

## Youth Consumer Preferences for Local vs. International Brands: Implications for SMEs in Kabwe District, Zambia

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### Abstract

The increasing presence of international brands in developing economies has intensified competition for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), making it important to understand the factors influencing consumer preferences for local versus international brands. This study examined youth consumer preferences for local and international brands and their implications for SMEs in Kabwe District, Zambia. Guided by Consumer Ethnocentrism Theory, the study investigated the influence of local brand perception, international brand perception, social influence, cultural and emotional attachment, and marketing and availability factors on purchase intentions. An explanatory cross-sectional research design was adopted, and data were collected from 139 youths using a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis were employed to analyse the data. The findings revealed that respondents generally exhibited stronger preferences for local brands than international brands. Local brand perception ( $B = 0.405, p < .001$ ), social influence ( $B = 0.313, p = .001$ ), and cultural and emotional attachment ( $B = 0.308, p < .001$ ) significantly influenced purchase intentions toward local brands, while international brand perception ( $B = 0.507, p < .001$ ) was the only significant predictor of purchase intentions toward international brands. Marketing and availability factors were not significant predictors for either brand category. The findings suggest that consumer preferences are driven more by perceptions, emotional connections, cultural identity, and social influences than by promotional activities alone. The study concludes that SMEs can strengthen their competitiveness by improving product quality, enhancing brand image, leveraging cultural identity, and building stronger emotional connections with consumers. These findings provide valuable insights for SME owners, policymakers, and marketing practitioners seeking to promote local brand consumption and improve SME sustainability in Zambia.

## 1. Introduction

Consumer preference plays an important role in shaping purchasing decisions and determining the competitiveness of SMEs in the modern markets. Consumer preference on goods is considered a pre-purchase activity that precedes the actual buying of goods (Kumar & Joseph, 2014; Silwimba & Mwiya, 2017). In today's increasingly globalized marketplace, consumers are constantly faced with choices between local and international brands across different product categories. As globalization continues to integrate economies and markets, consumers in many countries are now presented with a wide variety of brands, both foreign and domestic (Lee et al., 2008; Mwiya, 2012). Consequently, understanding why consumers prefer local or international brands has become an important area of interest among researchers, policymakers, and business practitioners.

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are widely recognised as fundamental drivers of economic growth, innovation, and employment creation across both developed and developing economies. Globally, SMEs represent a dominant proportion of business enterprises and play a critical role in supporting economic development, poverty reduction, and structural transformation (Ayyagari et al., 2014; Beck & Demirgüç-Kunt, 2006; OECD, 2017). Recent global estimates indicate that SMEs account for nearly 90% of all registered businesses worldwide and generate more than 50% of global employment (World Bank Group, 2018; IFC, 2019). In developing economies, SMEs also strengthen local supply chains, support household income generation, and stimulate grassroots entrepreneurship (Abor & Quartey, 2010; Mwiya et al., 2017). These contributions make SMEs central actors in economic systems and national development agendas.

Within the African context, SMEs play an especially important role in addressing unemployment, promoting inclusive growth, and supporting economic diversification. African economies are characterised by rapidly growing populations and expanding labour markets, conditions that place increasing pressure on governments to create employment opportunities. SMEs have therefore become essential vehicles for absorbing labour and fostering entrepreneurial activity across the continent (Fatoki, 2014; Rogerson, 2001). However, despite their significant contributions, many African SMEs continue to face structural challenges such as limited access to finance, weak institutional support systems, technological limitations, and managerial capability constraints (Amoah & Amoah, 2018).

In Zambia, SMEs constitute a major pillar of the national economy and contribute significantly to employment creation, poverty reduction, and local economic development. SMEs operate across various sectors including trading, agriculture, manufacturing, hospitality, and services, many of which have strong labour absorption capacity (ZDA, 2016; Mulenga & Van De Walle, 2020; Mufalali et al., 2026). These enterprises also play a critical role in connecting local producers with consumers and ensuring the availability of both locally produced and imported products within the market. However, despite their importance, many SMEs in Zambia struggle to achieve sustainable growth and competitive performance. Research indicates that SME development in Zambia continues to be constrained by limited access to finance, inadequate infrastructure, weak managerial capabilities, and low technological adoption (Ndulo, 2011; Muleya & Ng'andu, 2021; Simasiku et al., 2026). Furthermore, the World Bank Group (2018) reported that SME capacity utilisation in Zambia stood at approximately 67 percent, one of the lowest levels in Sub-Saharan Africa, while the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM, 2019) highlighted persistently high SME failure rates.

One important challenge affecting SMEs in Zambia is the growing competition between local and international brands. As globalization has accelerated, multinational companies have expanded into developing economies, exposing consumers to a wide variety of imported products. Consequently, consumers are increasingly required to make choices between local brands and international brands (Ozsoy, 2012). In highly competitive markets, understanding how consumers make purchasing decisions has become essential for SMEs seeking to remain competitive and sustainable. Knowledge of consumers' perceptions and preferences can therefore become the bedrock for competitive advantage and market positioning.

The debate regarding local versus international brands has become more pronounced among young consumers. Studies indicate that young people and teenagers are often attracted to foreign brands because such brands are associated with prestige, visibility, modern lifestyles, and social differentiation (Kumar & Kim, 2009). Similarly, Kashi (2013) observed that consumers' preference for foreign brands is influenced by perceived quality, emotional value, and the desire for uniqueness. At the same time, local brands continue to attract consumers because of affordability, accessibility, cultural familiarity, and patriotic sentiments. These contrasting perceptions have intensified competition between local SMEs and multinational corporations, particularly in developing economies where imported products are increasingly visible.

In Zambia, consumer preferences for local versus imported products vary across product categories. Studies indicate that consumers tend to prefer local products such as fresh produce and locally manufactured food products because of lower prices and perceived freshness (Mumba et al., 2021; Mundia et al., 2025). However, for products such as electronics, clothing, and luxury goods, consumers often favour imported products due to perceptions of superior quality, prestige, and greater variety (Harrison & Lervik, 2019; Akinwale & Afolabi, 2022). The aggressive marketing strategies employed by global brands have also contributed to changing consumer perceptions, particularly among youths and middle-income consumers. Despite government interventions such as the "Buy Zambian" campaign and the National Trade Policy of 2018 aimed at supporting local industries and SMEs (Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry, 2020; Zambia Association of Manufacturers, 2020), imported products continue to exert strong competitive pressure on local enterprises.

Kabwe District presents an important setting for examining these dynamics because of its growing urban population, expanding retail sector, and increasing exposure to both local and international brands. Youths in Kabwe are continuously exposed to changing consumption patterns driven by globalization, social media influence, digital marketing, and evolving lifestyle aspirations. However, there remains limited empirical evidence regarding the factors influencing youths' preferences for local versus international brands and the implications of such preferences for SMEs in Zambia. Against this backdrop, this study seeks to examine youth consumer preferences for local versus international brands and determine the implications of these preferences for SMEs in Kabwe District, Zambia.

## 1.2 Research Hypotheses

Ho1: Positive perceptions of local brands have a significant positive influence on youths' purchase intentions toward local brands in Kabwe District, Zambia.

Ho2: Positive perceptions of international brands have a significant positive influence on youths' purchase intentions toward international brands in Kabwe District, Zambia.

Ho3: Social influence has a significant positive influence on youths' preference for local brands in Kabwe District, Zambia.

Ho4: Cultural and emotional attachment has a significant positive influence on youths' purchase intentions toward local brands in Kabwe District, Zambia.

Ho5: Marketing and product availability have a significant positive influence on youths' purchase intentions toward local brands in Kabwe District, Zambia.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

#### Consumer Ethnocentrism Theory

This study is anchored on Consumer Ethnocentrism Theory, which originated from the concept of ethnocentrism proposed by Sumner (1907) and was later adapted to consumer behaviour by Shimp and Sharma (1987). The theory explains consumers' beliefs regarding the appropriateness of purchasing domestic products instead of foreign-made alternatives. It posits that consumers often evaluate products not only based on quality, price, and functionality but also according to their country of origin and the perceived economic and social consequences of their purchasing decisions.

Consumer Ethnocentrism Theory suggests that individuals with strong ethnocentric tendencies prefer locally produced goods because they believe such purchases support domestic employment, economic development, and national welfare. Conversely, purchasing foreign products may be viewed as detrimental to local industries and economic growth. As a result, ethnocentric consumers tend to demonstrate stronger preferences for local brands and less favourable attitudes toward international brands.

According to Baber et al. (2024), consumer ethnocentrism is influenced by factors such as patriotism, cultural identity, collectivism, social class, and openness to foreign cultures. The theory further explains important consumer outcomes, including brand preference, purchase intention, willingness to pay, repeat purchase behaviour, and attitudes toward imported products. Empirical evidence indicates that stronger ethnocentric tendencies are associated with greater preference for domestic brands and higher intentions to purchase local products.

The theory is particularly relevant to this study because it provides a framework for understanding how local brand perceptions, cultural and emotional attachment, social influences, and perceptions of international brands shape youth consumer preferences in Kabwe District. It therefore offers a suitable foundation for examining factors influencing preferences for local versus international brands and their implications for SME competitiveness in Zambia.

## 2.2 Empirical Review

Brands play an important role in shaping consumer preferences and purchase decisions, especially in competitive markets where consumers are exposed to both local and international products. Wood (2000) noted the complexity of defining the brand construct, but generally regarded a brand as a unique means of giving a product distinctive feature for attaining competitive advantage. Similarly, the American Marketing Association defines a brand as a name, term, sign, symbol, design, or a combination of these, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller and differentiate them from those of competitors (Keller, 1998). In consumer decision-making, brands often serve as cues for evaluating product quality, reducing information search, and guiding purchase choices (Ger et al., 1993). This is particularly important for SMEs, whose competitiveness may depend on how consumers perceive the quality, value, and identity of their brands.

The literature shows that consumer preference for local versus international brands is influenced by several factors, including perceived quality, price, emotional value, brand loyalty, social status, and country of origin. Schiffman et al. (2010) argue that brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand image are important indicators of brand equity. Ozsomer (2012), using signaling theory, explains that where markets are characterized by imperfect and asymmetric information, firms may use brand signals to communicate quality and other product attributes to consumers. In this sense, brand image and brand association become important tools through which SMEs can position local products against international competitors.

Perceived quality has received considerable attention in explaining consumer preference. Zeithaml (1988) defines perceived quality as the consumer's judgment about a product's overall excellence or superiority. Similarly, Yoo et al. (2000) argue that perceived quality helps consumers recognize the differentiation and superiority of a particular brand, thereby encouraging them to choose that brand over competing alternatives. Studies suggest that consumers often use cues such as price, country of origin, performance, and brand image to determine quality (Andaleeb, 1995; Dodds et al., 1991; Yoo et al., 2000). In many developing markets, international brands are frequently perceived as superior because of their global availability, advanced production technologies, and prestigious image (Nguyen, Barrett & Miller, 2005; Steenkamp, Batra & Alden, 2003). However, some studies also indicate that local products may be perceived as more authentic and culturally relevant, thereby encouraging loyalty among consumers who value local identity (Harrison & Lervik, 2019; Smith & Jones, 2022).

Price is another major factor influencing consumer preference. Hansen (2005) argues that price is one of the most important extrinsic cues consumers use when evaluating products and brands. In price-sensitive markets, imported goods may benefit from lower production costs and economies of scale, making them attractive to consumers seeking affordability (Dunning, 2020). This creates pressure on local SMEs to improve efficiency and manage costs while maintaining product quality (Kanyenze, 2021). Chanda and Mulenga (2023) further observed that while consumers may support local products, the competitive pricing and wider availability of imported products often challenge local SMEs' market position.

Consumer preference is also shaped by emotional value and the need for uniqueness. Emotional value refers to the benefit derived from the feelings or affective states that a product generates, such as enjoyment, pleasure, pride, or social recognition (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). Kumar and Kim (2008) found that emotional value significantly influences purchase intention toward both foreign and local brands. Similarly, Batra et al. (2000) observed that brands from Western countries often carry symbolic and emotional meaning in developing countries, especially among consumers who associate them with modernity, prestige, and status. The theory of consumers' need for uniqueness further explains that some individuals seek products that help them differentiate themselves from others (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977; Tian & Hunter, 2001). Consumers with a high need for uniqueness tend to adopt new products or brands more quickly than those with a low need for uniqueness (Amaldoss & Jain, 2005; Zimmer et al., 1999). This partly explains why young consumers may prefer international brands when such brands are associated with sophistication, modern lifestyles, and social visibility.

Country of origin also plays a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions. Nagashima (1970) describes country-of-origin effect as the image, reputation, and stereotype that consumers attach to products or brands from a specific country. Elliott and Cameron (1994) further explain that country of origin may have positive or negative influence on consumers' decision-making processes. Consumers may perceive brands from certain countries as more reliable, fashionable, technologically advanced, or prestigious depending on the product category. For example, global brands may be preferred because they are associated with higher prestige, cosmopolitanism, and modernity (Schuiling & Kapferer, 2004; Shocker, Srivastava, & Rueckert, 1994; Steenkamp et al., 2003). However, Ger (1999) argues that local brands can also create sustainable unique value by drawing on cultural understanding, authenticity, and local relevance.

Empirical studies in Africa and Zambia show that consumer preferences are shaped by a combination of economic, cultural, and social factors. Akinwale and Afolabi (2022), in a study on consumer preferences and SME competitiveness in Kenya, found that price, quality, and perceived local value significantly influenced consumer preference. The study concluded that SMEs could enhance competitiveness by focusing on product quality, branding, and leveraging local consumer support. In Zambia, Mumba et al. (2021) found that consumers increasingly support local products because of perceived quality and contribution to the local economy, although this preference is often challenged by imported products that offer lower prices and greater variety. Similarly, Chanda and Mulenga (2023) noted that consumer preference for local products provides opportunities for SMEs, but only where local enterprises are able to improve quality, branding, availability, and customer loyalty.

Overall, the empirical literature suggests that youth consumer preference for local versus international brands is influenced by perceived quality, emotional value, price, social influence, country of origin, and cultural attachment. International brands often benefit from perceptions of superior quality, prestige, uniqueness, and global image, while local brands may benefit from affordability, authenticity, cultural relevance, and national pride. For SMEs in Kabwe District, these findings imply that competitiveness depends not only on producing local products but also on strengthening brand quality, improving packaging, increasing visibility, building emotional connections with consumers, and positioning local brands as credible alternatives to international brands.

### 3 Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study adopted an explanatory cross-sectional research design to examine the relationship between consumer perceptions, social, cultural, marketing factors, and youth purchase intentions toward local and international brands in Kabwe District, Zambia (Mundia et al., 2026; Mufalali et al., 2026). An explanatory design is appropriate for testing theoretically grounded relationships between variables and determining the extent to which independent variables influence a dependent variable (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Mundende, 2015). The cross-sectional approach involves collecting data at a single point in time and is widely used in consumer behaviour research where constructs such as perceptions, attitudes, preferences, and purchase intentions are relatively stable (Creswell, 2014; Mundende et al., 2023; Regina et al., 2026). This design was suitable for the present study as it enabled the analysis of how local brand perception, international brand perception, social influence, cultural and emotional attachment, and marketing and availability factors influence youth consumer preferences and purchase intentions.

#### 3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Kabwe District, Zambia, a centrally located urban district with a population exceeding 300,000 with youths constituting of over 60% (Zambia Statistics Agency, 2022). Kabwe has transitioned from a historically industrial town to a commercial hub driven largely by small and medium enterprises engaged in trading, retailing, manufacturing, and service activities in trading activities. The growing presence of both locally produced products and international brands in Kabwe makes the district an appropriate setting for examining consumer preferences. Further, the increasing exposure of urban youths to digital marketing, social media, retail outlets, and global consumption trends makes Kabwe an ideal setting for examining youth consumer preferences for local versus international brands and their implications for SME competitiveness.

#### 3.3 Population

The target population comprised youths residing in Kabwe District, Zambia, representing consumers within the economically active age group who are increasingly involved in brand-related purchasing decisions. Youths were considered relevant for this study because of their growing exposure to local and international brands, social media marketing, changing lifestyle aspirations, and their influence on current and future consumption patterns. The unit of analysis and observation was the individual youth because consumer preference is inherently a personal cognitive and behavioural outcome shaped by individual perceptions, attitudes, social influence, cultural attachment, and product-related experiences (Lyon et al., 2000).

#### 3.4 Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

A simple random sampling technique was employed to ensure that each youth in the population had an equal chance of being selected, thereby minimizing selection bias and enhancing the representativeness of the sample. The sample size of 139 respondents was obtained and used for analysis. This sample size exceeds the minimum requirements for multiple regression analysis, as recommended by (Green, 1991; Cohen, 1992; Hair et al., 2010; Mundende et al., 2022), ensuring adequate statistical power and robustness of the estimates.

#### 3.5 Data Collection Methods and Instrument

Data were collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire, consisting of closed-ended questions measured on a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was divided into four main sections: Section A captured the demographic characteristics of respondents; Section B measured perceptions toward local and international brands; Section C assessed key factors influencing brand preference, including social influence, cultural and emotional attachment, and marketing and availability factors. Section D measured purchase intentions toward local and international brands. The measurement items were adapted from established consumer behaviour, brand preference, and consumer ethnocentrism literature to ensure consistency, validity, and comparability of the data collected. The use of questionnaires allowed for the collection of standardized data across a relatively large sample, ensuring consistency and comparability of responses (Saunders et al., 2007; Mubita et al., 2023; Kabamba et al., 2020).

#### 3.6 Validity and Reliability

To ensure the instrument's validity and reliability, several measures were undertaken. Content validity was established through a detailed review of relevant literature and expert evaluation of the questionnaire items (Sekaran, 2003; Zikmund et al., 2003). Construct validity was assessed using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), the results of which confirmed the suitability of the measurement items for examining brand perceptions, preference factors, and purchase intentions (Hair et al., 2010). Reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha, with a coefficient of 0.70 or higher considered acceptable for internal consistency (Hair et al., 2010; Pallant, 2020). These steps ensured that the measurement items were both accurate and consistent across respondents.

#### 3.7 Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of respondents and provide an overview of youth consumer preferences toward local and international brands. Inferential analysis, specifically multiple regression analysis, was employed to examine the effects of local brand perception, international brand perception, social influence, cultural and emotional attachment, and marketing and availability factors on purchase intentions toward local and international brands. This approach enabled the estimation of the relative contribution of the research variables while controlling for overlap among predictors.

#### 3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance for the study was obtained prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary and respondents were informed of the study's purpose before giving their informed consent. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained and all data collected were used solely for academic purposes. These ethical procedures align with the principles of responsible and ethical research practice outlined by Bryman and Bell (2011) and Creswell

and Clark (2017).

## 4 Results and Discussion

This section presents the study findings. Literature and related studies assisted in the discussion of the findings. The section begins with demographics and then moves into the analysis of data.

### 4.1 Descriptive Statistics of Respondents

This section provided a detailed analysis of the demographics of the respondents.

Table 1: Respondents' Profile Analysis

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
15-19 years	21	15.1
20-24 years	111	79.9
25-29 years	6	4.3
30 years and above	1	0.7
Total	139	100
Gender		
Female	71	51
Male	68	49
Total	139	100
Education Level		
Certificate	9	6
Diploma	35	25
Bachelors' Degree	95	69
Masters	0	0
Total	139	100

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The findings show that the majority of respondents were aged between 20 and 24 years (79.9%), indicating that the sample largely comprised young consumers within the economically active youth category. Female respondents constituted 51% of the sample while males accounted for 49%, suggesting a relatively balanced gender representation. In terms of education, all respondents possessed tertiary-level education, making the sample suitable for examining consumer preferences among educated youths who are regularly exposed to both local and international brands.

### Descriptive Analysis of Study Variables

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Key Constructs

Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation
Local Brand Perception	3.665	0.83
International Brand Perception	3.301	0.92
Social Influence	3.434	0.79
Cultural & Emotional Attachment	3.477	0.81
Marketing & Availability	3.511	0.77
Local Brand Purchase Intention	3.664	0.84
International Brand Purchase Intention	2.945	0.97

The results indicate that respondents generally held favorable perceptions toward local brands ( $M = 3.665$ ) compared to international brands ( $M = 3.301$ ). Similarly, purchase intention toward local brands ( $M = 3.664$ ) was higher than purchase intention toward international brands ( $M = 2.945$ ). The findings suggest that youths in Kabwe District exhibit stronger preferences for local brands than international brands. Cultural attachment, social influence, and marketing factors all recorded mean scores above the neutral point, indicating their importance in shaping brand preferences.

### 4.2 Determinants of Local Brand Purchase Intention

Table 3: Multiple Regression Results Predicting Local Brand Purchase Intention

Construct	B	Std. Error	t	Sig.	Decision
Constant	0.041	0.3	0.136	.892	-
Local Brand Perception	0.405	0.077	5.233	.000	Accept
Social Influence	0.313	0.088	3.536	.001	Accept
Cultural & Emotional Attachment	0.308	0.083	3.716	.000	Accept
Marketing & Availability	-0.002	0.079	-0.025	.980	Reject

Model Summary:  $R^2 = 0.542$ ; Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.528$ ;  $F = 39.57$ ;  $p < .001$

The model explains 54.2% of the variation in local brand purchase intention. The findings indicate that local brand perception, social influence, and cultural and emotional attachment positively and significantly influence youths' intentions to purchase local brands.

#### Local Brand Perception and Local Brand Purchase Intention

Local brand perception emerged as the strongest predictor of local brand purchase intention ( $B = 0.405, p < .001$ ). This finding suggests that positive perceptions of local brands, particularly regarding quality, value, trustworthiness, and innovation, significantly increase youths' willingness to purchase locally produced products. The findings are consistent with previous studies which show that brand image and perceived quality are critical determinants of consumer purchase decisions and brand competitiveness (Wood, 2000; Ger et al., 1993; Schiffman et al., 2010). They also support evidence that consumers are more likely to prefer local products when they perceive them as authentic, high-quality, and superior to competing alternatives (Zeithaml, 1988; Yoo et al., 2000; Harrison & Lervik, 2019; Smith & Jones, 2022). From a theoretical perspective, the findings support Consumer Ethnocentrism Theory, which posits that consumers who hold favorable perceptions of domestic products are more likely to support local brands because they associate them with national economic development and local welfare (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). The results suggest that when youths perceive local brands positively, they develop stronger intentions to purchase them, reinforcing the theory's central proposition that favorable domestic product evaluations encourage local buying behavior.

#### Social Influence and Local Brand Purchase Intention

Social influence was found to have a positive and statistically significant effect on local brand purchase intention ( $B = 0.313, p = .001$ ). This finding suggests that youths' preferences for local brands are significantly influenced by family members, friends, peers, and social networks, as positive recommendations, opinions, and shared experiences encourage greater support for locally produced products. This finding is supported by previous studies that identified reference groups as important determinants of consumer purchasing behavior (Swaminathan et al., 2001). Akinwale and Afolabi (2022) also found that social and cultural factors significantly influence consumer preferences and support for local products. Furthermore, Mumba et al. (2021) observed that consumers increasingly support local products because of their perceived contribution to local economic development. The results therefore suggest that social endorsement can strengthen consumer confidence in local brands and improve their competitiveness. The findings are consistent with Consumer Ethnocentrism Theory, which recognizes that consumer preferences are influenced by social norms, collective values, and societal expectations. Individuals often learn consumption preferences from their social environment, and support for local products may be reinforced when family members and peers perceive local purchasing as socially desirable and economically beneficial.

#### Cultural and Emotional Attachment and Local Brand Purchase Intention

Cultural and emotional attachment positively and significantly influenced local brand purchase intention ( $B = 0.308, p < .001$ ). This finding indicates that youths who feel connected to local culture, traditions, and identity are more likely to support local brands. It suggests that purchasing local products extends beyond economic considerations and involves emotional, symbolic, and cultural dimensions. Consumers may perceive local brands as reflections of their heritage, values, and community identity. The findings are strongly supported by the literature on emotional value and consumer behavior. Sweeney and Soutar (2001) define emotional value as the benefit derived from the feelings and affective states generated by a product. Kumar and Kim (2008) found that emotional value significantly influences purchase intention toward both local and foreign brands. Similarly, Ger (1999) argued that local brands create unique value through authenticity and cultural relevance. Akinwale and Afolabi (2022) also reported that cultural affinity and national pride encourage support for local products. These findings suggest that emotional and cultural connections strengthen consumer loyalty toward domestic brands. The findings further support Consumer Ethnocentrism Theory by demonstrating that youths' preference for local brands is strengthened by cultural identity, patriotism, and emotional attachment, suggesting that purchasing decisions are influenced not only by product attributes but also by feelings of belonging and commitment to the local economy.

#### Marketing and Availability and Local Brand Purchase Intention

Marketing and availability did not have a statistically significant effect on local brand purchase intention ( $B = -0.002, p = .980$ ). This finding suggests that although advertising, promotion, and product availability may increase awareness of local brands, youths' purchasing decisions are influenced more by their perceptions of local brands and the emotional and social meanings associated with them than by marketing efforts alone. This result contrasts with studies that emphasize the importance of visibility and market presence in shaping consumer behavior. Chanda and Mulenga (2023) argued that local SMEs can improve competitiveness through branding, availability, and customer engagement strategies. Ozsomer (2012), through signaling theory, also suggested that firms use marketing signals to communicate product quality and value to consumers. However, the present findings indicate that marketing efforts alone may be insufficient when consumers already possess established perceptions regarding local products. From the perspective of Consumer Ethnocentrism Theory, this finding suggests that consumers' support for local brands is driven more by deeply held beliefs, perceptions, and emotional attachment than by promotional activities. Consequently, SMEs may achieve greater success by strengthening product quality and local identity rather than relying solely on marketing campaigns.

### 4.3 Determinants of International Brand Purchase Intention

Table 4: Multiple Regression Results Predicting International Brand Purchase Intention

Construct	B	Std. Error	t	Sig.	Decision
Constant	1.272	0.322	3.953	.000	-
International Brand Perception	0.507	0.071	7.102	.000	Accept
Social Influence	0.082	0.091	0.902	.369	Reject
Marketing & Availability	-0.08	0.081	-0.986	.326	Reject

Model Summary:  $R^2 = 0.309$ ; Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.294$ ;  $F = 20.16$ ;  $p < .001$

The model explains 30.9% of the variation in international brand purchase intention.

### International Brand Perception and International Brand Purchase Intention

International brand perception had a positive and highly significant influence on purchase intention toward international brands ( $B = 0.507, p < .001$ ). This finding suggests that favorable perceptions of international brands as high-quality, durable, prestigious, and capable of enhancing social status significantly increase youths' willingness to purchase foreign products. The findings align with Zeithaml (1988), who argued that perceived quality is a critical determinant of consumer choice. Yoo et al. (2000) similarly found that consumers tend to choose brands they perceive as superior in quality. Research by Nguyen, Barrett and Miller (2005) and Steenkamp, Batra and Alden (2003) further demonstrated that global brands benefit from perceptions of superior quality and prestige. Batra et al. (2000) also found that products originating from Western countries often carry symbolic and emotional meanings associated with status, modernity, and success. Kumar and Kim (2009) similarly observed that young consumers are attracted to foreign brands because they symbolize modern lifestyles and social differentiation. Furthermore, Schuiling and Kapferer (2004) argued that global brands often enjoy higher prestige and cosmopolitan appeal than local brands. While the Consumer Ethnocentrism theory predicts stronger preference for local products among ethnocentric consumers, the significant effect of international brand perception suggests that some youths evaluate products primarily based on perceived quality, prestige, and country-of-origin associations rather than national loyalty. This indicates the presence of lower ethnocentric tendencies among some young consumers who view international brands as symbols of global identity and social status.

### Social Influence and International Brand Purchase Intention

Social influence did not significantly affect international brand purchase intention ( $B = 0.082, p = .369$ ). This suggests that decisions to purchase international brands are largely driven by individual perceptions and personal evaluations rather than social approval or peer influence. Youths appear to rely more on their own assessment of the quality and prestige associated with international brands when making purchasing decisions. This finding contrasts with studies that emphasize the role of reference groups in shaping consumer behavior (Swaminathan et al., 2001). However, it supports the argument that perceptions of product superiority and prestige can outweigh social influence when consumers evaluate international brands (Steenkamp et al., 2003; Nguyen et al., 2005). From a theoretical perspective, Consumer Ethnocentrism Theory suggests that preferences for foreign products may emerge when consumers prioritize perceived product attributes over collective social expectations. The insignificant role of social influence therefore indicates that individual brand evaluations are more important than social pressure in determining international brand preferences among youths.

### Marketing and Availability and International Brand Purchase Intention

Marketing and availability also showed no statistically significant effect on international brand purchase intention ( $B = -0.080, p = .326$ ). This finding suggests that youths' preference for international brands is primarily driven by perceptions of quality, prestige, country of origin, and uniqueness rather than marketing exposure or product accessibility. The findings differ from studies that identify marketing visibility and availability as important factors in brand choice (Ozsomer, 2012; Chanda & Mulenga, 2023). However, they support the argument that international brands derive much of their attractiveness from their symbolic value, prestige, and global image (Batra et al., 2000; Schuiling & Kapferer, 2004). Young consumers may therefore continue to prefer international brands even in the absence of intensive marketing because strong brand reputations already exist. In relation to Consumer Ethnocentrism Theory, the findings suggest that consumers who prefer international brands are motivated more by perceptions of superiority and global status than by promotional efforts. This highlights the importance of brand image and country-of-origin perceptions in shaping international brand preferences.

## 5 Conclusion and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

This study examined youth consumer preferences for local versus international brands and their implications for SMEs in Kabwe District, Zambia. The findings revealed that youths generally exhibited stronger preferences for local brands than international brands. Local brand perception, social influence, and cultural and emotional attachment were found to significantly influence purchase intentions toward local brands, while international brand perception was the primary determinant of purchase intentions toward international brands. Marketing and availability factors did not significantly influence purchase intentions for either brand category. The study concludes that positive brand perceptions and emotional connections play a more important role than promotional activities alone. Consequently, strengthening local brand image and consumer attachment may enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of SMEs in Zambia.

### 5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, SMEs should prioritize improving product quality, consistency, and overall brand image to strengthen positive consumer perceptions of local brands. Since local brand perception emerged as the strongest predictor of local purchase intention, SMEs should invest in quality assurance, attractive packaging, and brand differentiation strategies. Furthermore, businesses should leverage cultural identity, local heritage, and patriotic themes in their branding efforts to strengthen consumers' emotional attachment to local products.

Given the significant influence of social networks, SMEs should also encourage positive word-of-mouth marketing and utilize social media influencers, peer endorsements, and customer testimonials to enhance brand credibility. Government agencies, SME support institutions, and business associations should implement initiatives that promote consumer awareness of the economic benefits of supporting local products. Additionally, entrepreneurship and marketing support programs should assist SMEs in developing stronger branding capabilities to effectively compete with international brands. Future studies may investigate additional factors such as consumer ethnocentrism, price sensitivity, and perceived quality across different product categories and geographical locations.

### Declaration of Competing Interests

The authors declare that they not aware of any competing financial interests or personal relationships that may have influenced the work described in this document.

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## Ethical considerations

The article followed all ethical standards appropriate for this kind of research.

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