

The strategic Role of Brand in Shaping Success in International Trade from the point of view of students of the University of Tabouk

الدور الاستراتيجي للعلامة التجارية في تشكيل النجاح في التجارة الدولية من وجهة نظر طلاب
جامعة تبوك

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Abstract:

This study explores the strategic role of branding in shaping success in international trade from the perspective of students at the University of . It highlights how effective branding influences consumer behaviors, particularly among younger demographics who are increasingly engaged in global markets. The research identifies key themes such as brand awareness, positioning, equity, and the added value of branding in decision-making processes for multinational corporations. Utilizing a descriptive analytical approach, the study gathers insights through a questionnaire distributed to business administration students, focusing on their perceptions of branding's impact on international trade success.

Key findings reveal that strong brand awareness and international recognition significantly enhance purchase intentions across borders.

Additionally, effective positioning strategies contribute to competitiveness in diverse environments. The results indicate that brand equity plays a crucial role in building consumer trust and loyalty, facilitating market entry for multinational companies. The study underscores the importance of cultural context in branding strategies and advocates for a hybrid approach that balances global consistency with local adaptation.

These insights provide valuable implications for marketers and multinational corporations aiming to tailor their branding strategies to meet the expectations of younger, culturally diverse consumers, ultimately fostering long-term engagement and success in international markets.

Keywords: Branding, International Trade, Brand Awareness, Consumer Behavior, Multinational Corporations

الدور الاستراتيجي للعلامة التجارية في تشكيل النجاح في التجارة الدولية من وجهة نظر طلاب جامعة تبوك

د. نسيم عبدالغفار سعيد بازهير

الملخص:

التنافسية في البيئات المتنوعة. تشير النتائج إلى أن قيمة العلامة التجارية تلعب دوراً حاسماً في بناء ثقة المستهلكين وولائهم، مما يسهل دخول السوق للشركات متعددة الجنسيات، تؤكد الدراسة على أهمية السياق الثقافي في استراتيجيات العلامة التجارية وتؤيد اتباع نهج هجين يوازن بين الاتساق العالمي والتكيف المحلي. توفر هذه الرؤى تبعات قيمة للمسوقين والشركات متعددة الجنسيات التي تهدف إلى تخصيص استراتيجيات العلامة التجارية لتلبية توقعات المستهلكين الشباب المتنوعين ثقافياً، مما يعزز في النهاية المشاركة طويلة الأمد والنجاح في الأسواق الدولية.

كلمات مفتاحية: الوعي بالعلامة التجارية، سلوك المستهلك، التجارة الدولية، العلامة التجارية، التعاون الدولي

تستكشف هذه الدراسة الدور الاستراتيجي للعلامة التجارية في تشكيل النجاح في التجارة الدولية من وجهة نظر طلاب جامعة تبوك، وتبرز كيف يؤثر الترويج الفعال للعلامة التجارية على سلوكيات المستهلكين، خصوصاً بين الفئات الشابة التي تشارك بشكل متزايد في الأسواق العالمية. تحدد الدراسة مواضيع رئيسية مثل الوعي بالعلامة التجارية، التمرکز، القيمة، والقيمة المضافة للعلامة التجارية في عمليات اتخاذ القرار للشركات متعددة الجنسيات. من خلال استخدام منهج تحليلي وصفي، تجمع الدراسة رؤى عبر استبيان وزع على طلاب إدارة الأعمال، مع التركيز على تصوراتهم حول تأثير العلامة التجارية على نجاح التجارة الدولية تكشف النتائج الرئيسية أن الوعي القوي بالعلامة التجارية والاعتراف الدولي يعززان بشكل ملحوظ نوايا الشراء عبر الحدود بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تسهم استراتيجيات التمرکز الفعالة في تعزيز

Introduction

1.1 Background

International trade is no longer limited to the movement of goods and services; it also involves the movement of ideas, symbols, and identities. In this fast-moving environment, branding is critical for how businesses compete, grow, and sustain credibility globally. Strong brands communicate trust across borders, reduce perceived risk for consumers, and enable firms to command loyalty in diverse markets. When entering culturally different markets, branding is not merely logos and slogans; it is an approach that offers articulated meaning, fosters trust, and connects people emotionally on a global scale. In highly competitive global markets with deep-rooted differences in consumer expectations, a well-thought-out brand strategy can be the difference between success and failure as it differentiates the product or service and creates loyalty for long-term value (Özsomer et al., 2024). Branding is especially impactful among younger, globally connected demographics such as university students (Jahan et al., 2024). This segment is digitally active, exposed to a multiplicity of international brands, and simultaneously shaping and being shaped by global consumption patterns. These students represent future leaders of businesses; therefore, understanding their perceptions of branding has implications not only for current consumer behaviour but also for the future of international trade. Exploring their attitudes provides insight into how branding builds trust, loyalty, and purchase intentions across cultures (Pfeifer et al., 2025).

1.2 Problem Statement

Although branding has an important role in international trade, there is limited empirical research on how young, globally aware consumers—particularly university students—perceive and interpret the strategic role of brands in shaping international business success. Most previous studies emphasize the corporate side of trade (brand strategy, investment, and management) and give comparatively little attention to the consumer side. This creates a knowledge gap regarding the extent to which branding constructs such as awareness, positioning, equity, and added value influence the behaviours and preferences of the next generation of global consumers.

Addressing this gap is crucial because the perceptions and behaviours of university students today will inform corporate brand strategies and policy decisions tomorrow. This research therefore examines how awareness, positioning, equity, and added value under the broader umbrella of branding potentially influence the behaviour of global consumers, ultimately informing corporations' strategic choices in global markets.

1.3 Study Questions

This research utilizes one main research question and four sub-questions:

Main Research Question:

- What is branding's strategic role in defining success in international trade, as defined by university students?

Sub-Questions:

1. How do brand awareness and international recognition influence consumers' purchase intentions across borders?
2. To what degree does positioning strategies generate or enhance competitiveness in ethnically diverse environments?
3. To what degree does brand generate equity serve as a mechanism for building consumer trust and loyalty through global experience?
4. How does branding affect and add value to the decision-making process of a multinational company considering entering an international market?

1.4 Significance of the Study

Through exploring university students' understandings of branding, this research attempts to gain a deeper understanding of branding's strategic role within international trade contexts. By considering brand awareness, positioning, and equity's formative impact on consumer behaviour, while also considering how large companies contemplate and plan for their company's strategy, this research can provide some real-world insights for marketers and multinational corporations. This would help multinational companies customize their branding, marketing and communications strategies with younger, cross-cultural customers in mind, while also facilitating decision-making processes regarding market entry, and global brand management. This research provides an expansion into academic discussions on branding and marketing across cultures by providing a consumer perspective into international business strategy.

Terms of significance

- Brand Awareness: the degree in which a consumer can recognize or recall a brand especially as it applies in a global sense.
- Brand Positioning: the deliberate positioning of a brand, in the mind of the intended target audience, to differentiate the brand from its competitors.
- Brand equity: the totality of value perception of the brand, consumers' experiences with the brand, consumer associations and the consumer loyalty towards the brand.
- Market Entry: the way in which firms choose to enter into, introduce products or services, new and international markets.
- Multinational Corporation (MNC): companies that operate in a range of countries, MNCs use branding as part of their strategy to enter markets and create market sustainability.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

The study aims to:

1. Examine how brand awareness and international recognition influence university students' purchase intentions across borders.
2. Investigate the impact of brand positioning strategies on competitiveness in ethnically diverse markets.
3. Assess the role of brand equity in building trust, loyalty, and long-term consumer relationships.
4. Explore how branding adds value to multinational companies' decision-making regarding market entry and global strategy.

1.6 Study Hypotheses

Based on the research questions objectives, the research proposes the following hypotheses:

- H1: Higher brand awareness positively influences consumers' purchase intentions in international markets.
- H2: Effective brand positioning enhances competitiveness in culturally heterogeneous markets.
- H3: Strong brand equity significantly contributes to consumer trust and loyalty.
- H4: Strategic branding positively affects multinational corporations' market entry decisions and global value creation.

Literature review

2.1 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The present study is anchored in consumer-based brand equity theory (Aaker, 1991) integrated with contemporary international branding strategy concepts. Consumer-based brand equity theory explains how brand value emerges through consumer perceptions of awareness, associations, perceived quality and loyalty (Johansson, 2014). In global trade environments, these elements transcend their domestic functions: brands act as carriers of cultural meaning, trust signals and competitive differentiation across national boundaries (Wunsch-Vincent, 2013; Dalwadi, 2013). Merging this theoretical lens with international branding research provides a foundation for examining how brand constructs influence international trade outcomes from the consumer side rather than the corporate side (Ng, 2020; Chen et al., 2024).

Within this framework, four interrelated constructs guide the study:

- Brand awareness and international recognition — the degree to which consumers in multiple markets can identify and recall a brand, shaping initial expectations and willingness to engage (Rodrigues et al., 2017; Özsomer et al., 2024).
- Positioning and differentiation in international markets — the strategies through which brands establish unique value propositions and signal distinctiveness in

- ethnically and culturally diverse environments (Papadopoulos et al., 2018).
- Brand value and consumer trust — perceptions of quality, credibility and associations that drive loyalty, reduce perceived risk and increase cross-border purchase intentions (Wunsch-Vincent, 2013; Ng, 2020).
 - Brand impact on international expansion decisions — the extent to which established brand equity facilitates entry into new markets, sustains competitiveness and supports long-term international success (Johansson, 2014; Chen et al., 2024).

These constructs are conceptually linked as shown in Figure 1. Brand awareness creates recognition; positioning and differentiation strengthen perceived uniqueness; brand value and trust generate loyalty and lower risk; and together

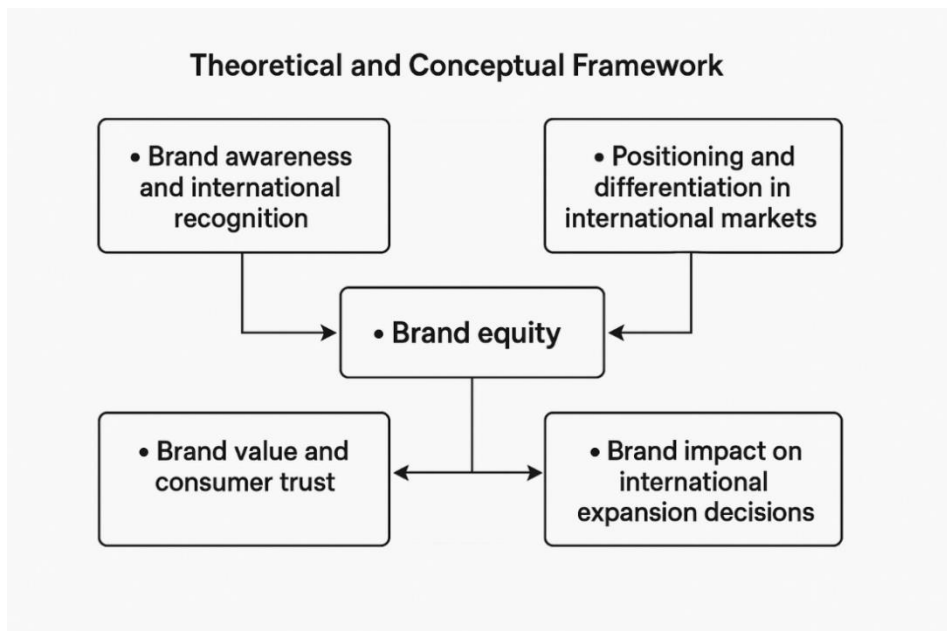


Figure 1: Theoretical and Conceptual framework

these dimensions influence how university students — as globally connected future decision-makers — perceive a brand's capacity to succeed in international trade. This integrative framework thus organises the literature review and informs the empirical analysis that follows.

2.2 Brand Awareness and International Recognition

Within the consumer-based brand equity framework (Aaker, 1991), brand awareness is foundational, representing the first stage in shaping consumer perceptions and the overall value of a brand. In the international context, it refers to the degree to which consumers across multiple markets can recognize, recall, or identify a brand and associate it with specific products or services (Rodrigues et al.,

2017). Awareness not only indicates familiarity but also functions as a trust signal, reducing uncertainty in foreign markets and preparing the ground for perceived quality, positive associations, and loyalty—key components of brand equity (Özsomer et al., 2024; Johansson, 2014). International recognition strengthens this effect by positioning the brand as credible and culturally adaptable, thereby facilitating cross-border engagement (Papadopoulos et al., 2018; Onalaja et al., 2021).

A growing body of literature emphasizes that brand awareness in global markets extends beyond mere recognition to encompass strategic positioning and long-term growth advantages. Onalaja et al. (2021) highlight that strategic brand positioning, which begins with awareness, enables firms to establish competitive advantages and strengthen market presence. Similarly, Görgün (2021) argues that in international markets, strong awareness functions as an entry facilitator, smoothing negotiations with distributors and partners while also signaling brand reliability to consumers. This aligns with da Silva Lopes (2008), who underscores the strategic role of brands in global management, noting that awareness and recognition are key assets that firms leverage to support international expansion.

Empirical studies indicate that brand awareness directly affects purchase intentions among globally connected youth, particularly university students. Abba (2024) found that students' recognition of international brands significantly increases their willingness to engage in cross-border transactions, as awareness mitigates perceived risk in unfamiliar markets. Montanari et al. (2019) similarly highlight that awareness fosters emotional attachment and brand associations, which are critical drivers of loyalty and future engagement. Gajic and Kordic (2015) note that international visibility enhances perceived quality, supporting the brand equity construct by linking recognition to consumer trust and long-term loyalty.

Digital platforms further amplify awareness effects among younger consumers. Lee and Lee (2019) demonstrate that online exposure to global brands strengthens recall and recognition, making students more confident in their purchase decisions. Jahan et al. (2024) argue that this digitally mediated awareness enables students to compare brands across markets, aligning with the framework's emphasis on consumer perceptions as the source of equity.

Despite this evidence, prior research largely emphasizes corporate-driven branding strategies or general consumer populations, leaving a gap in understanding how students themselves perceive and interpret brand awareness as a component of brand equity in international trade contexts. By explicitly linking brand awareness to the consumer-based brand equity framework, the present study examines students' perspectives, demonstrating how awareness acts as the initial driver of recognition, trust, and subsequent engagement with global brands. This alignment ensures that the literature review supports the theoretical framework, illustrating how awareness underpins positioning, value creation, and ultimately impacts international expansion decisions (Onalaja et al., 2021; Görgün, 2021; da Silva Lopes, 2008).

2.3 Positioning, Differentiation and Competitiveness

Within the consumer-based brand equity framework, brand positioning and differentiation represent the mechanisms through which awareness translates into perceived uniqueness and competitive advantage (Aaker, 1991; Johansson, 2014). Positioning involves deliberately crafting the brand's identity in the minds of target consumers to emphasize distinct value propositions, while differentiation highlights attributes or experiences that separate a brand from competitors (Nascimento et al., 2020). In global markets, these strategies must account for cultural, social, and economic differences, ensuring that the brand resonates with diverse consumer segments while maintaining a consistent core identity (Sun et al., 2016; Stošić-Mihajlović & Trajković, 2020; Martusenko, 2025).

Recent literature underscores that positioning and differentiation are not only branding tools but also central to sustaining competitiveness across borders. Biriukov et al. (2025) argue that brand management strategies grounded in positioning and differentiation significantly enhance trading companies' competitiveness by reinforcing perceived value and reliability. Similarly, Jolaoso & Adesoye (2022) demonstrate that strategic brand management in the U.S. market can drive business growth by leveraging well-crafted positioning to create distinct market identities. Martusenko (2025) further highlights that global brands able to adapt their positioning strategies to international contexts while maintaining a coherent image achieve higher levels of recognition and long-term competitiveness. Empirical evidence shows that effective positioning positively influences competitiveness and purchase intentions. Nascimento et al. (2021) demonstrate that brands that align their positioning strategies with local cultural preferences achieve stronger market performance, even when operating in highly saturated international markets. Similarly, Yang and Wang (2024) find that differentiated branding fosters perceived quality and credibility, which in turn enhances consumer loyalty and cross-border engagement. Montanari et al. (2019) highlight that youth and university students are particularly responsive to clear positioning, as it reduces uncertainty and strengthens emotional connection with brands recognized globally. Digital platforms further mediate the impact of positioning among younger, globally connected consumers. Lee and Lee (2019) show that social media content, online reviews, and influencer endorsements can reinforce differentiation by highlighting unique brand narratives, while Jahan et al. (2024) note that students actively evaluate brands' positioning across markets, comparing attributes and perceived value before making purchase decisions. Pfeifer et al. (2025) reinforce the importance of cultural adaptability in positioning, noting that brands able to balance global consistency with local relevance achieve higher competitiveness in ethnically diverse environments.

Despite these findings, most prior research emphasizes corporate-driven strategy or general consumer behavior, rather than exploring how students perceive brand positioning and differentiation as part of overall brand equity in international trade contexts. Understanding student perspectives can provide insight into how

positioning strategies contribute to perceived uniqueness, competitive advantage, and readiness to engage with global brands. By linking positioning and differentiation back to brand awareness, this study demonstrates a sequential pathway within the theoretical framework: awareness fosters recognition, which allows effective positioning and differentiation to create perceived value, competitive advantage, and ultimately consumer trust and loyalty (Biriukov et al., 2025; Jolaoso & Adesoye, 2022; Martusenko, 2025).

2.4 Brand Value, Consumer Trust and International Expansion

Brand value and consumer trust are central to how global consumers evaluate and engage with international brands. Perceived value encompasses quality, credibility, and positive associations, while trust reflects confidence in a brand's ability to consistently deliver on promises across diverse markets (Stošić-Mihajlović & Trajković, 2020; Pfeifer et al., 2025). Together, they foster loyalty, reduce perceived risk, and influence purchase intentions, forming a crucial component of brand equity that drives long-term engagement (Omar & Ensor, 2011; Yang & Wang, 2024; Sinha, 2022).

Evidence suggests that strong brand value and trust significantly affect cross-border consumer behavior. Yang and Wang (2024) report that when students perceive international brands as reliable and high-quality, they are more likely to engage in cross-border purchases. Troiville and Dube (2024) emphasize that trust mitigates uncertainty in foreign markets, encouraging consumers to adopt brands they may not have direct experience with. Zubko (2020) and Mittal and Banga (2015) further demonstrate that loyalty and repeat purchase behaviors are closely tied to value and trust perceptions, highlighting their critical role in sustaining brand equity. Digital platforms amplify these effects, as consumers, particularly university students, rely on online reviews, social media, and influencer endorsements to evaluate brand credibility before purchasing (Çepni Şener, 2023; Ul Oman et al., 2024).

Brand value and trust also have strategic implications for multinational corporations' international expansion. High brand equity lowers the perceived risk of market entry, enables premium pricing, and strengthens competitive positioning in foreign markets (Omar & Ensor, 2011; Yang & Wang, 2024). Troiville and Dube (2024) show that firms leverage established consumer trust and recognition to support sustainable global growth. Taufiqurrahman & Aslami (2025) highlight how brand adaptation strategies in global marketing allow multinational companies to sustain trust and perceived value even when modifying offerings for local markets. Pfeifer et al. (2025) note that brands successfully perceived as trustworthy across cultural boundaries maintain competitiveness while adapting strategies to local preferences.

Despite extensive research, the majority of studies focus on corporate perspectives or general consumer populations, leaving limited insight into how university students perceive brand value and trust in international trade contexts. By

linking these perceptions to awareness and positioning, this study highlights the pathway through which students interpret brand equity and its influence on cross-border engagement and support for multinational expansion (Taufiqurrahman & Aslami, 2025; Ul Oman et al., 2024; Sinha, 2022).

2.5 Summary of Previous Studies and Research Gap

The literature reviewed highlights four key dimensions of branding that shape success in international trade: brand awareness and international recognition, positioning and differentiation, brand value and consumer trust, and impact on international expansion. Brand awareness serves as the foundation for consumer perceptions, enabling recognition, reducing perceived risk, and facilitating engagement with international brands (Rodrigues et al., 2017; Özsomer et al., 2024). Effective positioning and differentiation further enhance competitiveness by establishing unique value propositions and signaling distinctiveness in culturally diverse markets (Nascimento et al., 2020; Yang & Wang, 2024). Brand value and trust consolidate these effects, driving loyalty, purchase intentions, and ultimately supporting multinational corporations' decisions to expand across borders (Omar & Ensor, 2011; Troiville & Dube, 2024; Pfeifer et al., 2025).

Despite the richness of this evidence, most prior research emphasizes corporate-driven strategies or general consumer populations, with limited attention to how young, globally connected consumers—particularly university students—perceive and interpret branding constructs in international contexts (Jahan et al., 2024; Montanari et al., 2019). Few studies explore how awareness, positioning, value, and trust interact from the consumer perspective, or how these perceptions influence willingness to engage with global brands and support multinational expansion.

By integrating these constructs within the consumer-based brand equity framework, the present study addresses this gap. It examines students' perspectives on branding, linking awareness to positioning, and subsequently to value and trust, ultimately connecting these perceptions to international trade outcomes. This approach not only extends theoretical understanding of brand equity in global markets but also provides practical insights for marketers and multinational corporations seeking to engage younger, culturally diverse consumers. In doing so, the study shifts focus from corporate-centric analyses to the consumer side, demonstrating how student perceptions can inform strategic branding decisions and international market success.

3. Methodology:

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-analytical research design, which focuses on describing and analyzing the characteristics of a phenomenon while exploring relationships between variables. The descriptive-analytical approach is suitable for this study because it allows for the systematic examination of university students'

perceptions regarding the strategic role of branding in international trade. By combining description with analytical interpretation, this design facilitates the identification of patterns, differences, and relationships among the four key brand constructs—awareness, positioning, value/trust, and impact on international expansion—while providing insights grounded in empirical data (Malih & Abdul Samad, 2020).

3.2 Study Population and Sample

The target population for this study comprised students enrolled at the College of Business Administration at the University, specifically those taking the International Trade and Marketing course. These students were selected because their academic background provides them with foundational knowledge of international business concepts, making their perspectives particularly relevant for examining branding strategies in a global context.

A purposive (intentional) sampling technique was used to select participants who could provide informed insights. The study sample consisted of 170 students, including both male and female participants. This sample size was deemed adequate to capture diverse perspectives within the target population while ensuring sufficient data for statistical analysis. Selecting students from the International Trade and Marketing course ensures alignment between participants' academic exposure and the research objectives, allowing the study to accurately assess how brand awareness, positioning, value/trust, and expansion strategies are perceived by future decision-makers in international business contexts.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

The study relied on both secondary and primary data to achieve its objectives.

Secondary Data: This included a comprehensive review of existing literature, scientific articles published in peer-reviewed journals, theses, reports, and other academic sources in both Arabic and English. These sources provided the theoretical foundation for the study, informed the development of the research instrument, and allowed comparison of the study's findings with previous research.

Primary Data: Data were collected through a structured questionnaire designed specifically for this study. The questionnaire was based on the theoretical and conceptual framework, ensuring alignment with the four key constructs of brand equity—awareness, positioning, value/trust, and international expansion—identified as central to students' perceptions of branding in international trade.

3.4 Study Instrument

The primary instrument for data collection was a self-administered questionnaire, structured around four dimensions, each comprising 10 items:

1. **Brand Awareness and International Recognition:** Measures the degree to which students can identify and recall brands across different markets, reflecting the first stage of consumer-based brand equity (Rodrigues et al., 2017; Özsumer et al.,

2024).

2. Positioning and Differentiation: Assesses perceptions of how brands establish unique value propositions and distinguish themselves in ethnically and culturally diverse markets, linked to competitive advantage and the second stage of the framework (Nascimento et al., 2020; Yang & Wang, 2024).
3. Brand Value and Consumer Trust: Captures students' perceptions of brand quality, credibility, and trustworthiness, which drive loyalty and purchase intentions, reflecting the third dimension of brand equity (Omar & Ensor, 2011; Troiville & Dube, 2024).
4. Brand Impact on International Expansion: Evaluates the perceived influence of brand equity on a multinational company's ability to enter and sustain operations in international markets, representing the final dimension of the theoretical framework (Pfeifer et al., 2025; Johansson, 2014).

This structure ensures that the questionnaire comprehensively covers the core elements of the consumer-based brand equity framework, allowing for an integrated assessment of students' perceptions of branding in international trade contexts.

3.5 Psychometric Properties of the Instrument

The validity and reliability of the questionnaire were thoroughly evaluated to ensure the instrument accurately measures the intended constructs.

Validity: Internal consistency was assessed using Pearson correlation coefficients. Each item was correlated with its respective dimension, and each dimension was correlated with the total score of the scale. Results indicated strong correlations across all four dimensions, ranging from 0.702 to 0.802 ($p < 0.01$), confirming that the items are consistent with the structure of the instrument and effectively measure the targeted aspects of the strategic role of branding.

Table 1. Pearson Correlation Coefficients Between Each Dimension and Total Score

No.	Dimension	Correlation Coefficient
1	Brand Awareness and International Recognition	0.802**
2	Positioning and Differentiation in International Markets	0.702**
3	Brand Value and Consumer Trust	0.737**
4	Brand Impact on International Expansion Decisions	0.787**

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Reliability: Stability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The reliability coefficients for the four dimensions were 0.961 (Brand Awareness), 0.958 (Positioning), 0.956 (Brand Value and Trust), and 0.953 (Brand Impact on Expansion), with an overall scale reliability of 0.980. These high values indicate

excellent internal consistency, demonstrating that the questionnaire provides reliable and stable measurements suitable for subsequent analysis.

Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients for Each Dimension and Overall Scale

No.	Dimension	Cronbach's Alpha
1	Brand Awareness and International Recognition	0.961
2	Positioning and Differentiation in International Markets	0.958
3	Brand Value and Consumer Trust	0.956
4	Brand Impact on International Expansion Decisions	0.953
5	Overall Scale	0.980

3.6 Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed electronically to students of the International Trade and Marketing course at the College of Business Administration. Data collection took place during the second semester of 1446 AH / 2024 AD. The survey was available to participants for a one-month period, allowing sufficient time for responses while ensuring that the data reflects the targeted semester cohort. Participation was voluntary, and responses were collected and compiled for subsequent descriptive and analytical analysis.

4. Results

This section presents the statistical outcomes of the study, organized according to the four research questions. Data were collected from 170 university students enrolled in the International Trade and Marketing course at the College of Business Administration during the second semester of 1446 AH / 2024 AD. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale. To test whether respondents' perceptions significantly differed from the neutral benchmark, a one-sample t-test was performed for each item, using a cut-off mean of 3.4 as the reference point. The following subsections provide the descriptive statistics and t-test results for each research question.

4.1 Impact of Brand Awareness and International Recognition on Cross-Border Purchase Intentions

To address the first research question — *“How do brand awareness and international recognition influence consumers' purchase intentions across borders?”* — a one-sample t-test was conducted on the responses to 10 questionnaire items (Table 3).

The results (Table 3) show that the mean scores for all items ranged from 4.00 to 4.19, with standard deviations between 0.746 and 0.873. These values are substantially higher than the neutral benchmark of 3.4 on the five-point Likert scale. The t-values for the items ranged from 10.189 to 13.782, all of which were statistically significant at $p < 0.001$.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics and One-Sample t-Test Results for Brand Awareness and International Recognition

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Difference	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
q1_1	4.00	0.754	0.600	10.380	0.000
q1_2	4.21	0.801	0.812	13.217	0.000
q1_3	4.05	0.813	0.647	10.381	0.000
q1_4	4.13	0.840	0.729	11.326	0.000
q1_5	4.08	0.873	0.682	10.189	0.000
q1_6	4.02	0.769	0.624	10.574	0.000
q1_7	4.07	0.840	0.671	10.413	0.000
q1_8	4.19	0.746	0.788	13.782	0.000
q1_9	4.14	0.802	0.741	12.055	0.000
q1_10	4.12	0.820	0.718	11.410	0.000

As shown in Table 3, the consistently high mean scores and highly significant t-values indicate that respondents strongly agreed that brand awareness and international recognition positively influence their purchase intentions across borders. These results provide robust empirical evidence supporting the first hypothesis of the study.

4.2 Effect of Positioning and Differentiation on Competitiveness in Diverse Markets

The second research question examined: *“To what degree do positioning strategies generate or enhance competitiveness in ethnically diverse environments?”* Responses to 10 questionnaire items were analyzed using a one-sample t-test (Table 4).

The findings reveal that mean scores ranged from 4.06 to 4.22, with standard deviations between 0.641 and 0.775, all above the neutral benchmark of 3.4 on the five-point Likert scale. The t-values varied from 11.089 to 16.743, and all were statistically significant at $p < 0.001$.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics and One-Sample t-Test Results for Positioning and Differentiation

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Difference	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
q2_1	4.22	0.641	0.824	16.743	0.000
q2_2	4.07	0.734	0.671	11.905	0.000
q2_3	4.14	0.691	0.741	13.992	0.000
q2_4	4.11	0.705	0.706	13.047	0.000
q2_5	4.06	0.775	0.659	11.089	0.000
q2_6	4.16	0.650	0.765	15.341	0.000
q2_7	4.22	0.641	0.824	16.743	0.000
q2_8	4.16	0.668	0.765	14.928	0.000
q2_9	4.12	0.728	0.718	12.847	0.000
q2_10	4.08	0.772	0.682	11.517	0.000

The results demonstrate that students perceive strong positioning and differentiation strategies as significant drivers of competitiveness in ethnically diverse markets. The high agreement levels and statistically significant differences from the neutral point provide clear evidence that effective positioning and differentiation enhance competitive performance across culturally diverse environments.

4.3 Impact of Brand Value and Consumer Trust on Consumer Loyalty

The third research question investigated: *“To what degree does brand equity serve as a mechanism for building consumer trust and loyalty through global experience?”* Responses from the 10 questionnaire items were analyzed using a one-sample t-test (Table 5).

The mean scores ranged from 4.09 to 4.28, with standard deviations between 0.660 and 0.805, all well above the neutral benchmark of 3.4 on the five-point Likert scale. The t-values ranged from 12.205 to 17.334, with $p < 0.001$ for all items, indicating statistically significant differences.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics and One-Sample t-Test Results for Brand Value and Consumer Trust

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Difference	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
q3_1	4.09	0.732	0.694	12.368	0.000
q3_2	4.27	0.660	0.871	17.206	0.000
q3_3	4.28	0.664	0.882	17.334	0.000
q3_4	4.22	0.805	0.824	13.339	0.000
q3_5	4.21	0.801	0.812	13.217	0.000
q3_6	4.24	0.779	0.835	13.978	0.000
q3_7	4.21	0.739	0.812	14.316	0.000
q3_8	4.11	0.754	0.706	12.205	0.000
q3_9	4.16	0.702	0.765	14.194	0.000
q3_10	4.16	0.797	0.765	12.508	0.000

The findings indicate that students strongly perceive brand equity as a key driver for building consumer trust and loyalty in international contexts. The consistently high means, low variability, and statistically significant t-values highlight that both brand value and trust are crucial mechanisms influencing consumer loyalty, particularly in global or cross-border markets.

These results align with prior research demonstrating that positive brand perceptions, combined with trust, enhance consumer engagement and repeated purchase intentions across different markets.

4.4 Influence of Branding on Multinational Companies' Decision-Making in International Markets

The fourth research question addressed the extent to which branding affects the decision-making process of multinational companies considering entry into international markets. Responses to the 10 items on this dimension were analyzed using a one-sample t-test with a neutral mean of 3.4.

The mean scores ranged from 4.12 to 4.31, and standard deviations ranged from 0.563 to 0.848, all well above the cut-off point. The mean differences ranged from 0.718 to 0.906, and the corresponding t-values ranged from 11.029 to 20.165, with $p < 0.001$ for all items, indicating statistically significant differences.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics and One-Sample t-Test Results for Branding's Influence on Multinational Decision-Making

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Difference	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
q4_1	4.18	0.708	0.776	14.300	0.000
q4_2	4.27	0.563	0.871	20.165	0.000
q4_3	4.20	0.667	0.800	15.637	0.000
q4_4	4.25	0.703	0.847	15.701	0.000
q4_5	4.12	0.848	0.718	11.029	0.000
q4_6	4.24	0.646	0.835	16.852	0.000
q4_7	4.31	0.596	0.906	19.807	0.000
q4_8	4.25	0.633	0.847	17.460	0.000
q4_9	4.19	0.746	0.788	13.782	0.000
q4_10	4.19	0.730	0.788	14.085	0.000

These results demonstrate that all items related to branding influence exceeded the neutral threshold, confirming a strong perceived impact of branding on the decision-making processes of multinational companies considering international market entry.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the strategic role of branding in shaping consumer behavior and multinational decision-making in international markets from the perspective of university students. This discussion interprets the statistical findings presented in the Results section, linking them to existing theories, empirical studies, and the consumer-based brand equity framework.

5.1 Brand Awareness and International Recognition

The results indicate that brand awareness and international recognition have a strong influence on consumers' cross-border purchase intentions, as reflected by consistently high mean scores across all items (4.00–4.21) and statistically significant t-values ($p < 0.001$). These findings suggest that students perceive well-known and widely recognized brands as more credible, desirable, and likely to influence their purchasing decisions in global contexts.



Figure2 : Descriptive statistics and one-sample t-test results for brand awareness and international recognition items

As shown in Figure 2, the visual distribution of responses mirrors the statistical outcomes in Table 3. The consistently high mean scores across all items confirm that respondents perceive brand awareness and international recognition as having a

strong and positive influence on their cross-border purchase intentions. This reinforces the central role of this dimension within the study's framework.

This outcome aligns with prior studies, such as Gao et al. (2024), which found that increased brand awareness enhances purchase intent, particularly when paired with product quality and customer satisfaction. Similarly, Nguyen and Nguyen (2022) highlighted that trust and positive brand perception significantly boost consumer willingness to engage in cross-border e-commerce. In addition, Lubis and Muniapan (2024) emphasized that strong brand recognition, coupled with consistent consumer experiences, plays a crucial role in shaping loyalty and long-term engagement across international markets.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings support the consumer-based brand equity framework, in which brand awareness is a foundational dimension that shapes subsequent perceptions of brand value and trust. High awareness creates cognitive and affective pathways that reinforce consumer preference and purchase intention, validating the first component of the study's conceptual model.

5.2 Positioning Strategies and Competitiveness

The findings indicate that positioning strategies strongly enhance competitiveness in ethnically and culturally diverse environments. The mean scores for all items ranged from 4.06 to 4.22, with highly significant t-values ($p < 0.001$), demonstrating that university students perceive strategic positioning as a critical mechanism for achieving differentiation and competitive advantage in global markets.

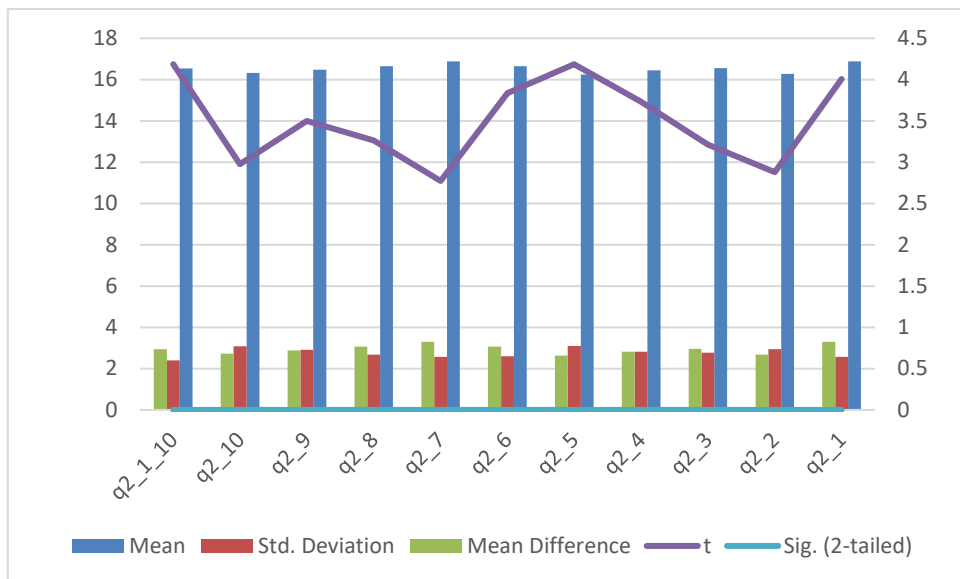


Figure3 : Descriptive statistics and one-sample t-test results for positioning and differentiation items

Figure 3 clearly reflects the high levels of agreement indicated in Table 4. The chart shows that respondents consistently view positioning and differentiation strategies as essential for enhancing competitiveness in ethnically diverse markets. This visual evidence underlines the importance of strategic positioning as a core element in the model tested in this study.

These results are consistent with Knight and Cavusgil (2004), who emphasized that innovation and strategic positioning allow firms, particularly SMEs, to compete effectively in culturally heterogeneous international environments. Nakata and Sivakumar (1996) similarly highlighted the importance of accounting for cultural differences in product development and market entry strategies, reinforcing the relevance of tailored positioning approaches to enhance competitiveness. Further, recent studies by Biriukov et al. (2025) and Martusenko (2025) indicate that adaptive positioning strategies, when aligned with local consumer expectations, significantly increase market responsiveness and brand resonance in diverse international contexts. Jolaoso and Adesoye (2022) additionally argue that integrating cultural intelligence into strategic planning not only improves competitive advantage but also fosters sustainable engagement with cross-border consumers.

Within the study's conceptual framework, these findings underscore the role of positioning and differentiation as central constructs that link brand awareness to consumer trust and international expansion. Effective positioning not only strengthens perceived brand value but also guides firms in making strategic decisions

for entering new markets, thereby bridging the consumer perception and corporate strategy dimensions of the model.

5.3 Brand Equity as a Mechanism for Trust and Loyalty

The results show consistently high mean scores across all items measuring brand value and consumer trust, ranging from 4.09 to 4.28, with all t-values highly significant ($p < 0.001$). These findings indicate that university students strongly perceive brand equity as a crucial mechanism for fostering trust and loyalty. In other words, brands that are recognized, well-positioned, and valued are more likely to generate confidence and repeated engagement among consumers in international contexts.

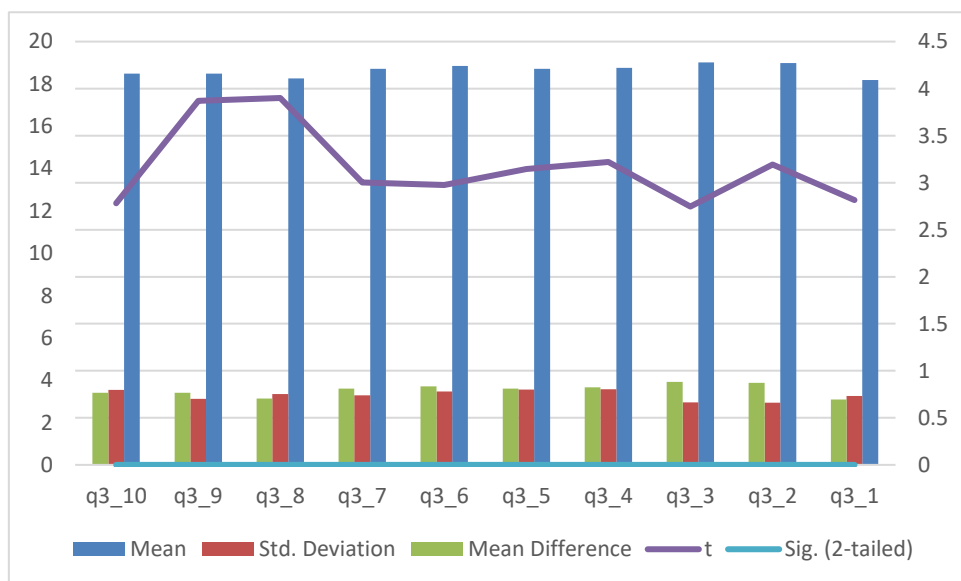


Figure4 : Descriptive statistics and one-sample t-test results for brand equity, trust and loyalty items

The trends depicted in Figure 4 correspond closely with the statistical findings in Table 5. Respondents strongly agreed that brand equity operates as a mechanism for building trust and loyalty through global experiences. This figure provides a clear visual confirmation of the weight this dimension holds within the overall scale used in the study.

This outcome aligns closely with the arguments of Sarkar and Sreejesh (2021), who emphasized that brand experience strengthens the emotional relationship between consumers and brands, ultimately enhancing trust and loyalty. Suhaily and Darmoyo (2024) further demonstrated that positive brand experiences, particularly

in global e-commerce environments, translate into greater consumer commitment and purchase intention. The current findings confirm that these principles hold true from the perspective of university students, suggesting that even within a consumer-student segment, brand equity is perceived as a driver of loyalty.

From the standpoint of the study's theoretical framework, these results reinforce the centrality of brand value and consumer trust as pillars of consumer-based brand equity. High scores indicate that the perceived value of a brand not only enhances immediate purchase intentions but also builds long-term relational capital with consumers, which is essential for sustaining competitive advantage in international markets. Moreover, this supports the conceptual linkage in the framework between brand awareness, positioning, and international expansion: brands that effectively communicate their value and engender trust are better positioned to expand successfully across borders.

Additionally, the strong student perception of brand equity's impact on loyalty suggests practical implications for marketers: investing in brand-building activities that enhance recognition, reliability, and trustworthiness can create a ripple effect, strengthening not only individual consumer commitment but also broader market competitiveness. This reinforces the notion that brand equity is not a static attribute but a dynamic mechanism influencing behavior, perception, and strategic outcomes simultaneously.

5.4 Branding's Impact on Multinational Decision-Making

The analysis of the fourth research question demonstrates high mean scores across all items measuring the influence of branding on multinational companies' decision-making, ranging from 4.12 to 4.31, with all t-values highly significant ($p < 0.001$). These results indicate that students perceive branding as a critical strategic factor that directly shapes the choices and strategies of multinational firms when entering new international markets.

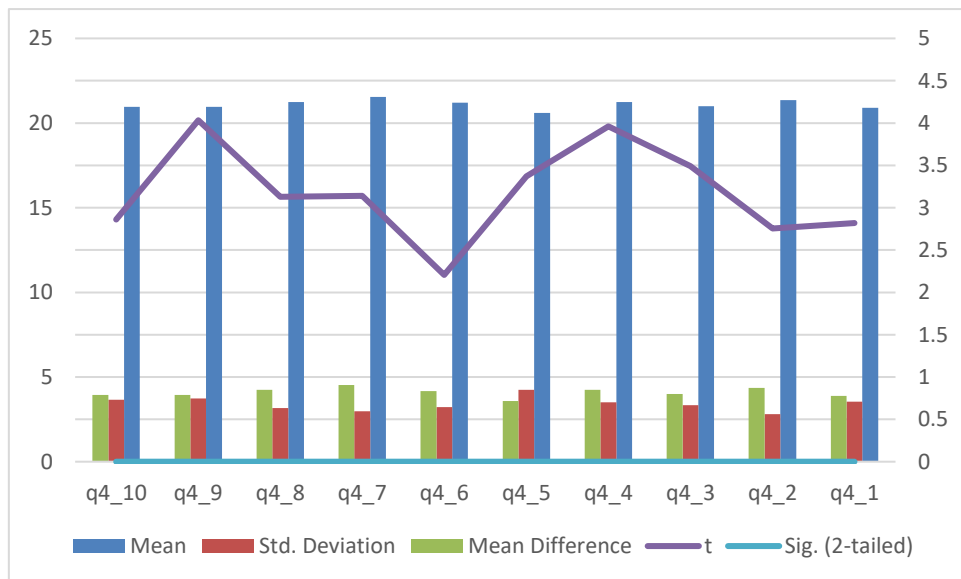


Figure5 : Descriptive statistics and one-sample t-test results for branding's impact on multinational decision-making items

Figure 5 visually illustrates the strong agreement reported in Table 6. Respondents consistently indicated that branding significantly influences the decision-making process of multinational companies entering international markets. This pattern highlights how this dimension integrates with the others to reflect the strategic role of branding examined in the study.

Specifically, strong brand recognition and trust appear to influence multiple aspects of multinational decision-making: selecting target markets, determining entry modes (e.g., joint ventures, acquisitions, or direct investment), adapting products and services to local cultural preferences, and building initial trust with new consumer bases. The findings suggest that companies with strong brands can leverage their equity to reduce perceived risk in foreign markets, gain competitive advantage, and accelerate acceptance among local consumers.

These results are consistent with Douglas, Craig, and Nijssen (2001), who argued that integrated international brand structures facilitate market entry and strategic decision-making. Strong brands act as strategic tools that provide not only a reputation advantage but also operational leverage, helping firms navigate complex cross-border environments more effectively.

From the perspective of the study's theoretical framework, this confirms the link between brand awareness, positioning, trust, and international expansion. High scores indicate that branding does not function solely as a consumer perception tool

but also as a determinant of corporate strategy, reinforcing the role of brand equity in enabling multinational firms to make informed and effective expansion decisions.

In practical terms, the findings suggest that multinational companies should actively cultivate and manage their brand equity before entering new markets, as doing so enhances market acceptance, reduces entry risk, and strengthens long-term competitiveness. Branding, therefore, is a dual-purpose mechanism: it influences consumer behavior while simultaneously guiding firm-level strategic decisions in international trade contexts.

5.5 Overall Implications

The findings of this study collectively underscore the comprehensive influence of branding on both consumer behavior and corporate decision-making in international markets. Across all four dimensions—brand awareness and international recognition, positioning strategies, brand equity and trust, and the impact of branding on multinational decision-making—the data reveal consistently high scores and statistically significant outcomes, confirming that these elements are interdependent and mutually reinforcing within the consumer-based brand equity framework.

In relation to the study's hypotheses, the findings provide strong empirical support for all four propositions. H1 is confirmed, as higher brand awareness consistently correlated with increased purchase intentions among university students, reflecting the critical role of recognition and credibility across borders. H2 is also supported, with positioning strategies shown to enhance competitiveness in culturally heterogeneous markets, aligning with respondents' emphasis on differentiation and tailored approaches. Similarly, H3 is validated, as robust brand equity was significantly associated with consumer trust and loyalty, highlighting the interdependence between perceived value and commitment. Finally, H4 is confirmed, with evidence indicating that strategic branding influences multinational firms' market entry decisions and value creation, demonstrating that brand strength serves as a guide for corporate strategy in international contexts. Collectively, these outcomes underscore that the hypothesized relationships within the integrated consumer-based brand equity framework are consistent with observed behaviors and managerial perspectives, reinforcing the theoretical and practical relevance of the study.

From a theoretical standpoint, the results validate the integrated model proposed in this study, demonstrating that strong brand equity enhances consumer trust and loyalty while simultaneously guiding firm-level strategies for international expansion. Brand awareness serves as the foundation, enabling recognition and credibility across borders; positioning strategies provide differentiation that strengthens competitiveness; brand equity and trust cultivate consumer commitment; and a robust brand informs strategic entry and adaptation decisions for multinational

firms. Together, these dimensions illustrate a holistic mechanism through which brands generate value for both consumers and companies in global contexts.

Practically, the study offers actionable insights for managers and brand strategists operating in international markets. First, investing in brand awareness and global recognition ensures that potential consumers associate the brand with quality and reliability, directly enhancing purchase intent. Second, strategic positioning and differentiation are essential for sustaining competitiveness in culturally diverse markets, where consumer preferences and local market conditions vary significantly. Third, cultivating brand equity and trust strengthens customer loyalty and reduces perceived risk, critical factors for companies seeking to expand across borders. Finally, leveraging brand strength in decision-making enables multinational firms to optimize market entry strategies, adapt offerings to local demands, and establish partnerships that enhance acceptance and performance in new markets.

Overall, this study highlights that branding is not merely a marketing tool but a strategic lever that links consumer perceptions to corporate outcomes. For international business managers, the implication is clear: a well-managed brand can simultaneously drive consumer engagement, competitive advantage, and informed strategic expansion, making it a cornerstone of sustainable success in global trade.

Conclusion

This study investigated the strategic role of branding in shaping success in international trade from the perspective of university students, employing a descriptive-analytical approach and a robust, psychometrically validated questionnaire. The findings provide strong evidence that brand awareness, positioning strategies, brand equity, and the impact of branding on multinational decision-making are critical drivers of consumer behavior and corporate strategy in global markets. High mean scores across all four dimensions indicate that branding significantly influences purchase intentions, competitiveness, consumer trust and loyalty, as well as multinational firms' market entry and expansion decisions. These results align with and extend the consumer-based brand equity framework, demonstrating the interconnection between consumer perception and strategic corporate outcomes.

From a practical perspective, the study highlights the importance of investing in global brand recognition, strategic differentiation, trust-building, and leveraging brand strength for international market decisions. For managers and brand strategists, this integrated perspective provides actionable insights for optimizing both consumer engagement and corporate internationalization strategies.

Limitations

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample was limited to students of the College of Business Administration at a single university, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other populations or cultural contexts. Second, the study relied on self-reported questionnaire data, which may be subject to response biases. Third, the research focused primarily on perceptions and attitudes, without directly measuring actual purchasing behavior or corporate performance outcomes, which could provide a more comprehensive understanding of branding's impact.

Future Research Directions

Future studies can build on this research in several ways. Expanding the sample to include students from multiple universities, regions, or countries would enhance generalizability and allow cross-cultural comparisons. Longitudinal research tracking actual consumer behavior and multinational firm performance could provide deeper insights into the causal relationships between branding and outcomes in international trade. Additionally, investigating the role of digital branding, social media influence, and emerging technologies in shaping cross-border consumer perceptions and firm strategies could offer valuable contemporary perspectives. Finally, examining other stakeholder groups, such as managers, employees, or local distributors, would provide a holistic understanding of branding's strategic role in international markets.

In conclusion, this study underscores that branding is a strategic, multidimensional tool—one that simultaneously shapes consumer intentions, strengthens competitive advantage, and informs multinational decision-making—thereby confirming its central role in achieving success in international trade.

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Appendix

Questionnaire: University Students' Perceptions of Branding in International Trade

Instructions:

This questionnaire aims to understand your perceptions regarding the strategic role of branding in international trade. Please respond to each statement based on your opinion using the following scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree | 2 = Disagree | 3 = Neutral | 4 = Agree | 5 = Strongly Agree

Section A: Brand Awareness and International Recognition

This section assesses how well students recognize and recall brands across global markets and their perceived influence on purchasing behavior.

1. I am familiar with multiple international brands in different product categories.
2. I can easily recognize internationally known brands even in foreign markets.
3. Brand awareness positively affects my willingness to purchase products from international brands.
4. I trust brands more when I have previously seen them advertised internationally.
5. Familiarity with global brands influences my perception of product quality.
6. I consider international recognition of a brand as a factor when making purchasing decisions.
7. Exposure to global brands online increases my likelihood to purchase them.
8. I prefer purchasing brands that are widely recognized internationally.
9. Awareness of a brand's global presence improves my confidence in its products.
10. Brand recognition reduces perceived risk when purchasing products from foreign markets.

Section B: Brand Positioning and Differentiation

This section evaluates how students perceive brand positioning strategies and their effectiveness in culturally diverse markets.

1. Brands that clearly differentiate themselves from competitors are more appealing.
2. I value brands that align their products with local cultural preferences in different markets.
3. Strategic positioning of a brand influences my choice when multiple options are available.
4. I notice when brands offer unique value propositions compared to competitors.

5. Brand differentiation strategies enhance my perception of a brand's competitiveness.
6. I am more likely to purchase from brands that position themselves as innovative or distinctive.
7. Brands that adapt their products or messaging to local markets attract my attention.
8. I consider brand positioning as an indicator of overall quality and reliability.
9. Brands that communicate a strong unique identity are more trustworthy.
10. Effective brand positioning increases my loyalty toward a brand in international markets.

Section C: Brand Value and Consumer Trust
This section measures how students perceive brand equity and trust as drivers of loyalty and repeated purchase intentions.

1. I associate strong brands with higher quality products.
2. Trust in a brand motivates me to make repeat purchases.
3. Positive experiences with a brand increase my loyalty toward it.
4. I rely on brand reputation when considering purchases in international markets.
5. I am more likely to recommend brands I trust to others.
6. Brand credibility increases my confidence in the product's performance.
7. A strong brand influences my perception of value for money.
8. I am willing to pay more for brands I trust internationally.
9. My loyalty is stronger for brands that maintain consistent quality across markets.
10. Trust and brand value reduce my perceived risk when buying from international brands.

Section D: Branding's Impact on Multinational Companies' Decision-Making
This section explores students' perceptions of how branding influences multinational companies' international market strategies.

1. Branding influences a company's decision to enter a new international market.
2. Strong brand equity helps multinational companies compete effectively in foreign markets.

3. Companies with recognized brands adapt better to culturally diverse environments.
4. Branding affects product or service offerings tailored to local consumer preferences.
5. Multinational firms consider brand perception as a key factor in strategic planning.
6. Global branding enables companies to form successful partnerships in new markets.
7. A strong brand helps companies overcome barriers to international expansion.
8. Branding informs pricing, promotion, and distribution strategies for global markets.
9. Companies with well-established brands are more likely to succeed internationally.
10. Branding contributes to long-term value creation for multinational corporations in global markets.

Demographics:

- Age: _____
- Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Other
- Academic Year: ☐ 1st ☐ 2nd ☐ 3rd ☐ 4th
- Have you taken courses related to international trade or marketing? ☐ Yes ☐ No



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