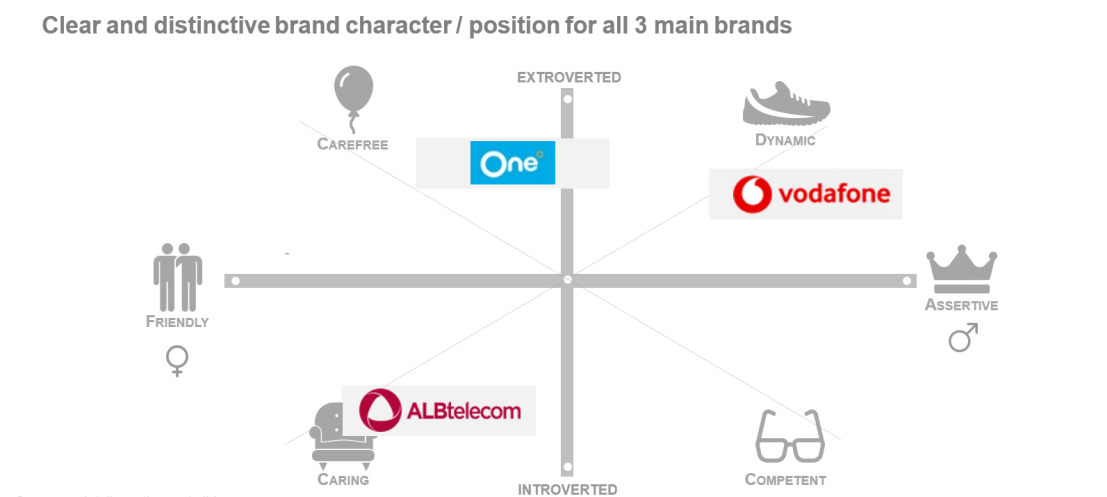


Figure 2. Albanian Telco Brands positions

Source: One Albania (2022)

III.3 Quantitative Impact on Brand Performance (2023)

Post-merger brand performance was monitored through two waves of national surveys: Wave 1 ran from February-March 2023, and Wave 2 ran from October 2023. The following KPIs guided the evaluation:

A. Net Promoter Score (NPS): NPS among fixed-line clients—a segment previously at high risk of churn—increased substantially. The post-merger NPS score for the new ONE brand aligned more closely with the legacy ONE than with ALBtelecom, signalling a successful transfer of positive brand equity.

Segment	Pre-Merger NPS	Post-Merger NPS	Change
<i>Fixed-line Clients</i>	Low (ALBtelecom)	Significantly higher	Recovered trust and loyalty
<i>Mobile Clients</i>	Stable (ONE)	Unchanged	Loyalty maintained post-merger

Table 4. Pre and Post-Mergers Changes

Source: Authors processing

Net Promoter Score (NPS) data illustrate divergent trends in customer satisfaction following the ONE-ATC merger. As shown in Table 5, among mobile-only users, Vodafone showed a significant increase in NPS (from 60 to 69). At the same time, ONE stagnated and subsequently declined, highlighting potential shortcomings in the post-merger integration of mobile services.

In contrast, among Fixed-Mobile Converged (FMC) customers, ONE demonstrated a significant improvement in satisfaction (NPS up from 59 to 66), outperforming Vodafone in this segment. This suggests that the merger had a more favourable impact on bundled service users, likely due to improved value propositions or better service integration.

Client Segment	Service Type	Wave 1 (W1)	Wave 2 (W2)
ONE Clients	Combined	53	—
Ex-ONE Clients	Combined	—	51
ATC-only Clients	Combined	31	—
Ex-ATC Clients	Combined	—	43
ONE (Mobile-only)	Mobile-only	54	49

Vodafone (Mobile-only)	Mobile-only	60	69
ONE (Fixed-Mobile Converged)	FMC	59	66
Vodafone (Fixed-Mobile Converged)	FMC	63	60

Table 5: Combined NPS results by client segment and service type

Source: Adopted from One Albania (2023)

A segmented analysis of ONE's customer base further reveals that both current and former ONE customers have maintained relatively stable, high NPS levels (53 and 51, respectively). In contrast, legacy ATC customers showed a significantly lower NPS (31), indicating dissatisfaction, although former ATC customers who switched to ONE showed moderate recovery (NPS 43). These trends suggest that while the ONE brand has retained the loyalty of its original customer base, the merger's impact on former ATC customers has been mixed, with only partial success in re-establishing trust after the integration.

B. Customer Satisfaction (TRI*M Index): Table 6 show a clear improvement in the TRI*M index, especially among fixed telephony customers, confirming the effectiveness of ONE Albania's post-merger repositioning strategy. As a composite indicator of customer satisfaction and emotional alignment, the TRI*M index reflects not only improved technical service but also a strengthened emotional connection with the brand.

These results suggest that the new ONE brand has successfully realigned and improved consumer expectations, especially among former ALBtelecom customers, validating the strategic integration of legacy identities into a unified, customer-centric narrative.

Segment	Service	Wave	TRI*M	Apostles (%)	Hostages (%)	Mercenaries (%)	Terrorists (%)
ATC Fixed Clients	Fixed	W1	58	39	8	24	28
ONE Fixed Clients	Fixed	W2	71	51	13	11	26
Vodafone Fixed Clients	Fixed	W1	79	—	—	—	—
Vodafone Fixed Clients	Fixed	W2	79	—	—	—	—
ONE Mobile Clients	Mobile	W1	75	50	10	27	14

Ex-ONE Mobile Clients	Mobile	W2	77	57	10	16	17
ATC-only Mobile Clients	Mobile	W1	61	36	4	39	22
Ex-ATC Mobile Clients	Mobile	W2	76	58	7	21	14

Table 6: Combined TRI*M Index and segment profiles

Source: adopted from One Albania

The overall results underscore the success of ONE Albania's strategic integration and brand harmonisation, not only in the efforts preserved, but also in the improvement of customer relationships across all segments, especially in the increase in emotional and experiential value perceived by former ATC users. This supports the thesis that brand strengthening, when combined with customer-centric repositioning, can generate significant gains in loyalty and satisfaction.

C. Brand Awareness and Image Perception: Post-merger brand mapping showed that the new ONE brand was perceived as much closer to ONE Telecommunications' heritage than ALBtelecom.

Image Association (Post-Merger)	Closer to...
Innovation, customer service	ONE Telecommunications
Heritage, reliability (fading)	ALBtelecom

Table 7. Consumer Perception of Brand Image Alignment After the Merger

Source: authors

Figure 3 illustrates how ONE Albania's post-merger brand image has shifted significantly towards ONE Telecommunications' traditional strengths, particularly in fixed services, while Vodafone remains prominent in mobile leadership:

- **Fixed Services Leadership:** Widest fixed network coverage jumped from 53% (W1) to 78% (W2), surpassing Vodafone's 63%; Best fixed prices increased from 53% to 77%, compared to Vodafone's 58%; Most reliable fixed services increased from 54% to 78%, compared to Vodafone's 60%; Fastest home internet speed increased from 58% to 79%, surpassing Vodafone's 67%. These results underscore ONE's success in inheriting and amplifying ATC's advantages in value, reliability, and breadth of service, which are key differentiators in ONE Telecommunications' positioning.
- **Mobile positioning:** Vodafone maintains its leadership position in fastest mobile internet speed (90% vs. ONE's 79%), market leadership (90% vs. 76%) and innovation (84% vs. 77%).

This two-track result validates ONE Albania's brand narrative: drawing on its heritage in the fixed telephony sector, the new ONE has rebuilt consumer trust and strengthened brand equity, while recognising that Vodafone remains the benchmark for innovation and leadership in the mobile sector.

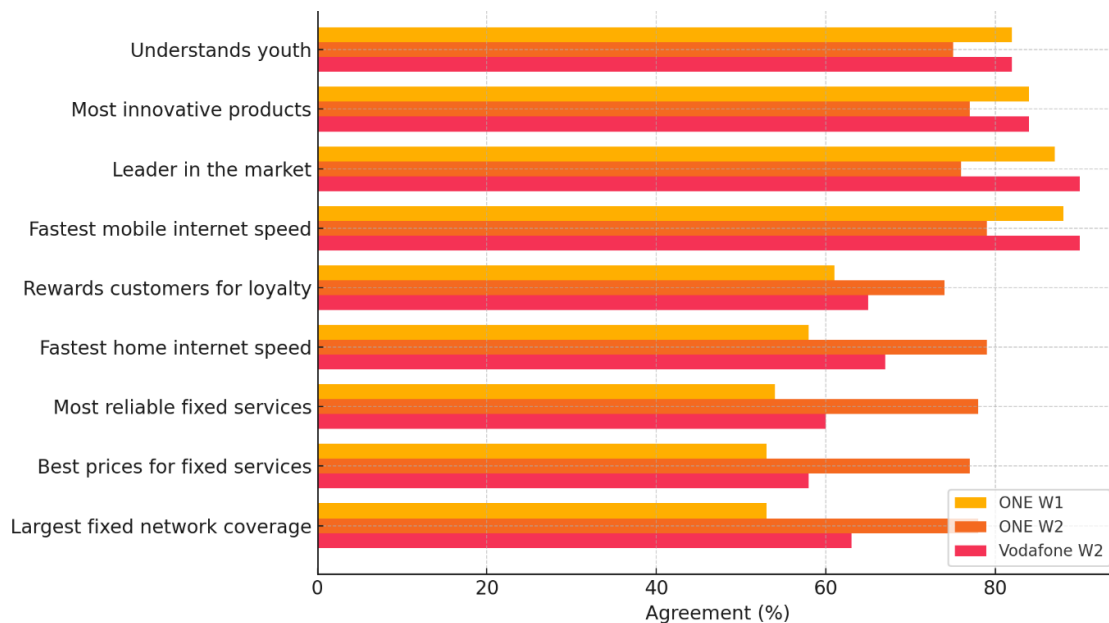


Figure 3. Brand image: ONE Vs. Vodafone (Selected Attributes)

Source: adopted from One Albania

Additionally, Figure 4 illustrates the evolution of customer expectations and perceptions regarding the new consolidated ONE brand over time. There is a clear decline in post-merger performance optimism across all customer segments, as measured by comparing initial expectations (W1) with actual perceptions (W2).

Despite a significant decline in performance optimism, particularly among ONE customers (from 76% expecting an improvement to only 51% perceiving it), the data still suggests that the majority of the existing customer base recognises a performance improvement. Importantly, although expectations have normalised since the merger, perceptions of decline have remained limited, suggesting that disappointment has not completely eroded confidence in the brand.

For Vodafone customers, perceptual improvements were marginal, and a considerable proportion still considered the new brand equivalent or slightly improved, reaffirming the stability of Vodafone's brand equity amid market repositioning.

This data confirms that managing post-merger expectations is essential and that, even in the absence of significantly higher performance, maintaining a constant or slightly improved level of

service can preserve or increase brand loyalty, especially when initial expectations are exceptionally high.

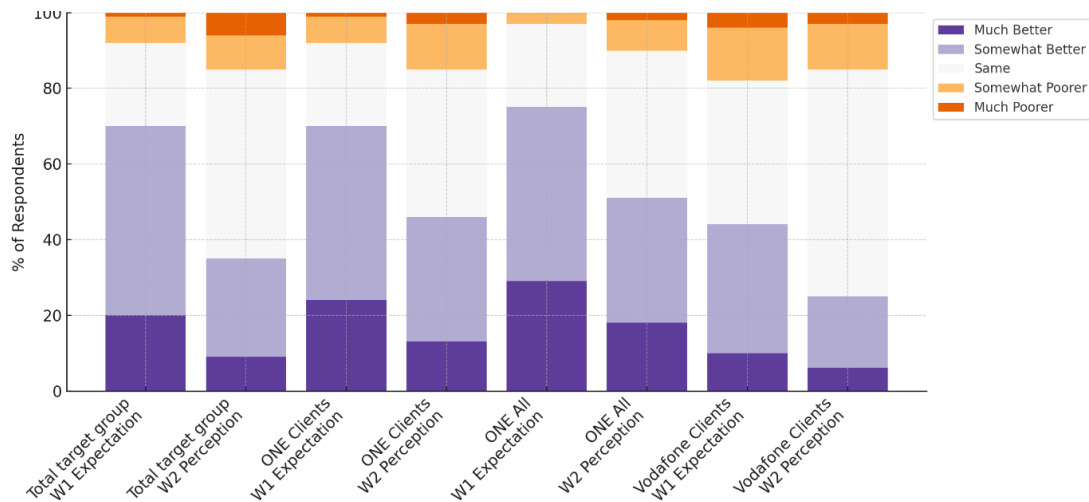


Figure 4. Pre-Merger Expectations Vs. Post-Merger Perceptions

Source: adopted from One Albania

III.4 Competitive Positioning and Market Perception

Despite significant progress in fixed services and FMC (Fixed-Mobile Convergence) offerings, ONE Albania continues to lag behind Vodafone in terms of reputation. As illustrated in Figure 5, while ONE is increasingly perceived as a value-for-money and customer-centric provider, especially in the fixed segment, Vodafone maintains a symbolic advantage rooted in its established market presence and global brand value.

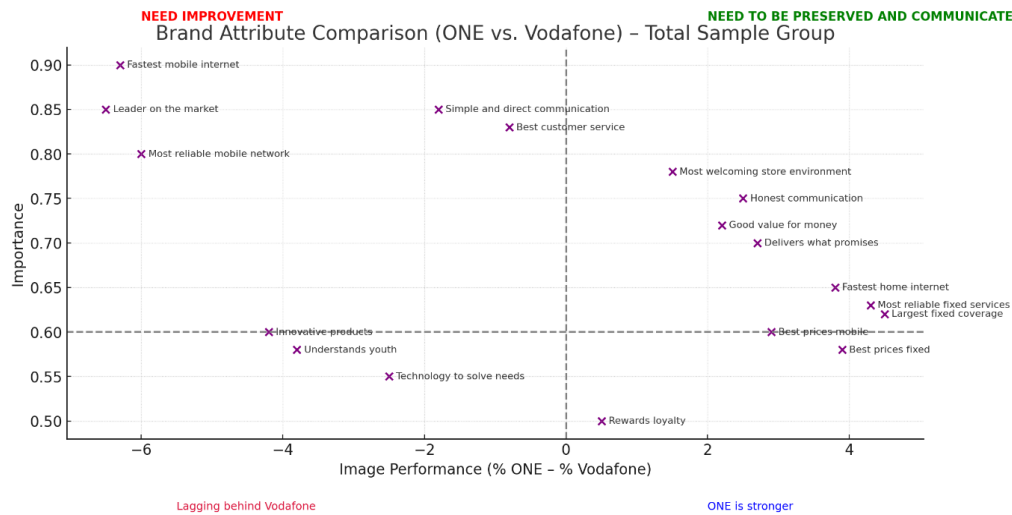


Figure 5. Brand image of ONE compared to Vodafone / Post merging perception against VDF

Source: Adapted from One Albania

The brand positioning map confirms that ONE's core strengths after the merger lie in attributes such as price competitiveness, customer centricity, and communication transparency. These strengths are particularly appreciated by value-sensitive segments, many of which are long-standing ALBtelecom customers. In contrast, Vodafone continues to dominate consumer perceptions on attributes such as network reliability, innovation, and premium status, particularly in mobile.

Operator	Market Position	Consumer Perception
ONE Albania	Growing, innovative, agile	Competitive pricing, innovative service
Vodafone	Legacy leader in mobile	Reputable, stable, international

Table 8. Post-Merger competitive positioning and brand perception

Source: authors

This perception gap reflects both the success and strategic limitations of ONE's current brand trajectory. While the company has successfully redefined its identity in terms of accessibility and functional value, it now faces the critical challenge of improving perceptions in areas historically within Vodafone's expertise, namely technology leadership and the quality of mobile services.

Consequently, this requires ONE to maintain its differentiated position in fixed services, while investing in mobile network performance and innovation. Closing this perception gap will be essential for ONE to consolidate its post-merger gains and position itself as a credible competitor to Vodafone's long-standing dominant position in the Albanian telecommunications market.

III.5 Financial Reporting

Financial reporting shows customer behaviour and preferences toward the brand. According to the 2023 annual activity report of AKEP in Albania (Electronic & Mailing Communication Authority), Vodafone reported high income. This clearly identifies, in financial terms, customers' preferences toward the Vodafone brand in Albania.

Indeed, although in 2023 "One Albania" commenced delivering services following the merger of "One Telecommunications" with "Albtelecom", "Vodafone Albania" remains the undertaking with the highest revenues in the mobile service market, accounting for about 56% of the market total (AKEP report, 2023).

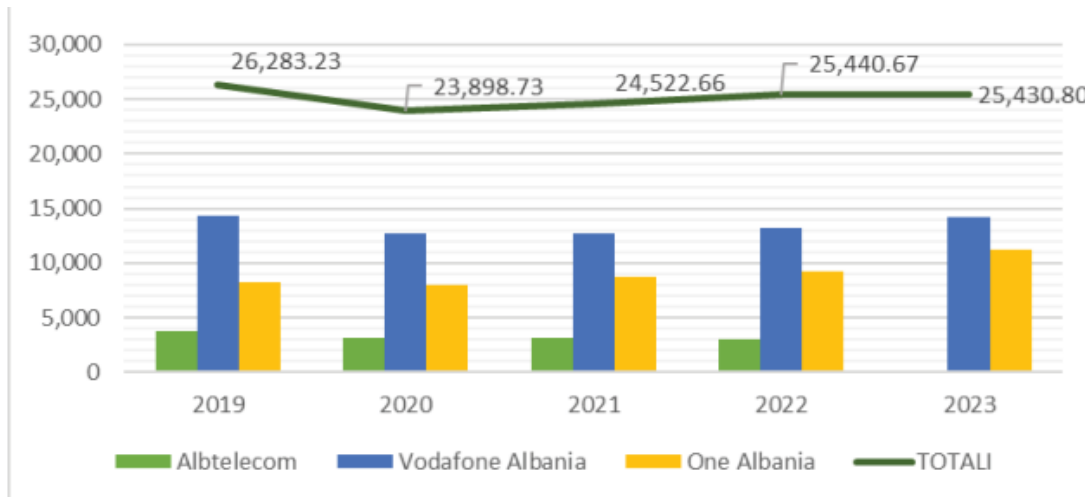


Table 9. Revenues reported by electronic communications undertakings (ALL m)

Source: AKEP

IV. DISCUSSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The results confirm that ONE Albania's post-merger strategy, based on authenticity, customer centricity, and strategic repositioning, has proven effective in restoring trust and loyalty, especially among the most vulnerable segments of its customer base. The significant improvement in Net Promoter Score (NPS) highlights an effective rebuilding of loyalty in areas where it was most at risk. At the same time, the increase in the TRI*M index reflects a strengthening of emotional engagement with the brand, especially among former ALBtelecom users who historically showed lower levels of satisfaction. Together, these results suggest that the new ONE brand has overcome the limitations of its traditional identities, positioning itself as a modern, responsive, and credible provider in a transitional, often sceptical market environment.

However, while short-term indicators point to successful integration, the long-term sustainability of this trajectory depends on several factors. First, consistent and transparent brand communication will be key to maintaining the gains achieved with the initial rebrand. Consumers in low-trust environments, such as Albania, need constant reassurance, not only through marketing strategies but also through service reliability, responsiveness, and price transparency.

Second, competitive differentiation must be constantly refined. While ONE has made significant progress in the fixed and FMC (Fixed-Mobile Convergence) segments, its relative weakness in mobile prestige, especially compared to Vodafone's established international reputation, remains a challenge. Bridging this gap will likely require a multifaceted approach that combines digital innovation, customer experience enhancements, and expanded loyalty mechanisms. Furthermore, as consumer expectations evolve alongside Albania's rapid digital transformation, the brand must remain agile, adapting its offering and messaging to new segments and usage patterns.

From a theoretical perspective, the case of ONE Albania reinforces the idea that successful post-merger brand integration is not simply a technical or operational challenge, but a strategic process that requires cultural alignment, emotional engagement, and ongoing measurement. The integration of brand equity from two distinct legacies – the functional depth of ALBtelecom and the emotional resonance of ONE – demonstrates the value of a hybrid positioning strategy, especially in post-transition markets.

Future research could extend these findings by adopting a longitudinal design to assess whether the positive consumer perception observed in the first year after the merger translates into lasting customer loyalty and increased market share over time. Comparative studies with similar post-merger telecom markets could provide further insights into how cultural and institutional factors influence consumer response to brand consolidation.

In practical terms, the findings of this study offer concrete guidance for marketers and strategic planners engaged in brand integration following M&A. On the other hand, it highlights the importance of aligning internal transformation efforts with external brand perception, especially in contexts where historical mistrust and competitive fragility coexist. By maintaining a clear commitment to customer-centric values and constantly adapting to the market, ONE Albania (and brands in similar contexts) can move beyond the initial recovery to achieve long-term consolidation and leadership.

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