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Consumer Perceptions of Foreign Brands and Cultural Identity in Uganda: The Moderating Role of Celebrity Endorsements

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the moderating role of celebrity endorsement in the relationship between consumer perceptions of foreign brands and cultural identity within an emerging market context. Grounded in Social Identity Theory, the research adopts a positivist philosophical stance and uses a cross-sectional survey design, employing quantitative methods to explore how the perception of foreign brands influences cultural identity formation among consumers. The target population consisted of Ugandan consumers aged 20 to 60 years, a segment with purchasing power, brand awareness, and decision-making autonomy, with 405 respondents. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted using AMOS (v.26) to validate the measurement model. Pearson correlation results revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between consumer perception of foreign brands and cultural identity ($r = 0.356$, $p < 0.01$). Additionally, a significant relationship was found between Celebrity Endorsement and Consumer Perception of Foreign Brands ($\beta = 0.656$, CR = 11.924, $p < 0.001$). Further analysis with Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) confirmed that celebrity endorsement significantly moderates this relationship due to the indirect moderated path of Celebrity Endorsement, which is notably strong and significant ($\beta = 0.62$). This amplifies the symbolic and identity-shaping role of foreign brands' perception. The findings show that foreign brands serve not only functional purposes but also act as tools for social identification, especially when endorsed by respected local figures. The study results imply that marketers in emerging markets move beyond traditional branding and strategically integrate celebrity endorsements and culturally resonant narratives to boost

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consumer engagement, brand relevance, and emotional connection with culturally diverse audiences.
Keywords: Consumer Perceptions; Cultural Identity; Emerging Markets; Celebrity Endorsements; Foreign Brands

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

In today's global marketplace, emerging markets are increasingly exposed to foreign brands, leading to dynamic shifts in consumer behavior and identity construction [1]. Cultural identity, explained as an individual's sense of belonging to a cultural group, plays a critical role in shaping consumer attitudes toward products and branding messages [2]. With the rapid diffusion of global media and digital technologies, consumers in emerging markets are constantly negotiating between traditional cultural values and modern global influences [3]. This cultural negotiation is reflected in purchasing decisions, particularly regarding foreign brands, which may be seen either as aspirational symbols of progress or as threats to local identity and values [4]. Consequently, understanding how consumers in these markets navigate cultural identity through consumption is vital for both theory and practice.

While existing studies have explored how cultural identity influences brand choice [5], less attention appears to be given to how exposure to and perception of foreign brands shape cultural identity in emerging market contexts. This reversed perspective is particularly relevant in Africa, where foreign brands often carry colonial legacies, modern appeal, and conflicting cultural meanings. Moreover, despite the widespread use of celebrity endorsements in such markets, little is known about their moderating role in the cultural identity-brand perception nexus. The few studies that exist often focus on Asian or Latin American contexts, leaving African markets like Uganda under-researched. While others focus on the influence of social media [6], influencer marketing, and Consumer Behavior [7]. This gap limits our understanding of how consumers in Uganda, a culturally diverse and youthful market, use foreign brand perception and celebrity cues in cultural identity construction. This study, therefore, seeks to address this gap by examining how consumer perceptions of foreign brands influence cultural identity and how celebrity endorsement may moderate this relationship in the Ugandan context.

Social Identity Theory [8, 9] offers a compelling lens to understand these processes. The theory posits that individuals categorize themselves and others into social groups, seeking positive distinctiveness and self-enhancement through in-group identification. In branding, foreign brands can represent an aspirational out-group or an adopted in-group depending on perceived social mobility and cultural alignment [10]. Consumers may embrace or reject foreign brands based on how these brands resonate with their cultural self-conception and social belonging. This identity negotiation is particularly salient in culturally diverse and post-colonial societies where the interplay of local and global identities is complex and evolving [10].

Celebrity endorsement, a widely used marketing strategy in emerging markets, adds another layer of influence. Celebrities often act as cultural symbols, and their endorsement of foreign brands may reinforce or moderate consumer perceptions by bridging cultural gaps or legitimizing foreign brand appeal [11]. However, the extent to which celebrity endorsements moderate the relationship between foreign brand perception and cultural identity construction remains underexplored, particularly in African contexts.

Despite growing interest in branding and identity in global markets, there is a notable research gap in empirical studies that examine how consumer perception of foreign brands influences cultural identity, especially in emerging African markets. Furthermore, the moderating role of celebrity endorsement in this relationship is insufficiently addressed in current literature. Most existing studies either treat cultural identity as a predictor of brand choice [5, 12, 13] or focus on Western consumer behavior, overlooking the unique sociocultural dynamics at play in African societies. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by examining how consumer perceptions of foreign brands shape cultural identity in Uganda, and how celebrity endorsement may moderate this relationship. By grounding the analysis in Social Identity Theory, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of consumer behavior in emerging markets and offers practical insights for brand strategists navigating culturally sensitive environments.

1.2. Theoretical Review

Social Identity Theory (SIT), developed by Tajfel and Turner[8, 9], posits that individuals derive part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups, and they strive to maintain a positive social identity by favoring in-groups over out-groups. The theory is anchored on three core processes: social categorization (classifying people, including oneself, into social groups), social identification (adopting the identity and norms of the group), and social comparison (evaluating one's group relative to others to achieve self-esteem). SIT assumes that individuals are motivated to achieve positive distinctiveness and self-enhancement through group affiliations[10]. Consequently, consumers may use brands, especially those symbolizing group status or cultural meaning, as a means of affirming or negotiating their social identity within the broader social environment[14].

Applied to the context of emerging markets, SIT provides a powerful framework for explaining how consumer perceptions of foreign brands influence cultural identity. In these settings, foreign brands often represent out-groups that may either threaten or enhance local cultural identity, depending on how they are perceived. For instance, when foreign brands are associated with prestige, modernity, or global belonging, consumers may align with them to express aspirational identities[15]. Conversely, if they are seen as culturally intrusive, consumers may reject them to preserve in-group loyalty. Therefore, SIT not only explains the identity-related mechanisms underpinning consumer behavior in emerging markets but also supports the conceptualization of consumer perception of foreign brands as a predictor of cultural identity.

1.3. Review of Empirical Literature

1.3.1. Consumer Perception of Foreign Brands and Cultural Identity in Emerging Markets

The growing influence of globalization has reshaped branding dynamics in emerging markets, where consumers are increasingly exposed to foreign products, media, and cultural narratives[16]. Foreign brands are often perceived not just as commercial products but as carriers of global meanings, aspirations, and lifestyles[17]. In this context, consumer perception of foreign brands, which refers to the beliefs, attitudes, and emotional responses toward brands from outside the local market, becomes a critical variable in understanding consumer identity. Positive perceptions of such brands are typically associated with quality, innovation, prestige, and modernity, especially in developing economies where local alternatives may be perceived as inferior or less cosmopolitan[18]. This perceptual bias contributes to the symbolic value consumers attach to foreign brands as tools for expressing desired social identities.

From a sociocultural perspective, branding has evolved beyond functional utility to serve as a mechanism for cultural identity formation, particularly in markets undergoing rapid modernization and exposure to global norms[19]. In such settings, brands, especially foreign ones, are used by consumers to express alignment with global culture, social mobility, or cosmopolitan ideals[17]. Cultural identity in branding has been conceptualised as the way consumers use brands to negotiate, express, or reconstruct their personal and collective identities[9, 19]. This process is especially pronounced among youth and urban populations in emerging markets, who often rely on brand consumption to articulate individuality and group belonging[9]. When foreign brands are perceived positively, they are more likely to be adopted as part of consumers' identity repertoire, thereby reinforcing or reshaping cultural affiliations through brand engagement.

Empirical studies support this connection. For instance, Ewing et al.[20] argue that favorable attitudes toward foreign brands are associated with stronger personal and aspirational identity constructions. In several emerging economies, where Western and Asian brands dominate key market sectors such as fashion, mobile technology, and beverages, foreign brand appeal often signals status and identity distinction among middle-class consumers[21]. Thus, when consumers perceive foreign brands as desirable and socially meaningful, they are more inclined to internalize those brands into their cultural identity frameworks[17, 22]. Based on this theoretical and empirical foundation, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1. *Consumer Perceptions of Foreign Brands are positively and significantly related to Cultural Identity in Branding.*

1.3.2. Moderating Role of Celebrity Endorsement

In emerging markets, the perception of foreign brands has increasingly become a driver of cultural alignment

and identity expression[23]. Consumers often associate foreign brands with prestige, modernity, and cosmopolitan lifestyles[4], and such perceptions can strongly influence how individuals reconstruct or negotiate their cultural identity in a globalized environment[5]. The symbolic value of foreign brands often transcends their functional benefits, positioning them as tools through which consumers assert social mobility and self-concept[24]. In emerging markets, where exposure to global trends and foreign products is growing, consumers' positive perceptions of foreign brands can signal a shift in cultural orientation, particularly among youth and urban middle-class segments[22].

Amidst this, Celebrity endorsement has emerged as a powerful marketing tool that can shape consumer attitudes, especially in culturally sensitive markets[25]. Celebrities act as reference points for social norms, identity aspirations, and lifestyle choices[26]. When a celebrity endorses a foreign brand, their personal image, cultural relevance, and public trust can significantly influence how consumers evaluate that brand[27]. This is particularly critical in emerging markets, where consumers may feel ambivalent about adopting foreign symbols. A culturally resonant celebrity can act as a cultural bridge, legitimizing the brand's presence and aligning it with local values, thereby reducing perceived cultural distance and enhancing identity acceptance[28]. In this sense, the endorsement does more than increase brand visibility; it reshapes the brand's perceived cultural fit.

Despite growing evidence on the individual effects of celebrity endorsement and foreign brand perception, limited studies have examined how celebrity endorsement interacts with foreign brand perceptions to influence cultural identity, especially in emerging economies. Most existing research addresses these constructs in isolation or within Western and Asian markets, overlooking the unique socio-cultural complexities of emerging African economies. This gap is significant given that endorsement by culturally relevant celebrities may determine whether consumers embrace or resist foreign brands as part of their identity[29]. As such, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2. *Celebrity Endorsement moderates the relationship between Consumer Perceptions of Foreign Brands and Cultural Identity in Emerging Markets.*

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey design within a positivist philosophical framework to investigate the moderating role of Celebrity Endorsement in the relationship between Consumer Perceptions of Foreign Brands and Cultural Identity in emerging market settings. The cross-sectional design was appropriate for capturing data from a heterogeneous population of consumers at a single point in time, enabling a snapshot of prevailing perceptions and identity-related responses to foreign branding within the emerging economies context. Aligned with positivist epistemology, which emphasizes observable, objective reality and quantifiable measurements, the study prioritized empirical assessment and hypothesis testing.

A quantitative methodological approach was employed, grounded in the assumption that social phenomena can be measured and generalized across populations[30]. This approach was selected for its capacity to generate reliable, replicable, and statistically valid results, consistent with the positivist view that objective truth can be uncovered through structured inquiry[31]. To facilitate this, structured, closed-ended questionnaires were utilized as the main data collection tool, allowing for systematic measurement of the variables and minimizing researcher bias.

Furthermore, moderation analysis, conducted through statistical modeling techniques, was employed to test the conditional effects of Celebrity Endorsement on the primary relationship under investigation. This analytical technique aligns with the positivist orientation by uncovering cause-and-effect relationships and revealing the extent to which Celebrity Endorsement alters the strength or direction of the influence between consumer perceptions and cultural identity. The approach provided a deeper understanding of the interaction mechanisms within the model, thereby contributing to theory development and practical marketing insights relevant to the branding strategies of foreign firms operating in emerging markets.

2.2. Population and Sampling Procedure

The target population for this study comprised Ugandan consumers above 18 years, a demographic that represents

the economically active and consumption-capable segment of the population. Individuals within this age range are more likely to possess the disposable income, brand awareness, and decision-making autonomy necessary for the purchase and evaluation of foreign products. According to the Uganda National Housing and Consumer Survey (2024)[32], this age group accounts for approximately 25,494,490 individuals, representing 57.4% of the national population. This demographic was selected based on its market relevance, particularly in influencing trends in brand perception and identity construction within emerging markets.

To derive a statistically appropriate sample from this large population, the study relied on Krejcie and Morgan's[33] sample size determination table, which recommends a minimum sample size of 384 respondents for any population exceeding 100,000 individuals. In line with best practices in survey-based consumer research and to account for non-response and incomplete submissions, the study adopted an expanded sample strategy. A total of 500 structured questionnaires were distributed across various regions of Uganda, ensuring a degree of geographic and socioeconomic diversity. Following data collection and quality checks, 405 responses were deemed valid and usable for analysis, exceeding the minimum threshold recommended for generalizability. This probabilistic sampling rationale ensured sufficient representation and statistical power for the moderation analysis. The sampling process, therefore, upheld the principles of representativeness, reliability, and inferential validity, which are central to robust empirical research in the positivist tradition.

2.3. Data Collection Procedures

Primary data was gathered through a digitally administered questionnaire (e-questionnaire), designed to facilitate efficient and wide-reaching distribution among the target population. To effectively access consumers of foreign products, supermarket chains in Uganda were strategically selected as key contact points, given their central role in the retail distribution of imported goods. With the cooperation of store managers, consumer databases and mailing lists were utilized to disseminate the survey link directly to identified shoppers known to engage with foreign brands. To ensure clarity and respondent accuracy, comprehensive guidelines on how to navigate and complete the online instrument were provided, in line with best practices recommended by Amin et al[34]. The questionnaire consisted entirely of closed-ended items and was segmented into thematic sections corresponding to the core variables of the study: Consumer Perceptions, Cultural Identity, and Celebrity Endorsement. Distribution and follow-up were supported by trained data collection assistants, who were provided with access to consumer contact details for effective survey administration and respondent support. Each item was measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5), enabling the quantification of attitudinal responses. This standardized scaling approach facilitated the capture of consistent data across all constructs in the model, enhancing both the reliability and comparability of the responses.

2.4. Discriminant Validity Using the Fornell and Larcker Criterion

Table 1 reveals the discriminant validity of the study constructs, Consumer Perception of Foreign Brands and Consideration of Cultural Identity, based on the Fornell and Larcker criterion, which requires that the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct must exceed the correlation between constructs. The AVEs for Consumer Perception of Foreign Brands and Consideration of Cultural Identity are 0.777 and 0.786, with corresponding square roots of 0.881 and 0.886, both greater than the inter-construct correlation of 0.356, which was significant at the 0.01 level. This confirms that each construct is more strongly related to its own indicators than to other constructs, thus demonstrating acceptable discriminant validity and supporting the distinctiveness and reliability of the measurement model.

Table 1. Discriminant Validity of Study Variables Based on the Fornell and Larcker Criterion.

	AVE	1	2
Consumer Perception of Foreign Brands (1)	0.777	0.881	
Consideration of Cultural Identity (2)	0.786	0.356**	0.886

Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).
Source: Primary data as indicated in the **Supplementary Materials** provided.

2.5. Skewness and Kurtosis Test Results of Study Variables

Table 2 presents skewness and kurtosis statistics for Consumer Perception of Foreign Brands and Cultural Identity, based on responses from 402 participants with no missing values, to evaluate the normality of their distributions. The results show that Cultural Identity has a higher standard deviation (1.232) and variance (1.518) than Consumer Perception (0.946 and 0.895, respectively), indicating greater dispersion. Both variables exhibit negative skewness (−0.471 and −0.314), implying a slight left skew, and when divided by their standard errors (0.122), the resulting z-scores (−3.86 and −2.57) indicate statistically significant skewness. Similarly, both variables demonstrate negative kurtosis (−0.773 and −1.308), suggesting platykurtic distributions, with z-scores (−3.18 and −5.38) exceeding the ±1.96 threshold, confirming statistically significant but not extreme deviations from normality. Despite these findings, the skewness and kurtosis values fall within acceptable limits for large samples, supporting the suitability of the data for parametric analyses.

2.6. Factor Analysis

The researcher carried out CFA to examine whether the item measures were consistent with the construct's nature[35]. **Table 3** shows several commonly used fit indices we employed to assess the overall model fit[36]. The comprehensive goodness-of-fit indices produced a Chi-square of 174.151 and Chi-Square/DF = 1.404.

Table 2. Skewness and Kurtosis Test Results of Study Variables.

		Consumer Perception of Foreign Brands	Cultural Identity
N	Valid	402	402
	Missing	0	0
Standard deviation		0.94617	1.23222
Variance		0.895	1.518
Skewness		−0.471	−0.314
Std. Error of Skewness		0.122	0.122
Kurtosis		−0.773	−1.308
Std. Error of Kurtosis		0.243	0.243

Source: Primary data as indicated in the **Supplementary Materials** provided.

Table 3. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results for Items Measuring Consumer Perception of Foreign Brands and Cultural Identity (n = 402).

Item Code	Label	Standardized Regression Estimates	Critical Ratio (t)
CONSUMER PERCEPTION OF FOREIGN BRANDS			
	Brand Origin		
BO1	When buying a product, I consider where it is made.	0.815	
BO2	I believe foreign brands are of higher quality in comparison to local brands.	0.879	24.790
BO4	Knowing the brand's origin influences my perception of its authenticity.	0.887	26.616
BO6	I believe brands from developed countries are more innovative.	0.912	23.175
BO7	A brand's country of origin impacts my perception of its safety.	0.940	24.185
BO8	I prefer brands from countries with a strong economic reputation.	0.896	22.514
	Perceived Risk		
PR8	I am unsure about the safety standards of foreign brands.	0.847	
PR10	I feel a higher risk when purchasing a foreign brand online.	0.859	9.073
	Brand Loyalty & Repeat Purchase Behavior		
BL6	I feel emotionally attached to foreign brands I regularly purchase.	0.910	
BL5	I actively seek out the latest products from my favorite foreign brands.	0.887	25.177
BL4	Once I trust a foreign brand, I continue purchasing it even if a local alternative is available.	0.857	23.762
CULTURAL IDENTITY			
CIB10	I feel more connected to brands that reflect African culture.	0.935	
CIB9	Foreign brands should adapt their products to Ugandan culture.	0.927	34.175
CIB8	I feel foreign brands dominate Uganda's cultural landscape.	0.826	24.805
CIB6	I trust brands that acknowledge and respect Ugandan heritage.	0.894	30.363

Table 3. *Cont.*

Item Code	Label	Standardized Regression Estimates	Critical Ratio (t)
CULTURAL IDENTITY			
CIB5	I prefer brands that incorporate Ugandan cultural elements in their marketing.	0.895	30.488
CIB3	I feel a sense of national pride when buying locally produced goods.	0.836	25.320

RMSEA	CMIN (X^2)	IFI	TLI	CFI	CMIN/DF
0.032	174.151	0.993	0.991	0.993	1.404

Notes: PFB – CIB – Consideration of Cultural Identity in Branding; BO – Brand Origin; PR – Perceived Risk; BL – Brand Loyalty & Repeat Purchase Behaviour; RMSEA – Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; CMIN (X2) – Chi - Square Loyalty & Repeat Purchase Behaviour.
Source: Primary Data as indicated in the dataset provided.

3. Results

Descriptive statistics revealed that the study sample comprised 226 males (56.2%) and 176 females (43.8%). The age distribution was skewed toward the 20–29 years category, suggesting a predominantly youthful cohort. Educational attainment showed that 52% of respondents held a bachelor's degree, while 54.5% were identified as urban-based consumers. To assess the adequacy of the measurement model, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted using AMOS software (v.26), following the guidelines by Hair et al [35]. CFA was employed to test the factorial validity and ensure that the observed indicators accurately reflected their latent constructs. As presented in **Table 3**, multiple fit indices were examined to evaluate model fit in line with the thresholds recommended by Hu et al [36].

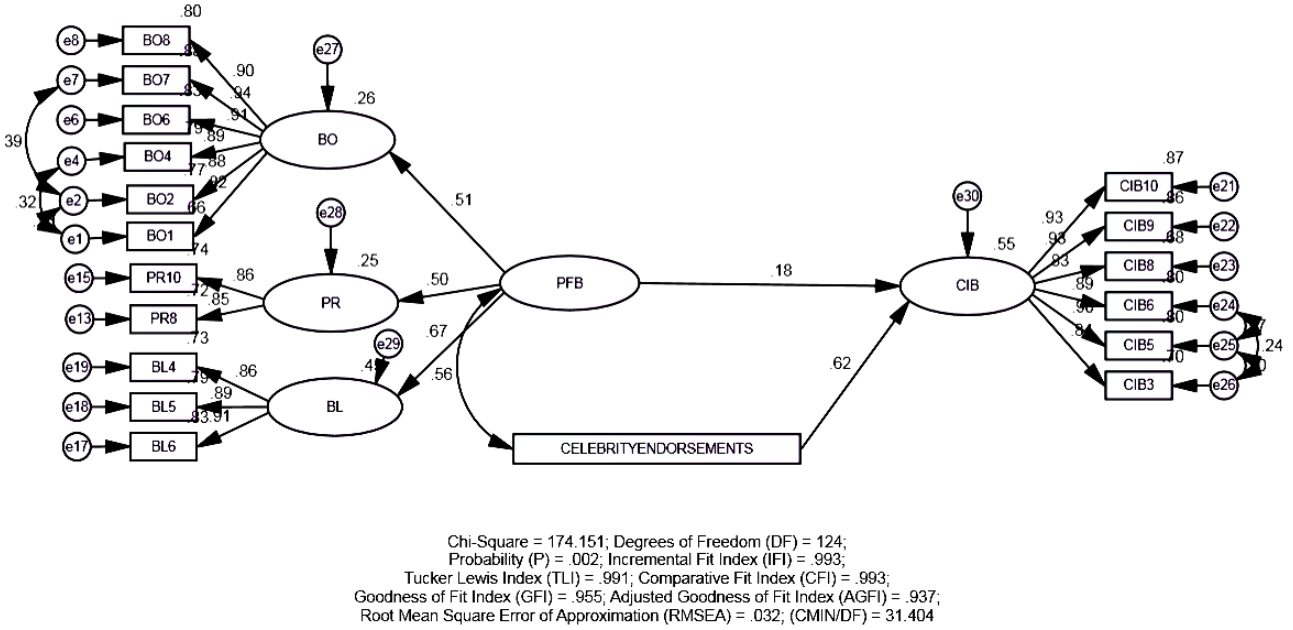
The chi-square statistic ($\chi^2 = 174.151$, df = 124) yielded a normed chi-square (χ^2/df) of 1.404, which falls within the acceptable range (<2.0), indicating a good fit. Incremental fit indices were all within excellent thresholds: The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.993, Incremental Fit Index (IFI) = 0.993, and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) = 0.991. These values exceed the minimum recommended cut-off of 0.90 for a very good model fit [36]. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was 0.032, well below the 0.05 benchmark, suggesting a close and parsimonious fit to the data. Collectively, these goodness-of-fit indices confirmed the robustness of the measurement model, as illustrated in **Figure 1**, indicating that the observed data adequately support the hypothesized factor structure.

3.1. Results of the Direct Hypothesized Relationships

To assess the linear association between Consumer Perception of Foreign Brands and Cultural Identity within the context of emerging markets, a Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was first conducted. The results revealed a statistically significant positive correlation ($r = 0.356$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting a moderate relationship between the constructs, as shown in **Table 4**. Subsequently, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed using AMOS software to test the hypothesized direct and moderating effects while accounting for measurement error, an advantage of SEM over traditional regression techniques [37]. The model was constructed to evaluate the predictive relationship between Consumer Perception of Foreign Brands and Cultural Identity, as well as to examine whether Celebrity Endorsement moderated this relationship.

Estimates of the direct structural paths (**Table 4**) indicated that Consumer Perception of Foreign Brands significantly and positively predicted Cultural Identity (standardized path coefficient $\beta = 0.430$, critical ratio [CR] = 2.720, $p = 0.007$). Additionally, a strong and significant relationship was observed between Celebrity Endorsement and Consumer Perception of Foreign Brands ($\beta = 0.656$, CR = 11.924, $p < 0.001$), providing support for its potential influence in branding evaluations.

The model explained a substantial proportion of variance in the dependent construct, with the Squared Multiple Correlation (R^2) for Cultural Identity recorded at 0.549. This implies that approximately 54.9% of the variance in Cultural Identity can be accounted for by Consumer Perception of Foreign Brands and the associated constructs in the model. Conversely, the unexplained (error) variance is approximately 45.1%, suggesting a moderate to strong predictive capacity of the structural model. These results show the relevance of perceptual and promotional dynamics in shaping cultural affiliations in brand consumption within emerging market contexts.



Chi-Square = 174.151; Degrees of Freedom (DF) = 124;
Probability (P) = .002; Incremental Fit Index (IFI) = .993;
Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) = .991; Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .993;
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = .955; Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) = .937;
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .032; (CMIN/DF) = 31.404

Figure 1. Structural Equation Model of Consumer Perception of Foreign Brands to Cultural Identity, moderated by Celebrity Endorsements.

Notes: PFB – Consumer Perception of Foreign Brands; CIB – Consideration of Cultural Identity in Branding; BO – Brand Origin; PR – Perceived Risk; BL – Brand Loyalty & Repeat Purchase Behaviour.

Source: Primary Data as indicated in the **Supplementary Materials**.

Table 4. Structural equation model results of the direct hypothesized paths.

	Paths	B	*t*-Value	*p*	Decision
H_1	PFB → CIB	0.430**	2.720	0.007	Supported
H_2	CELEBRITYENDORSEMENTS → CIB	0.656***	11.924	0.000	Supported

Notes: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level; *** Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level.

H_n – Hypothesis; PFB – Consumer Perception of Foreign Brands; CIB – Consideration of Cultural Identity in Branding.

Source: Primary data, 2025 as indicated in the **Supplementary Materials**.

3.2. Moderation Effect

The Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) results indicate a moderation effect of Celebrity Endorsement on the relationship between Consumer Perception of Foreign Brands (PFB) and Cultural Identity. Specifically, the direct path from Consumer Perceptions to Cultural Identity is statistically significant but relatively weak (β = 0.18), while the indirect moderated path of Celebrity Endorsement is notably strong and significant (β = 0.62). These findings, coupled with excellent model fit indices (RMSEA = 0.032, CFI = 0.993, TLI = 0.991), validate the proposed moderation. This suggests that celebrity endorsements substantially enhance the influence of consumer perceptions on cultural identity formation, highlighting their strategic importance in reinforcing the cultural relevance of foreign brands within emerging market contexts.

4. Discussion

4.1. Consumer Perception of Foreign Brands and Cultural Identity

In emerging markets, consumers often interpret foreign brands not only as products but also as symbols that connect with or challenge their cultural values. The way a brand is perceived can reflect how people want to present themselves within their communities and to the outside world. For some, buying foreign brands may signal modernity and global belonging, while for others it may raise questions about cultural preservation. This link suggests that marketers must carefully consider cultural identity when positioning foreign brands in such markets. This, therefore, confirms earlier studies indicating that consumers are increasingly integrating foreign brand preferences into their expressions of identity and social

belonging[7]. Grounded in Social Identity Theory (SIT) by Tajfel[8], which posits that individuals derive part of their self-concept from membership in social groups. This aligns well with the results, which confirm that foreign brands serve as symbolic resources for identity construction. In Uganda, for instance, the popularity of brands such as Samsung, Nike, or Toyota is not solely due to product functionality but also to the perceived prestige, global connectedness, and aspirational value they confer on the consumer. These findings are consistent with research by Mandler[38], which emphasized that in emerging markets, foreign brands are often associated with modernity, social status, and cosmopolitan lifestyles.

Furthermore, the study reflects how global consumer culture interacts with local cultural values. In Uganda and other African contexts, young urban consumers are particularly drawn to foreign brands as markers of social mobility and distinction. The use of these brands becomes a form of social signaling, often influenced by peers, social media, and celebrity endorsements. This aligns with the work of Ramirez-Solis et al[39] who argue that consumers in emerging economies use global brands to project a hybrid identity, one that maintains local cultural roots while embracing global consumer ideals. In this sense, the preference for foreign brands does not necessarily signal cultural erosion, but rather a reconfiguration of cultural identity that accommodates both traditional and modern elements. This dual identification advances the dynamic nature of identity in a globalized world.

Finally, these results highlight the relevance of sociocultural context in consumer behavior studies in Africa. For example, in Kampala, brands like Coca-Cola or Tecno Mobile have successfully embedded themselves into local cultures by sponsoring festivals, supporting youth entrepreneurship, and engaging in culturally tailored advertising. This reinforces SIT's view that identity-related consumption is tied to social categorization and in-group affiliation. Consumers align themselves with brands that reflect the values of their aspirational social groups, whether those be youth culture, professional class, or urban elites. Recent literature by Johri et al[40] supports this, noting that in emerging markets, brand perception is closely tied to social narratives and collective identity. Thus, marketers aiming to penetrate such markets must navigate the cultural identities of their target consumers, integrating both global appeal and local relevance.

4.2. Moderation Effect of Celebrity Endorsement

The results from the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) highlight a nuanced relationship between consumer perception of foreign brands and cultural identity, particularly in the presence of celebrity endorsement as a mediating factor. While consumer perception alone shows a positive relationship with cultural identity, its direct influence is relatively modest. This implies that although individuals in emerging markets may associate foreign brands with status, modernity, or quality, these perceptions alone are not strong enough to deeply shape or redefine their cultural identity. However, this begins to shift when celebrity endorsement is introduced, offering a socially influential mechanism that amplifies the connection between consumers and the symbolic meanings of foreign brands. This aligns with the Social Identity Theory[8], which posits that individuals construct their self-concept through social affiliations. In this case, celebrities serve as aspirational figures, reinforcing group membership and identity through their association with certain brands.

The strong moderating role of celebrity endorsements shows how social and cultural dynamics influence brand perception in emerging markets. Celebrities act as cultural intermediaries, shaping consumer narratives and embedding foreign brands into local identity frameworks. In African markets, this can be observed in how musicians, influencers, and athletes are leveraged to validate foreign brand narratives within culturally relevant contexts. For example, Ugandan music icons like Eddy Kenzo or Sheebah have been brand ambassadors for foreign products, and their endorsement carries significant cultural capital among young consumers. This is supported by recent research, which emphasizes that in low- to middle-income contexts, celebrities enhance brand credibility and resonate with consumers' desires for upward mobility and social recognition[41]. Therefore, foreign brands become more than commodities; they are integrated into cultural expression and identity construction, especially when promoted by figures perceived as authentic or aspirational.

This dynamic interaction between consumer perception, celebrity endorsement, and cultural identity suggests that branding strategies in emerging markets must go beyond traditional marketing to incorporate socially embedded practices. Foreign brands that successfully localize their

messaging through credible celebrities can transform from external cultural artifacts into integral parts of consumers' everyday identity. This resonates with findings by Bensalem and Benouhiba[24, 42], who argue that in culturally pluralistic and aspirational societies, consumer-brand relationships are shaped by how well the brand narrative aligns with local social values and identity markers. As SIT suggests, individuals seek validation and belonging through group affiliation, and celebrity-endorsed foreign brands serve as a bridge between global consumption and local cultural identity. In essence, the results highlight that in Uganda and similar markets, celebrity endorsement does not just increase brand visibility; it significantly deepens the psychological and cultural imprint of foreign brands on consumers' identities.

5. Conclusions

The study concludes that there is a significant positive relationship between consumer perception of foreign brands and cultural identity in emerging markets. Foreign brands are not only valued for their functional benefits but also embraced as markers of social identity, prestige, and modernity, particularly among young urban consumers who navigate hybrid identities shaped by both local traditions and global influences. Drawing on Social Identity Theory[8], the findings suggest that brand preferences are deeply embedded in group affiliations and self-concept. Celebrity endorsements and social media further strengthen the symbolic appeal of foreign brands by aligning them with admired local figures, while successful brands gain deeper community integration through culturally relevant marketing and support for local causes. Rather than erasing cultural identity, foreign brand consumption reflects its dynamic reshaping, highlighting the importance for marketers to understand the social and cultural contexts that influence consumer behavior in emerging economies.

The study also concludes that celebrity endorsement significantly moderates the relationship between consumer perception of foreign brands and cultural identity in emerging markets. While perceptions of foreign brands alone show a modest positive influence on cultural identity, this effect is greatly amplified when celebrities are involved. Celebrity figures act as aspirational role models who enhance the symbolic value of brands, reinforcing group identity and self-concept in line with Social Identity Theory[8]. In Uganda, endorsements by local icons such as musicians and influencers embed foreign brands into culturally meaningful narratives, making them more relatable and socially relevant. These celebrities serve as cultural intermediaries who validate brand messages within local contexts, increasing consumer trust and emotional connection. As such, foreign brands become vehicles for expressing modern identity and social mobility. This dynamic shows that branding strategies must integrate socially embedded practices to resonate with consumers' identity frameworks. Celebrity endorsements do not merely boost brand visibility; they transform foreign brands into culturally integrated elements of everyday life.

The paper therefore recommends that **marketers** targeting emerging markets such as Uganda should go beyond promoting the functional attributes of foreign brands and instead focus on their symbolic and identity-enhancing roles. Branding strategies should be tailored to reflect the values, aspirations, and social dynamics of young urban consumers, who often navigate complex identities influenced by both local culture and global trends. Campaigns should draw on the principles of Social Identity Theory by fostering emotional and social connections between brands and consumers through culturally resonant storytelling. Additionally, companies should invest in community engagement initiatives and align their messaging with local values and causes to foster stronger brand loyalty and cultural integration.

The study also recommends that marketers strategically leverage celebrity endorsements to strengthen the influence of foreign brands on consumer identity. By partnering with well-known and respected local figures such as musicians, athletes, or social media influencers, brands can amplify their relevance and credibility within the local cultural context. These celebrities function as cultural bridges, helping consumers associate foreign products with familiar and aspirational symbols of success. To maximize impact, endorsements should be authentic and culturally aligned, ensuring that the celebrity-brand association enhances trust, emotional resonance, and identity expression. Ultimately, embedding foreign brands into the cultural fabric through socially embedded marketing can enhance consumer engagement and long-term brand attachment.

Supplementary Materials

The supporting information can be downloaded at https://journals.zycentre.com/public/JEMM-227-Consumers'-Perceptions-of-Foreign-Brands-and-Cultural-Identity.xlsx.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, Literature and Data Collection, A.W.; Methodology and Data Analysis, M.K.; Discussion of findings; Y.W. All authors participated in the editing of the work, and they have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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