

THE IMPACT OF CULTURAL CONGRUENCE IN MEDIA SPONSORSHIPS ON ICONIC BRAND DESIRABILITY: MODERATING EFFECTS OF CULTURAL FANDOM AND THREAT PERCEPTION

UTJECAJ KULTURNE PODUDARNOSTI U MEDIJSKIM SPONZORSTVIMA NA POŽELJNOST IKONIČNE MARKE: MODERIRAJUĆI UČINCI KULTUROLOŠKE ZAJEDNICE OBOŽAVATELJA I PERCEPCIJE PRIJETNJE



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Abstract

Purpose – This study explores the consumer perceptions of iconic brands and influence of cultural congruence of TV show sponsorships on brand desire. It looks at moderating effects of cultural fandom and threat perceptions of iconic brands.

Design/Methodology/Approach – Employing a 2x2 between-subjects experimental design, this research manipulated brand iconicity (iconic vs. non-iconic) and cultural context (local vs. foreign) through scenarios involving brands and TV shows. Participants from the US, who were recruited via Mechanical Turk, responded to various measures concerning brand perception and cultural association on a 7-point Likert scale.

Sažetak

Svrha Rad istražuje percepciju potrošača o ikoničnim markama i utjecaj kulturne podudarnosti sponzorstava televizijskih emisija na poželjnost marke. Rad promatra moderirajuće učinke kulturološke zajednice obožavatelja i percepcije prijetnje ikoničnim markama.

Metodološki pristup Koristeći među sudionicima eksperimentalni dizajn 2x2, istraživanje je manipuliralo ikoničnošću marke (ikonična u odnosu na neikoničnu marku) i kulturnim kontekstom (lokalni u odnosu na strani) kroz scenarije koji su uključivali marke i TV emisije. Sudionici iz SAD-a regrutirani su putem Mechanical Turka, a odgovarali su na različite mjere percepcije marke i kulturne povezanosti korištenjem 7-stupanjske Likertove ljestvice.

Findings and implications – Iconic brands were perceived to be more desirable, appealing, and attractive. The findings underscore that iconic brands paired with culturally congruent sponsorships enhance brand desirability. Desire for iconic brands is moderated by individual cultural orientations and iconicity – by perceptions of foreign threat. This study extends iconic brands theory by demonstrating the synergistic effect of cultural congruence on brand desirability. It highlights the strategic importance of aligning brand messages with cultural values to amplify consumer engagement.

Limitations – The study's primary limitations include its focus on a predominantly American context, with a sample size that may not capture the full spectrum of global consumer behavior.

Originality – This research study contributes original insights into the dynamic interplay between brand iconicity/culture and cultural congruence, providing empirical evidence on how cultural fit enhances consumer perceptions. It offers valuable implications to brand managers on leveraging cultural elements of sponsorships to enhance brand equity.

Keywords: iconic brands, consumer perception, media sponsorship, cultural fandom

Rezultati i implikacije Ikonične su marke percipirane kao poželjnije, privlačnije i atraktivnije. Rezultati naglašavaju da uparene s kulturno podudarnim sponzorstvima pojačavaju poželjnost marke. Poželjnost ikoničnih marki moderirana je individualnim kulturnim orijentacijama i ikoničnošću - percepcijom stranih prijetnji. Rad proširuje teoriju ikoničnih marki upućujući na sinergijski učinak kulturne podudarnosti na poželjnost marke i ističe stratešku važnost usklađivanja poruka marke s kulturnim vrijednostima kako bi se pojačao angažman potrošača.

Ograničenja Primarna ograničenja istraživanja uključuju fokus na pretežno američki kontekst i veličinu uzorka koja možda ne obuhvaća cijeli spektar globalnog ponašanja potrošača.

Doprinos Istraživanje pruža originalne uvide u dinamičan međuodnos ikoničnosti marke/kulture i kulturne podudarnosti pružajući empirijske dokaze o tome kako kulturno uklapanje poboljšava percepciju potrošača. Za upravitelje markom nudi vrijedne implikacije o iskoristavanju kulturnih elemenata sponzorstava za jačanje tržišne vrijednosti marke.

Gljučne riječi: marke ikone, percepcija potrošača, medijsko sponzorstvo, kulturološka zajednica obožavatelja

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's fiercely competitive business landscape, brand managers are constantly exploring innovative strategies to distinguish their brands and foster enduring consumer relationships. As markets become more saturated and consumer preferences continue to evolve, positioning a brand as "iconic" significantly boosts its market presence and fortifies its resilience against competitors.

The theory of iconic brands (Holt, 2004) provides crucial insights into how brands can achieve and sustain a heightened level of attractiveness and desirability. Iconic brands such as Coca-Cola, Apple, Disney, and Harley Davidson stand as pillars of cultural significance and commercial success in the evolving landscape of global marketing. These brands have achieved an unparalleled level of recognition, having not only established a strong market presence but also transcended geographical boundaries to become universally recognized symbols of innovation and excellence (Srivastava et al., 2020). They are characterized by their enduring popularity, distinctive identity, and a profound ability to forge emotional connections with consumers, significantly influencing consumer preferences and behaviors (Holt, 2004).

Iconic brands succeed not merely on account of their product offerings; they encapsulate a broader spectrum of consumer values, embodying aspirations, lifestyles, and cultural ideals that resonate deeply with their target audience behaviors (Holt, 2004). This embodiment of cultural and emotional significance extends a brand's appeal beyond its functional attributes, enabling it to connect with consumers on a more profound level.

These brands influence more than simple consumer transactions; they shape consumer lifestyles, values, and aspirations, thereby setting trends and leading industry standards (Ahmed et al., 2024). They create immersive experiences that evoke specific emotions, essential for cementing a brand's iconic status and ensur-

ing its longevity in the market (Merchant et al., 2017). Moreover, iconic brands often transcend their commercial identity to become cultural symbols that reflect and mold societal trends and preferences, impacting social and cultural norms and becoming integral to consumers' self-schema (Cova & D'Antone, 2016; Saeed et al., 2021).

Understanding the elements that contribute to a brand's iconic status is invaluable for marketers, especially in the context of growing competition. The relationship between a brand's identity and the cultural narratives it aligns with significantly amplifies its attractiveness, making it stand out in a crowded market. As globalization intensifies, maintaining a brand's cultural relevance across diverse markets becomes crucial. The iconic brands theory highlights how integrating local cultural elements with global brand strategies can create a powerful synergy, enhancing the brand's global appeal while respecting local sensitivities and preferences.

Despite extensive research on brand management and consumer behavior, gaps remain in understanding the nuanced effects of a cultural fit between iconic brands and their media sponsorships on consumer purchasing decisions. Previous research has indicated that cultural elements significantly enhance a brand's authenticity and prestige, suggesting that alignment with local cultural values can enhance a brand's market effectiveness substantially (He & Wang, 2017; Özsomer, 2012). However, the specific mechanisms through which cultural congruence impacts consumer behavior and brand perception, particularly in the context of media sponsorships, are less understood.

This study is aimed at filling these gaps by exploring how cultural congruence in sponsorships influences consumer perceptions and purchasing behavior towards iconic brands. It builds on the theoretical foundation laid by scholars such as Holt (2004) and Özsomer (2012), who highlight the importance of cultural symbolism and local identity in brand perception. By integrating insights from dynamic construc-

tivist theory of culture (Hollan, 2000; Hong et al., 2000; Torelli & Rodas, 2024), the present research seeks to deepen our understanding of the interaction between brand iconicity and cultural congruence.

This study hypothesizes that a strong cultural fit between iconic brands and their sponsorships positively influences brand desirability. Additionally, it examines the moderating effects of individual traits such as cultural fandom and perception of threat from foreign cultures, which may influence the effectiveness of culturally congruent sponsorships.

The significance of this research lies in its dual contribution to both theory and practice. Theoretically, it extends the literature on brand management by providing empirical evidence of the role of cultural congruence in enhancing consumer engagement with iconic brands. Practically, it offers actionable insights for marketers and brand managers on how to strategically leverage cultural elements in sponsorships to maximize brand equity and consumer loyalty.

Methodologically, this study employs an experimental design to manipulate brand iconicity and cultural congruence across TV sponsorships, measuring consumer responses to assess the impact on brand perception and behavior. The results offer a nuanced understanding of how iconic brands can effectively utilize cultural congruence to strengthen their market presence and consumer appeal.

2. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

2.1. Iconic brands

A brand is a label that designates ownership by an organization, and we evaluate, feel, and associate a brand with in order to judge its value (Brakus et al., 2009). As Duncan and Moriarty (1998) put it, “perception is more important than reality” in terms of building brand value. As consumer perceptions are the only place in which brands exist, managing a brand is all about controlling perceptions. In a constantly shifting

branding environment, emotional and symbolic benefits get embodied via abstract brand meanings (Monga & John, 2010) as the value of functional benefits increases. Brands are often referred to as a shortcut that has a differential effect and embeds some of the knowledge that leads to systematic consumer responses (Keller, 1993; Letukytė & Urbonavičius, 2022).

Iconic brands have achieved a high level of recognition, prestige, and cultural significance, often becoming symbols of a particular culture or industry (Holt, 2004). These brands, such as Coca-Cola, Apple, Disney, and Harley Davidson, have not only established a strong market presence and a loyal customer base but have also transcended geographical boundaries to become universally recognized symbols of excellence and innovation (Srivastava et al., 2020). They are characterized by their enduring popularity, distinctive identity, and the ability to evoke strong emotional connections with consumers, thereby influencing consumer preferences and behaviors extensively.

The appeal of iconic brands lies not only in their products or services but also in their ability to embody certain lifestyles, values, or aspirations, making them highly desirable and influential. This resonance establishes them as trendsetters and leaders in their industries, setting standards for excellence and quality. The foundation of their iconic status includes consistent branding, memorable marketing campaigns, and a strong brand identity that engages consumers deeply (Ahmed, 2024). Moreover, iconic brands create immersive experiences that evoke specific emotions, crucial in solidifying a brand’s iconic status and ensuring its longevity in the market (Merchant et al., 2017). These brands often represent more than just commercial entities; they are cultural symbols that reflect and shape societal trends and preferences. The impact of iconic brands extends beyond mere consumption; they influence social and cultural norms and can become integral parts of consumers’ self-schema, fostering brand love and loyalty (Cova & D’Antone, 2016; Saeed et al., 2021).

Iconic brands also play a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors. By associating with cultural or identity icons as brand ambassadors, companies can enhance their brand's appeal and reach (Purnandika et al., 2022). The recognition and prestige of iconic brands are further amplified by their ability to incorporate local cultural elements, making them more appealing and relatable to diverse consumer groups (He & Wang, 2017). This global recognition is a testament to their ability to resonate with consumers across different cultures and regions. The iconicity of a brand is built not only through visual representation but also through its capacity to forge distinct associations in consumers' minds (Reghunathan & Joseph, 2021). Elements such as logos, colors, and symbols are pivotal in building brand recognition and recall, with consumers often perceiving iconic brands as epitomes of quality, prestige, and cultural significance (Safeer et al., 2022). Thus, iconic brands significantly contribute to shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors towards these brands, enhancing their market presence and influence globally.

2.2. Iconic brands and culture

The label "iconic" gets frequently used for timeless (Torelli, 2013), very well-known, and successful brands (Torelli et al., 2023), but this conceptualization of iconic brand loses key meaning of the "iconic branding" embodied culture. The distinction between iconic and non-iconic brands emerged via a definition of identity brands that represent desirable lifestyles or personality traits; however, iconic brands include values shared by entire cultural groups (Holt, 2003).

The relationship between culture and iconic brands is multifaceted and profound, characterized by the intricate interplay of global and local cultural influences that shape the iconic status of brands.

The iconic component of iconic brands (Briciu & Briciu, 2020) can be defined as "a person or thing regarded as a representative symbol, especially of

a culture or a movement; a person or an institution considered worthy of admiration or respect," according to the Oxford English Dictionary. Iconic brands have a function because symbols are important to individuals in daily life and act as the cornerstones of society (Holt, 2004).

The dynamic constructivist theory of culture states that people with experience of a certain culture (direct or indirect) will develop a culture's cognitive representation (Koh et al., 2014; Romney et al., 1996; Torelli & Rodas, 2024). A collective phenomenon, defined as a culture, consists of shared meaning and common frame of reference in a group (Causadias, 2020; Szalay & Deese, 2024). A culture is formed by these common features combined with standards for how members of the group perceive, assess, communicate, and behave (Charness & Chen, 2020).

Cultural elements play a significant role in this process, as brands often tap into local cultural capital, symbolism, and heritage to forge authenticity and prestige (Özsomer, 2012). By aligning with local cultural values, tastes, and needs, brands can resonate more deeply with consumers, enhancing their perceptions and directly influencing purchase decisions, particularly in emerging markets (He & Wang, 2017). These brands are cultural symbols, embodying specific societal values, beliefs, and ideologies. They can act as identity myths that reflect and smooth over societal tensions and anxieties through the narratives they convey (Pineda et al., 2022). This ideological role is crucial as it allows brands to reflect and shape cultural norms and identities. For example, brands can become symbols of patriotism or represent certain ideological stances, carrying a symbolic load that resonates with loyal consumers (Baibokonov et al., 2021).

Additionally, the relationship between culture and iconic brands extends to city branding. Cultural infrastructures contribute symbolic capital that policymakers can leverage to enhance a city's brand identity. Iconic buildings and large-scale cultural events play significant roles in this regard, showcasing the influence of culture in

shaping a city's identity and brand (Plaza et al., 2015). In the realm of branding, creating culturally resonant brand icons is crucial. These icons, often represented through iconic characters and symbols, can significantly impact consumer trust and attitudes, fostering emotional connections with the brand (Merchant et al., 2017). Through nostalgic brand positioning, brands tap into emotional attachment and local authenticity, further enhancing brand equity and deepening the brand-consumer relationship (Gilal et al., 2021). The process of brand iconization sees brands acquiring higher cultural, moral, and political values, transforming them into symbols that hold significant societal meaning (Kravets & Öрге, 2010). These brand icons are not merely products but complex narratives that reflect and influence contemporary societal trends (Liu, 2024).

As Özsomer (2012) notes that local iconness significantly influences perceptions of brand globalness, this suggests that a brand's iconic status within a local context can substantially enhance its overall appeal. Park & John (2010) highlight that distinctive and appealing brand personalities are pivotal in shaping consumer attitudes, thereby increasing brand attractiveness and desirability. Furthermore, other researchers such as Heinberg et al. (2019) emphasize the impact of nostalgic (in a sense iconic) brand positioning in fostering emotional attachment and enhancing brand authenticity, which in turn boosts brand desirability. Lastly, Warren et al. (2019) discuss how the concept of "Brand Coolness" contributes to a brand becoming more popular and iconic, thus positively affecting consumer perceptions of attractiveness and desirability. This leads to the following hypotheses:

H1: Iconic brands are associated with positive brand perceptions.

H2: Iconic brands are perceived as globally oriented.

Brands leverage cultural elements to create authenticity, prestige, and emotional connections with consumers. By integrating local cultural

capital, brands not only resonate more deeply with consumers but also establish themselves as potent symbols of societal values and beliefs as iconic brands. The cultural significance of iconic brands extends beyond mere consumption, shaping identities, reflecting societal tensions, and influencing consumer behaviors.

2.3. Brand sponsorships

Research conducted by Simmons & Becker-Olsen (2006) underscores the critical role of cultural considerations in the effectiveness of sponsorships, particularly when iconic brands engage with different sponsorships. High-fit sponsorships, where there is a perceived congruence between the brand and the cultural context of the TV show, can significantly enhance brand equity and consumer perceptions (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). This alignment can create a more authentic and meaningful connection with consumers, leading to increased brand loyalty and positive brand attitudes. Furthermore, sponsorships that are culturally aligned not only resonate more deeply with target audiences but also foster a sense of community among viewers who share similar cultural values and interests (Moharana et al., 2023). Such community identification can enhance brand engagement, advocacy, and loyalty, strengthening the brand's market position. The brands choosing to strategically select sponsorships that resonate with their values and appeal to their target audience are more likely to see positive outcomes and bolster their brand reputation.

The implications of sponsorship alignment extend beyond consumer engagement. Thus, researchers Lee & Mazodier (2015) demonstrated that well-aligned sponsorships can increase brand affect and trust over time, highlighting the long-term benefits of these strategic partnerships. This points to the importance of duration and consistency in sponsorships to maximize their impact on brand-related outcomes.

Moreover, the quality and quantity of sponsorships, such as those in sports and cultural events, have been shown to positively influ-

ence internal brand commitment and behavior among employees through enhanced perceptions of the brand image (Batt et al., 2021). This indicates that sponsorships can not only enhance external brand perceptions but also internally affect employee engagement and brand advocacy. In the context of TV sponsorships specifically, combining TV sponsoring with television advertising has been found to amplify the effects of sponsorships, although the impact varies depending on the context (Olson & Thjømøe, 2009). This suggests that a multi-faceted approach to sponsorship can be particularly effective. Sponsorship marketing efforts are influenced by cultural nuances, and understanding and leveraging these elements can enhance the impact of sponsorships on brand awareness and consumer perceptions (Keshkar et al., 2019). This alignment between sponsorship activities and cultural reputation can also enhance the authenticity and credibility of brands, fostering stronger consumer connections. Brands engaged in public welfare sponsorships that align with cultural values and perceptions can further influence consumer perceptions positively, enhancing brand identity and authenticity (Shen, 2019).

Overall, the integration of cultural values and practices in sponsorship strategies not only enhances the impact on consumer brand identity and symbolic image but also underscores the importance of cultural compatibility in shaping successful sponsorship outcomes, such as brand desirability. As iconic brands themselves incorporate cultural perceptions, aligning these with culturally matched sponsorships can boost the effects of sponsorships for iconic brands. Hence, the following hypothesis:

H3: Cultural congruence between an iconic brand and its sponsorships positively influences brand desirability.

2.4. Cultural identity and consumer perceptions of iconic brands

The intricate relationship between personal cultural affiliations and the perceptions of iconic brands and sponsorships reveals diverse

consumer responses based on cultural identity and heritage. Local culture fans, who are deeply rooted in their traditions and values, tend to favor sponsorships that resonate with their local customs, seeing these alignments as authentic connections with the brand, thus enhancing brand loyalty and positive perceptions (Özsomer, 2012). Furthermore, the perception of iconic brands by individuals identifying strongly with a particular culture, such as American culture fans, can also influence brand desirability. These individuals may see American iconic brands as embodying cultural values like innovation and quality, which enhances the brand's appeal and desirability within this demographic (Kim & Hong, 2007), thus:

H4: Individuals identifying as fans of American culture perceive iconic brands as more desirable compared to non-iconic brands.

However, individuals with high threat perceptions of foreign cultures view these same cultural elements differently. They may perceive iconic brands and sponsorships that represent foreign cultures through a lens of skepticism and caution, potentially viewing them as threats to cultural authenticity and traditional values (Chen et al., 2016). This sense of cultural threat can lead to ethnocentric tendencies where foreign brands are seen as economic and cultural threats, resulting in resistance or outright rejection of these brands (German, 2020). These individuals might also exhibit a preference for local brands, which they perceive to be more aligned with their cultural values and norms, viewing them as more trustworthy and less likely to pose a cultural threat (Dawar & Lei, 2009). They would rate iconic brands as less iconic and less global in a defensive reaction stemming from a desire to protect and preserve one's own cultural heritage in the face of perceived foreign cultural influences, leading to the hypothesis:

H5: Individuals with high threat perception of foreign cultures perceive iconic brands as less global and less iconic compared to non-iconic brands.

In conclusion, iconic brands, recognized for their cultural significance and strong market presence, might enhance consumer perceptions through culturally congruent sponsorships that might amplify their inherent appeal. However, the impact of these strategies may vary based on individual traits such as threat perception and cultural fandom. Consumers with high threat perceptions may view iconic brands and their sponsorships with skepticism, potentially reducing the positive effects, while fans of a specific culture might show increased loyalty and affinity, enhancing these effects.

3. METHODOLOGY

The primary aim of this study was to investigate how cultural congruence influences consumer perceptions of brands, particularly focusing on the perceptions of iconicity and cultural embodiment within diverse cultural contexts. To achieve this, the study utilized both iconic and non-iconic brands—Avanti (a fictional brand) and Ford—as subjects of the analysis, alongside television shows “How I Met Your Father” and “All of Us Are Dead” to provide the cultural context.

3.1. Participants and design

Participants from the US, recruited using the Mechanical Turk (MTurk) platform ($N=79$, 43% female, $M_{age}=38.3$, $SD_{age}=10.5$) with CloudResearch controls, completed the study in exchange for monetary compensation. The sample distribution by age groups included 13% of participants aged 20-29, 36% aged 30-39, 18% aged 40-49, 8% aged 50-59, and 4% aged 60 and older, reflecting a diverse age range predominantly skewed towards younger and middle-aged adults.

The experimental design of the study utilized a 2x2 factorial arrangement (between-subjects

design), where participants were exposed to one of four different scenarios based on a combination of brand type (non-iconic vs. iconic) and show culture (foreign vs. local). This design allowed for the examination of how the interaction between the iconicity of a brand and the cultural context of a television show influences consumer perceptions.

Both iconic and non-iconic brands—Avanti (a fictional brand) and Ford—were used as subjects of the analysis, with television shows “How I Met Your Father” and “All of Us Are Dead” providing the cultural context. Avanti was selected to represent a non-iconic, lesser-known brand in contrast with the well-established, iconic Ford, allowing for a clearer examination of the impact of brand iconicity. The choice of “How I Met Your Father” catered to American cultural elements, leveraging its relevance to the American sample, while “All of Us Are Dead,” as a show that capitalized on the growing popularity of Korean culture globally, was used to introduce a distinct foreign cultural influence (Figure 1). The manipulation of local culture as American and Korean as foreign was strategic, considering the sampling context (the United States via MTurk) and the rising global fascination with Korean culture, respectively. This setup was ideal for exploring the nuanced ways in which local vs. foreign cultural elements can affect brand perception in a market increasingly influenced by both global and local cultural narratives.

The decision to use a relatively small sample size of 79 participants was predicated on the expectation of observing medium to large effect sizes (Aleem et al., 2024), which would allow for meaningful analysis despite the smaller cohort. This approach ensured that the study could efficiently capture significant cultural impacts on brand perception without the need for a large-scale sample, which might dilute the specific cultural effects being studied.

FIGURE 1: Stimuli for non-iconic and iconic brand sponsorships with different culture TV shows



Source: Author's own research.

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3.2. Measures

In this study, a range of measures were assessed using a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree) to capture diverse perceptions related to brand and cultural engagement (adapted from Choi et al. (2007)). Brand Iconicity was evaluated through statements such as “Ford/Avanti is an icon of American/Korean culture,” while Brand Embodiment of Cultural Values was measured by responses to “Ford/Avanti embodies American/Korean culture values.” The association of TV series with

cultural elements was gauged using the statement “I associate this TV series ‘How I Met Your Father/All of Us Are Dead’ with things that are in ‘American/Korean’ culture.” Show Familiarity was explored both through binary responses (Yes/No) to whether participants had seen the show, and a scale measuring familiarity ranging from “Very unfamiliar” to “Very familiar.” Similar scales assessed Brand Familiarity, Brand Globality, and Brand Culture Association. Additionally, the attractiveness, appeal, and desirability (adapted from Freling et al. (2011)) of the brands were measured together with participants’ attitudes towards specific advertisements. The global perception of the TV series was also evaluated, along with participants’ self-identification with the American culture and their perception of foreign cultures as a threat. These comprehensive measures allowed the study to deeply analyze the interactions between cultural identity, brand perception, and consumer behavior within a structured experimental design.

3.3. Manipulation checks

Manipulation checks were conducted to assess the efficacy of the experimental conditions. In the comparison between non-iconic and iconic brand conditions, there was a statistically significant difference in the perceived iconicity of the brand ($M_{\text{iconic}}=6.28$, $SD=0.83$ vs. $M_{\text{non-iconic}}=3.28$, $SD=1.66$, $F_{(1,77)}=104.31$, $p<0.001$, $\eta^2=0.64$) and the embodiment of cultural values ($M_{\text{iconic}}=5.72$, $SD=0.83$ vs. $M_{\text{non-iconic}}=1.05$, $SD=1.72$, $F_{(1,77)}=41.9$, $p<0.001$, $\eta^2=0.39$). The iconic brand condition scored higher than the non-iconic brand condition, indicating a successful manipulation of brand iconicity. Similarly, significant differences were observed in the perception of cultures between foreign and local show conditions. While the American culture was perceived to be more prevalent in local culture shows ($M_{\text{local}}=5.33$, $SD=1.06$ vs. $M_{\text{foreign}}=3.14$, $SD=1.73$, $F_{(1,77)}=43.85$, $p<0.001$, $\eta^2=0.44$), the Korean culture was more strongly associated with foreign culture shows ($M_{\text{foreign}}=5.5$, $SD=1.44$ vs. $M_{\text{local}}=2.07$, $SD=1.1$, $F_{(1,77)}=136.72$, $p<0.001$, $\eta^2=0.68$), demonstrating a successful manipulation of show cultures. To verify the effectiveness of employing lesser-known shows, presumed to be less familiar to the audience, the study investigated differences in familiarity and viewership. The results revealed no significant differences: familiarity ($M_{\text{local}}=2.79$, $SD=2.03$ vs. $M_{\text{foreign}}=3.28$, $SD=2.47$, $F_{(1,77)}=0.9$, $p=0.35$) and viewership ($M_{\text{local}}=1.77$, $SD=0.43$ vs. $M_{\text{foreign}}=1.69$, $SD=0.47$, $F_{(1,77)}=0.52$, $p=0.47$). This suggests that manipulation successfully minimized the influence of prior familiarity and perceptions, thereby confirming that any observed effects could be attributed to the experimental conditions rather than pre-existing knowledge.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Effects of brand iconicity on consumer perceptions

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to assess the impact of brand iconicity on consumer perceptions, revealing significant differences across various brand-related attributes (Table 1).

Notably, brand familiarity was substantially higher for iconic brands ($M_{\text{iconic}}=6.46$, $SD=0.82$ vs. $M_{\text{non-iconic}}=2.20$, $SD=1.74$, $F_{(1,77)}=194.79$, $p<0.001$, $\eta^2=0.78$). This pattern was consistent with brand globality, where iconic brands were perceived to be more globally recognized ($M_{\text{iconic}}=6.00$, $SD=1.10$ vs. $M_{\text{non-iconic}}=3.88$, $SD=1.51$, $F_{(1,77)}=51.50$, $p<0.001$, $\eta^2=0.42$). Similar results were found with regard to perceptions of cultural association, particularly with local (American) culture with iconic brands scoring significantly higher ($M_{\text{iconic}}=6.33$, $SD=0.90$ vs. $M_{\text{non-iconic}}=3.53$, $SD=1.55$, $F_{(1,77)}=97.45$, $p<0.001$, $\eta^2=0.61$) and non-iconic brands being more strongly associated with foreign (Korean) culture ($M_{\text{iconic}}=2.33$, $SD=1.71$ vs. $M_{\text{non-iconic}}=3.70$, $SD=0.99$, $F_{(1,77)}=18.81$, $p<0.001$, $\eta^2=0.24$). Furthermore, brand appeal was significantly higher for iconic brands ($M_{\text{iconic}}=5.26$, $SD=1.25$ vs. $M_{\text{non-iconic}}=4.43$, $SD=1.38$, $F_{(1,77)}=7.91$, $p<0.01$, $\eta^2=0.09$), as was brand attractiveness ($M_{\text{iconic}}=5.15$, $SD=1.46$ vs. $M_{\text{non-iconic}}=4.48$, $SD=1.40$, $F_{(1,77)}=4.46$, $p<0.05$, $\eta^2=0.05$), and brand desirability ($M_{\text{iconic}}=5.03$, $SD=1.35$ vs. $M_{\text{non-iconic}}=4.33$, $SD=1.21$, $F_{(1,77)}=5.92$, $p<0.05$, $\eta^2=0.07$). Thus, H1 was confirmed as iconic brands led to higher brand appeal, attractiveness, and desirability. H2 was also confirmed as perception of globality was significantly higher for iconic brands. However, there was no significant difference in attitudes towards advertisements (Table 1).

TABLE 1: Effects of brand iconicity on consumer perceptions

| Variable | Mean (iconic) | SD (iconic) | Mean (non-iconic) | SD (non-iconic) | F-sta- tistic | p- value | Effect size (η^2) |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|----------------|----------------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------|-----------------------------|
| Brand familiarity | 6.46 | 0.82 | 2.20 | 1.74 | 194.79 | <0.001 | 0.78 |
| Brand globality | 6.00 | 1.10 | 3.88 | 1.51 | 51.50 | <0.001 | 0.42 |
| Local brand culture (American) | 6.33 | 0.90 | 3.53 | 1.55 | 97.45 | <0.001 | 0.61 |
| Foreign brand culture (Korean) | 2.33 | 1.71 | 3.70 | 0.99 | 18.81 | <0.001 | 0.24 |
| Brand appeal | 5.26 | 1.25 | 4.43 | 1.38 | 7.91 | <0.01 | 0.09 |
| Brand attractiveness | 5.15 | 1.46 | 4.48 | 1.40 | 4.46 | <0.05 | 0.05 |
| Brand desirability | 5.03 | 1.35 | 4.33 | 1.21 | 5.92 | <0.05 | 0.07 |
| Attitude towards advertisement | 4.46 | 1.64 | 4.25 | 1.58 | 0.34 | 0.561 | 0 |

Source: Author's own research. SD – standard deviation.

4.2. Effects of cultural sponsorships on consumer perceptions

In examining the differences between local and foreign shows across various brand and consumer perception metrics, the analysis revealed minimal and statistically non-significant differences. Specifically, local shows had a slightly lower global perception score ($M_{\text{local}}=4.07$) compared to foreign shows ($M_{\text{foreign}}=4.31$), though this difference was not significant ($p=0.56$). Attitudes towards advertisements were slightly more favorable in local shows ($M_{\text{local}}=4.49$) than in

foreign shows ($M_{\text{foreign}}=4.19$), yet this too lacked statistical significance ($p=0.42$). Similarly, brand appeal, attractiveness, and desirability showed negligible differences between local and foreign shows, with local shows scoring marginally higher on desirability and lower on appeal and attractiveness, none of which were significant ($p>0.05$ for all). Collectively, these findings suggest that whether a show is local or foreign has little impact on global perceptions, attractiveness, appeal, and desirability, indicating similar consumer reception regardless of the show's cultural context (Table 2).

TABLE 2: Effects of cultural sponsorships on consumer perceptions

| Variable | Mean (local) | SD (local) | Mean (foreign) | SD (foreign) | F-sta- tistic | p- value | Effect size (η^2) |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------------|-----------------|------------------|-------------|-----------------------------|
| Perception as a global show | 4.07 | 1.60 | 4.31 | 1.93 | 0.34 | 0.56 | 0.01 |
| Attitude towards advertisement | 4.49 | 1.65 | 4.19 | 1.55 | 0.66 | 0.42 | 0.01 |
| Brand appeal | 4.79 | 1.34 | 4.89 | 1.43 | 0.10 | 0.76 | 0.00 |
| Brand attractiveness | 4.74 | 1.38 | 4.89 | 1.56 | 0.19 | 0.67 | 0.00 |
| Brand desirability | 4.72 | 1.33 | 4.61 | 1.32 | 0.13 | 0.71 | 0.00 |

Source: Author's own research. SD – standard deviation.

4.3. Effects of cultural congruence on brand desire

Significant interaction effects (Table 3) were found in the analysis between brand type (iconic vs. non-iconic) and show type (foreign vs. local culture) on desirability of the brand ($F_{(1,75)}=4.11$, $p=0.0463$).

4.4. Moderating effects of cultural fandom and threat perception on brand iconicity

In moderation analysis using R (Model 1, Haynes (2017) approach), significant relationships emerged across various brand and consumer perception variables in conditions distinguished

TABLE 3: Effects of cultural congruence on brand desire

| Interaction | Degrees of freedom | Sum of squares | F-value | P-value | Significant |
|--|--------------------|----------------|---------|---------|-------------|
| Non-iconic vs iconic | 1 | 9.69 | 6.10 | 0.02 | Yes |
| Foreign vs local show culture | 1 | 0.13 | 0.08 | 0.77 | No |
| Interaction (iconicity x show culture) | 1 | 6.52 | 4.11 | 0.0463 | Yes |
| Residuals | 75 | 119.10 | | | |

Source: Author's own research. SD – standard deviation.

Tukey's post hoc tests further delineated these interactions, showing a significant difference between the combined condition of iconic brands in local shows and non-iconic brands in foreign shows, with a mean increase of 1.223 in brand desirability ($p=0.0112$). However, other pairwise comparisons within the interaction framework did not reach statistical significance, indicating that the distinct impact observed is primarily evident when iconic brands are associated with local culture shows. Thus, H3 was confirmed as the iconic brand was perceived to be more desirable when paired with local (American) culture.

by brand type (non-iconic vs. iconic) and cultural context of shows (foreign vs. local). Brand desirability increased for fans of local (American) culture with a coefficient of 0.37 ($p=0.02$). Moreover, a high threat perception of foreign cultures led to negative perceptions of brand globality, and brand iconicity with coefficients of -0.41 ($p=0.01$) and -0.62 ($p<0.001$), respectively. In the context of show culture, the appreciation of global show culture among local (American) culture fans increased (0.67, $p=0.01$).

TABLE 4: Moderating effects of cultural fandom and threat perception

| Condition | Response variable | Moderator | Coefficient | P-value |
|--|---------------------|---|-------------|---------|
| Non iconic brand vs iconic brand | Brand desirability | Individuals identifying as fan of American culture | 0.37 | 0.02 |
| Non iconic brand vs iconic brand | Brand globality | Individuals with high threat perception of foreign cultures | -0.41 | 0.01 |
| Non iconic brand vs iconic brand | Brand iconicity | Individuals with high threat perception of foreign cultures | -0.62 | <0.001 |
| Foreign culture show vs local culture show | Global show culture | Individuals identifying as fan of American culture | 0.67 | 0.01 |

Source: Author's own research. SD – standard deviation.

H4 was confirmed as individuals identifying as fans of the American culture perceived iconic brands to be more desirable compared to non-iconic brands. Given that individuals with high threat perception of foreign cultures perceive iconic brands to be less global and less iconic, H5 was also confirmed.

4.5. Results discussion

This research study provides a comprehensive analysis of the way in which cultural factors and individual differences influence consumer perceptions of iconic brands. Through a series of systematic evaluations involving main effects, interaction effects, and moderating influences, each element offered unique insights into brand perception across different consumer segments. The main effects revealed that iconic brands are associated with positive brand perceptions, confirming their enhanced appeal and desirability (Holt, 2004). This finding suggests that iconic brands, due to their strong identity, culture, and emotional connections, maintain a distinguished position in the marketplace, resonating widely across diverse consumer bases. Additionally, the study confirmed that iconic brands are perceived to be more globally oriented, indicating their widespread recognition and acceptance beyond local markets (Özsomer, 2012). This supports the notion that iconic brands transcend cultural and geographic boundaries to appeal to a global consumer base.

Further analysis of interaction effects explored how the type of brand (iconic vs. non-iconic) and the cultural context of media (local vs. foreign culture) influenced brand desirability. A significant interaction was observed, where iconic brands paired with fitting local culture shows were perceived to be more desirable than non-iconic brands in foreign shows. This interaction underscores the synergy between congruent cultural elements and iconic brands, suggesting that cultural familiarity can significantly enhance brand desirability (Torelli & Cheng, 2015). The moderating effects provided additional depth, showing how individual

traits such as cultural fandom and perceptions of threat from foreign cultures modulate perceptions of brand globality and iconicity. Fans of the American culture demonstrated a heightened desirability for iconic brands, reinforcing the role of cultural identity in shaping brand preference (Merchant et al., 2017). Conversely, individuals with a high perception of threat from foreign cultures perceived iconic brands to be less global and less iconic, highlighting that cultural defenses can negatively impact brand perception (He & Wang, 2017).

4.6. Theoretical implications

This research study extends Holt's (2004) iconic brands theory, which posits that iconic brands achieve a unique status by embodying cultural ideals that resonate deeply with consumers. The study's confirmation that iconic brands are perceived to be more globally oriented and more desirable when aligned with local culture enhances our understanding of how global and local dynamics can be synergistically managed to boost brand prestige and consumer attachment. This expansion of Holt's theory underscores the strategic importance of integrating local cultural elements to enhance a brand's global appeal, suggesting a dual-focused approach to brand identity construction that respects and utilizes cultural nuances (Holt, 2004).

The findings also provide empirical support for the dynamic constructivist theory of culture, which argues that individuals' cultural perceptions can dynamically influence their cognitive processes and behaviors (Hollan, 2000; Hong et al., 2000; Torelli & Rodas, 2024). By demonstrating that individual traits such as cultural fandom and threat perceptions toward foreign cultures moderate perceptions of brand iconicity and globality, the study highlights the fluid nature of cultural influence on consumer behavior. This integration not only enriches the dynamic constructivist perspective but also suggests practical ways in which marketers can anticipate and react to varying cultural orientations in their target markets.

Moreover, this research contributes to the literature on cultural fit in marketing by illustrating how the congruence between a brand's cultural messaging and the consumer's cultural identity enhances brand desirability. Previous studies have shown that cultural fit affects consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty (Bae et al., 2020; Mazodier & Merunka, 2012); this study builds on these insights by showing how cultural fit specifically influences the perception of iconicity and globality, thereby affecting brand attractiveness and market effectiveness. This contribution is particularly relevant in an era where consumers are increasingly looking for brands that not only meet functional needs but also align with their cultural values and identities.

Finally, the study advances our understanding of global branding strategies by elucidating how brands can effectively manage the tension between global standardization and local adaptation. The interactions between brand type and show type, as well as the moderating effects of individual cultural orientations, offer deeper insights into how global brands can strategically navigate cultural complexities to maximize consumer engagement and loyalty. This addresses a significant gap in the global branding literature, which has debated the relative merits of standardization versus adaptation for several decades (Schuiling & Kapferer, 2004).

4.7. Practical implications

The present study highlighted the importance of integrating congruent cultural elements into branding strategies. Marketers are advised to harness cultural sponsorships to enhance the appeal and relevance of their brands in specific markets. This approach not only boosts brand desirability but also strengthens consumer connections with the brand, thereby fostering loyalty and enhancing overall market competitiveness (Holt, 2004; Merchant et al., 2017). By effectively blending brand identity with relevant cultural values, marketers can create a compelling brand narrative that appeals to both local sensibilities and global aspirations.

Findings regarding the moderating effects of individual cultural orientations—such as cultural fandom and perceptions of threat from foreign cultures—underscore the need for targeted marketing strategies. Marketers should segment their audience based on these traits and tailor their marketing campaigns accordingly (Usunier et al., 2005). For example, in markets where consumers exhibit high levels of cultural pride or sensitivity, brands should emphasize their commitment to local values and highlight how they respect and incorporate local traditions and practices.

The research indicated that perceptions of brand globality and iconicity could be carefully managed through marketing communications that align with consumer perceptions of cultural congruence. Marketers should ensure that their branding efforts communicate the global stature of their brands while maintaining a level of authenticity that resonates with local audiences (He & Wang, 2017). This balancing act is crucial for avoiding the pitfalls of cultural dissonance, which can lead to reduced brand effectiveness and alienation of potential customers.

The positive impact of cultural congruence between iconic brands and their sponsorships on brand desirability suggests that selecting culturally relevant sponsorship opportunities is a powerful way to enhance brand equity. Marketers need to choose sponsorships that not only reflect the brand's values but those that also resonate with the cultural narratives and preferences of their target audience (Özsomer, 2012). This strategy can significantly increase the effectiveness of marketing efforts, as consumers are more likely to engage with and support brands that they perceive to be aligned with their cultural identity and values.

Finally, the study highlights the ongoing need for cultural adaptation and sensitivity in global marketing efforts. As consumer demographics and cultural dynamics continue to evolve, marketers must remain agile, continually updating their understanding of local markets and adjusting their strategies to maintain relevance and

effectiveness (Srivastava et al., 2020). This dynamic approach to cultural adaptation will help brands stay competitive in a rapidly changing global market.

4.8. Limitations and further research

This study, while comprehensive, possesses certain limitations that suggest directions for further research. Primarily, the experimental design, focused predominantly on the interplay between iconicity and cultural congruence, may not capture the full spectrum of factors influencing consumer behavior in naturalistic settings. This limitation highlights the need for longitudinal studies that can track changes in consumer perceptions over time, providing insights into how enduring these effects are and how they evolve with shifts in cultural trends and market dynamics. Additionally, the research predominantly centers on American cultural contexts and American sample, which may not be universally applicable across different global settings. Moreover, the sample size, though adequate for initial explorations, may limit the statistical power to detect smaller effect sizes and nuances in consumer behavior across different demographics. This smaller sample size also skews towards younger audiences. This demographic skew could potentially bias the results towards the perceptions and behaviors that are more typical of younger consumers, possibly overlooking the insights that could be gained from older demographic segments who may interact with brands and cultural content differently. Expanding the sample to include a broader age range and more participants would enable a more robust analysis of how various age groups perceive and are influenced by brand iconicity and cultural congruence.

Future studies should explore these dynamics in varied cultural landscapes to verify the

generalizability of the findings and expand the understanding of global consumer behavior. Furthermore, the impact of different media sponsorships and consumer engagement was not explicitly addressed, suggesting another avenue for research given the increasing types of sponsorships. By addressing these areas, subsequent research can offer deeper, more comprehensive insights into the intricate relationship between brand management strategies and consumer responses in an interconnected global marketplace.

5. CONCLUSION

This research study successfully closes a significant gap in the understanding of how cultural congruence, individual differences, and iconic brand perceptions influence consumer behavior. By integrating the theories of iconic branding and cultural dynamics, the study provides a nuanced view of how brands can leverage cultural elements through sponsorships and enhance their appeal and resonance across diverse consumer groups. The findings demonstrate that the strategic alignment of culturally rich brands (iconic brands) with cultural elements of sponsorship significantly enhances brand desirability, while individual traits such as cultural fandom and perceptions of threat from foreign cultures play critical roles in shaping consumer perceptions of iconic brands.

In conclusion, this research not only bridges theoretical gaps but also equips practitioners with the knowledge necessary for managing cultural brand equity more effectively in sponsorship contexts. The insights gained from this study are crucial for developing a strategic approach that aligns with both global aspirations and local sensitivities, ensuring that brands not only survive but thrive in the competitive and culturally complex landscape of international markets.

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