Effects of ethnic and global identities on home country brand perceptions: an identity theory perspective

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Abstract

Purpose – This study links ethnic identity and global identity with perceptions of brand globalness (BG) and brand local iconness (BLI) regarding home country brands. Identity Theory considers consumer behavior as driven by multiple identities concurrently and interactively.

Design/methodology/approach – Samples from two populations, Mexicans living in Mexico and Mexican Americans in the United States, were exposed to eight randomly presented real-world Mexican brands, followed by existing measures for several constructs. Comparing such populations is uniquely appealing for studies of immigrants’ home country brands. Data is analyzed via linear regression.

Findings – Ethnic and global identities have an interactive effect on BG, BLI, and purchase intention even after controlling for ethnocentrism and cosmopolitanism. With the interaction term between ethnic identity and global identity included in the model, (a) global identity exhibits more efficacy than ethnic identity in explaining purchase intention; and (b) relationships involving BLI grow stronger while those involving BG become weaker. The direction of the effect of global identity depends on whether BG or BLI serves as the mediator. Ethnic identity has a significant effect on purchase intention through BLI among Mexican Americans.

Originality/value – Simultaneous focus on two interacting identities is novel in the international branding space. This approach is useful for illuminating the effects of brand attributes including BG and BLI as well as studying branding effects where self-symbolizing is of interest.

Keywords Ethnic identity, Global identity, Brand globalness, Brand local iconness, Purchase intention, Identity theory

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

There were more than 45 million immigrants in the United States in 2020 representing over 13.5% of the total population (US Census Bureau, 2021). Brands linked with immigrants’ home countries frequently depend on demand beyond the local market. Keen understanding of emigrant populations abroad may be critical and a pathway to success (Kumar and Steenkamp, 2013). How these individuals enact an ethnic identity (based upon ethnic roots and culture) as well as a global identity (based upon tendencies towards having a global or local orientation) is likely to be particularly relevant for home country brands (Aguirre-Rodriguez et al., 2023; Gao et al., 2017). Ethnic identity and global identity have been studied separately with an emphasis on direct effects and higher order operationalizations (Cleveland and Bartikowski, 2023; Cleveland and Bartsch, 2019; Kipnis et al., 2019). The systems perspective of Identity Theory, however, underscores the interactive nature of the effects of these two identities on judgments of home country brands (Burke and Stets, 2022; Smith-Lovin, 2003).
In this investigation, we extend theorizing around ethnic identity and global identity in the context of home country brands [1] with a focus on perceptions of brand globalness (BG) and brand local iconness (BLI) (Liu et al., 2020; Mandler et al., 2021). Whereas BG signifies a brand’s availability and, by extension, novelty and high quality in markets around the globe (Zabkar et al., 2017); BLI suggests that the brand reflects “consensus expressions of particular values held dear by some members of a society” (Holt, 2004, p. 4). For example, Toyota is a highly global Japanese brand that boasts availability throughout the world as well as high quality in its product categories, whereas Tia Rosa is a Mexican bakery brand which, despite falling short of being a global brand, symbolizes Mexico to consumers of Mexican origin. We briefly review existing studies of identity effects on brand perceptions (e.g. Kim, 2022; Diamantopoulos et al., 2019), hypothesize the effects of ethnic identity and global identity on BG and BLI, and highlight the interaction between the two identities in line with Identity Theory and recent trends in marketing research (Burke and Stets, 2022; MacKinnon, 2022; Forehand et al., 2021). We will also incorporate three well-established outcomes of BG and BLI, namely perceived prestige, identity expressiveness, and quality of brands as second-stage mediators without developing formal hypotheses for them (Ozsomer, 2012; Steenkamp and De Jong, 2010; Westjohn et al., 2012).

The hypotheses will be tested in a dataset of assessments of real brands with samples drawn from Mexicans living in Mexico and Mexican American immigrants living in the United States. Mexican brands are frequently distributed in the United States (Kumar and Steenkamp, 2013), and Mexican Americans do not typically have animosity towards Mexican brands (Mandler et al., 2023; Zolfagharian and Ulusoy, 2017; Peñaloza, 1994). Predictable variance in this sample population facilitates examining differences in patterns of identity effects (Aguirre-Rodriguez et al., 2023; Shoham et al., 2017; Zolfagharian et al., 2020).

With the interaction term between ethnic identity and global identity included in the model, (a) global identity exhibits more efficacy than ethnic identity in explaining purchase intention; and (b) relationships involving BLI grow stronger while those involving BG become weaker. The mediated effect of global identity on purchase intention is positive with BLI as mediator but negative with BG as mediator. Ethnic identity has a positive mediated effect on purchase intention through BLI for Mexican Americans but an otherwise unsettled pattern of effects. Incorporating the interaction between ethnic identity and global identity in the testing of the mediated relationships significantly improves explanatory power, even after controlling for consumer ethnocentrism and cosmopolitanism.

Our investigation contributes to the study of global branding in several ways. First, we conceptualize how ethnic identity and global identity are directly associated with purchase intentions. Existing research focuses on direct effects of these identities (e.g. Cleveland et al., 2023; Kim, 2022) and stands to benefit from applying novel theoretical perspectives (Kashif and Udunuwara, 2021). We leverage Identity Theory, a theory base well-suited to predictions about how individuals self-symbolize with brands (Burke and Stets, 2022). Second, we test BG and BLI as mediators of the effects of ethnic identity and global identity on purchase intentions. Given the disparate prior findings related to these brand perceptions, linking them to ethnic identity and global identity in the same investigation contributes to clarifying the relationship between BG and BLI (Liu et al., 2020; Mandler et al., 2021). Finally, we provide evidence for the interactive effect of ethnic identity and global identity on perceptions of BG and BLI. This represents a more complex yet theory-based account of immigrants’ brand judgments and intentions (Steenkamp, 2019). It also responds to calls to make allowances for a multi-faceted self that is composed of discrete identities (MacKinnon, 2022; Forehand et al., 2021).
Theoretical framework

Ethnic identity

Previous research defines ethnic identity as self-manifestation of an individual’s ethnic ancestry and culture, influenced by the perceptions of others (Cleveland et al., 2023; Visconti et al., 2014; Zolfagharian and Ulusoy, 2017). Ethnic identity may be linked to a particular ancestry or a blend of multiple ancestries/nationalities (Cleveland, 2024; Cleveland et al., 2022). Per Identity Theory, any given identity, including ethnic identity, is a socio-behavioral system of interaction guided by verification from others. Verification is drawn from direct or inferred beliefs that others view the individual as he/she sees him/herself when the identity is enacted. For instance, an individual may question whether others view him/her as a member of an ethnic group while eating ethnic food or participating in a festival. Verifying feedback may lead to subsequent behavioral consistency. Non-verifying feedback tends to induce change. The nature of feedback over time influences the prominence and, by extension, the salience of an ethnic identity (Burke and Stets, 2022).

Ethnic identity varies in terms of prominence, or relative importance, compared with other identities comprising an individual’s sense of self (e.g. “member of an ethnic group” vs “parent”). Generally, prominence is a slow-changing characteristic shaped by identity enactment over time. Ethnic identity also varies in salience, a situational characteristic akin to enactment likelihood and shaped by contextual factors as well as prominence (Aguirre-Rodriguez et al., 2023; Burke and Harrod, 2021). More prominent identities have increased salience, or likelihood of enactment, regardless of context. Contextual factors, such as product category (e.g. local food vs global fashion) or occasion (e.g. ordinary times vs special times, such as religious holidays), also influence identity salience (Burke and Stets, 2022; Smith-Lovin, 2003).

The ethnic identity of a Mexican American immigrant in the United States may become more situationally salient upon encountering a brand from Mexico because the brand is symbolic of the identity context (Burke and Harrod, 2021). Brands linked with the home country for an immigrant may be poignant symbols of ethnic identity (Erdem et al., 2006). As an individual’s ethnic identity becomes more prominent and salient, this aspect of self will have more impact upon the evaluation of potent identity symbols such as these (Burke and Stets, 2022). Zolfagharian et al. (2014, 2020) find a positive association between immigrants’ ethnic identity prominence and attitude toward brands and products from their home countries. A prominent ethnic identity also increases recognition of home country brands via more extensive knowledge related to, and awareness of, ethnicity. Consequently, immigrants tend to overestimate the extent to which their home country brands and products are recognized and liked by others (Shimp and Sharma, 1987).

While a prominent ethnic identity may be expected to influence recognition and evaluative judgments of home country brands, it is also reasonable to consider pertinent beliefs or perceptions in this process. Literature suggests that brands closely associated with an ethnicity can also benefit from global culture brand positioning. The effects of this positioning have been studied as BG, defined as the extent to which a brand is believed to have global availability as well as novelty, esteem, high quality, sensation, and social responsibility (Davvetas et al., 2015; Steenkamp et al., 2003; Zabkar et al., 2017). BG tends to be a net positive regardless of whether the brand is believed to be controlled locally or by a foreign entity (Winit et al., 2014). When consumers are given a choice among various local brands, global positioning can serve as an indicator of value.

A widely distributed home country brand with discernible local ties would seem like a useful symbol of an ethnic identity. The more prominent the ethnic identity, the more likely the individual to have extensive knowledge of the identity context, recognize the brand’s ethnic symbolism, and expect that others also share this view of the brand (Burke, 2023; Burke and Harrod, 2021). Per Identity Theory, the rationale for this pattern is based upon an
expectation that ethnicity-linked brands will make the prominent ethnic identity more salient, increase consideration about feedback, and shape subsequent judgment and evaluation (Burke and Stets, 2022). For instance, a brand of alcoholic beverages that is globally “mainstream” but still has shared meanings implicating a home country may be preferred by individuals with a prominent ethnic identity linked with the same country. Using a home country brand with global perceptions may be expected to be viewed by others as part of a successful enactment of the ethnic identity. Thus, immigrants with a prominent ethnic identity are more likely to recognize a home country brand as having higher levels of BG, which in turn increases the likelihood of purchasing that brand.

**H1.** For home country brands, ethnic identity has a positive mediated effect on purchase intention through BG.

In addition to BG, ethnic identity is relevant to the benefits that accrue when brands articulate linkages to local culture, identity, and heritage (Strizhakova and Coulter, 2019). Local culture brand positioning contributes to BLI, defined as the degree to which consumers associate a brand with the local culture, norms, identity, and symbols (Alden et al., 1999; Özsomer, 2012; Swoboda et al., 2012). BLI means a brand is viewed as more aligned to needs of local consumers (Guo et al., 2019; Özsomer, 2012), has higher levels of awareness (Steenkamp and De Jong, 2010), and enjoys enhanced value and image via local sourcing, production, and job creation (Davvetas and Halkias, 2019; Steenkamp, 2019). Pursuing BLI can enhance competitive success by differentiating a brand from global competitors (Schuiling and Kapferer, 2004). BLI may be a positive driver of preference when deciding between a globally available brand believed to be local rather than foreign-owned (Winit et al., 2014).

From the perspective of ethnic identity, brands with close linkages to “home” may be sought as identity symbols. The ethnicity linkages of a home country brand will make such brands more appealing to individuals with prominent ethnic identity, which in turn grow more salient with brand encounters. For example, a brand of food ingredient linked with ethnic festivities that is available abroad or an airline associated with “home” that has available departures at foreign airports may be preferred by individuals with a prominent ethnic identity. Stronger local ties as a home country brand will be expected to manifest ethnic identity associations. Using such brands will be expected to induce verifying feedback from others (Burke and Harrod, 2021).

As with BG, the rationale for BLI is based upon an expectation that encountering a home country brand will make the ethnic identity more salient. The individual with a prominent ethnic identity encountering the brand will also have more extensive knowledge of the ethnic identity context. The individual will expect that increasing BLI of a home country brand will lead others to view the brand as a symbol of the home country, an important factor in receiving verifying feedback from ethnic identity enactment (Burke and Stets, 2022). As such, ethnic identity is expected to serve as a positive driver of purchase intention through BLI.

**H2.** For home country brands, ethnic identity has a positive mediated effect on purchase intention through BLI.

**Global identity**

Global identity is another part of self that implicates BG and BLI and is relevant to preferences towards home country brands. Individuals with a prominent global identity view themselves as a “global citizen” (Gao et al., 2017). They hold positive attitudes toward globalization, recognize the commonalities among people around the world, and are interested in global values and lifestyles (Bartsch et al., 2016; Tu et al., 2012). They exhibit preference for brands with globally shared meanings and choose global brands or globally positioned local brands (Bartikowski and Walsh, 2015; Strizhakova et al., 2011; Westjohn
et al., 2012). Generally, evidence suggests that an individual with a prominent global identity will prefer global brands over local brands (Kim, 2022; Winit et al., 2014). However, successful home country brands that combine global distribution with perceived ties to home countries are also viewed favorably by consumers with prominent global identities. This owes to common integration of global and local perspectives in modern society (Cleveland and Bartsch, 2019).

As mentioned above, identities vary in terms of prominence (relatively stable) and salience (relatively context-specific). Global identity may vary in prominence compared to other identities (e.g. “global citizen” vs “member of an ethnic group” vs “parent”). Factors such as product category (e.g. visible fashion vs household cleaning products) or consumption occasion (e.g. ordinary times vs special occasions such as traveling) may also influence identity salience, or likelihood of enactment. Encountering a brand from another country is likely to make global identity more situationally salient, as the brand is linked to identity via associations with another country (Lau-Gesk, 2003). For instance, the prominent global identity of a Mexican citizen in Mexico may become more situationally salient when he or she encounters a motorcycle brand associated with the United States. The heightened salience of the prominent global identity will then shape subsequent judgment and evaluation. Expectations of how the brand will influence feedback from others will factor into judgment and evaluation (Burke and Stets, 2022).

Increasing levels of identity prominence is associated with more extensive knowledge about the identity context. An individual with a prominent global identity will have knowledge of a wider range of brands around the globe and may be able to link many brands with a particular country. This will have a bearing on preferences towards brands that may be used in enacting the global identity. As individuals with a prominent global identity seek recognition of this aspect of self from others, brands judged as comparatively less “global” are less preferred. These individuals seek brands that, based on their knowledge, may be recognized by others as more “global.” More extensive knowledge is thus likely to lead to restrictive assessment of BG. A home country brand is likely to be judged as having lower levels of BG with diminished purchase intentions. The rationale for this pattern is based upon an expectation that future usage will be less likely to garner verifying feedback for the global identity (Burke and Stets, 2022). Therefore, we hypothesize:

H3. For home country brands, global identity has a negative mediated effect on purchase intention through BG.

For BLI, there is alignment with global identity from the perspective of brand evaluation and purchase intention. As noted above, a brand from another country is likely to make global identity more situationally salient. A prominent global identity being made more salient by encountering a home country brand means that this aspect of self will shape brand judgment. Additional knowledge related to this context leads to brand judgment such that brands are more readily recognized and associated with their source. Individuals with a prominent global identity are more likely to judge a home country brand as having higher levels of BLI. This owes to recognized linkages with another country and likely leads to increased preference for it. These brands are expected to be more recognized by others as having local ties while also being a part of global consumer culture perhaps through perceptions of foreign ownership (Winit et al., 2014). For instance, a Mexican American immigrant with a prominent global identity may choose a Mexican brand of bottled water that is available in the United States and has high levels of familiarity abroad. Displaying an assortment of brands with high BLI is more likely to lead to verification of global identity by increasing the likelihood of recognition of these identity cues by others (Reed et al., 2012; Kirmani, 2009). This rationale is based upon an expectation that usage of a brand with higher levels of BLI will be more likely to garner verifying feedback from others (Burke and Stets, 2022). Therefore, we hypothesize:
**H4.** For home country brands, global identity has a positive mediated effect on purchase intention through BLI.

Interaction of ethnic and global identities

An implication of the above hypotheses is that encountering home country brands makes both ethnic identity and global identity more situationally salient. For a Mexican American immigrant, home country brands having discernible associations with Mexico that also are viewed as having global distribution should be expected to follow such a pattern. Encountering brands such as a Mexican beverage or airline brand while in another country may increase salience of ethnic identity due to home country associations, and global identity due to availability abroad. In such situations, Identity Theory expects interactions between these identities (Burke and Stets, 2023). Identities do not necessarily exist or act in isolation. Self has a level of complexity that will be missed if identities are considered separately and their interplay is ignored (Mackinnon, 2022; Smith-Lovin, 2003). Expecting an interaction is thus appropriate in the context of multiple identities whose combined effect does not equate with the sum of its parts (Burke, 2023).

While inter-identity interactions may be expected, it is more typical to find tests of direct and parallel effects in extant studies of ethnic identity and global identity (Cleveland and Bartikowski, 2023; Cleveland et al., 2023; Sobol et al., 2018). Multifaceted, higher order operationalizations of global identity in conjunction with ethnic identity have also been put forward (Kipnis et al., 2019). Emerging research in the area suggests that consumers will blend ethnic identity and global identity, making it appropriate to consider these parts of self as having some degree of fusion (Cleveland and Bartsch, 2019; Dey et al., 2019). This follows from conceptualizations indicating societal movement from national to global perspectives (Iwabuchi, 2010, 2016; Roudometof, 2005) and an embedded acculturation process experienced by immigrants wherein ethnic identities evolve (Askegaard et al., 2005; Peñaloza, 1994).

Identity Theory suggests a different approach that goes beyond additive effects and integrative operationalizations. Instead, it is most theoretically appropriate to treat identities as discrete and expect interactions between them. The self-structure of any given individual is composed of multiple identities that vary in terms of both prominence and salience. Prominence is relatively slow-changing over time while salience is more situational. In addition, multiple identities may have bearing on any given social situation and idiosyncrasies in the self-structure of individuals lead to complex patterns of inter-identity interaction (Burke and Stets, 2022; Smith-Lovin, 2003). Given that interactions between multiple identities should be expected, the inclusion of the interactive effect between ethnic identity and global identity is not only theoretically justified but also likely to lead to greater explanatory power (Burke and Stets, 2023; MacKinnon, 2022). Therefore, we hypothesize:

**H5.** The interaction of ethnic identity with global identity makes a greater contribution to explaining purchase intention than does either ethnic identity or global identity.

The nature of an interaction between ethnic identity and global identity warrants consideration. Trends towards creolization, or negotiating conflicting cultural-based roles, imply that these identities could have a positive interactive effect (Cleveland and Bartsch, 2019; Mahammadbaksh et al., 2012). However, Identity Theory also suggests that the relative prevalence of an identity within an evaluative situation will be conditioned upon the situational salience of each identity. It should also be expected that the prominence of both ethnic identity and global identity will vary at the level of the individual. This idiosyncrasy will affect the salience of relevant identities, can be difficult to anticipate without data, and should be accounted for when examining effects (Burke, 2023; Burke and Stets, 2022).
In the present inquiry, contrasting the ethnic identity of individuals living in a home country against that of immigrants from the home country living abroad suggests a difference in both prominence and salience. Living abroad among more and differing ethnicities will tend to make a given ethnic identity for the individual more salient. Over time, this may also heighten the prominence of an ethnic identity making it a more appreciable part of the individual’s sense of self (Burke and Harrod, 2021). Ethnic identity should thus be expected to be more salient to the extent that it is a prominent part of self when home country brands are an evaluative target.

A parallel line of reasoning is not apparent for global identity when contrasting individuals living in a home country with immigrants from the home country living abroad. Global identity emphasizes self-identification as a global citizen and is linked to judgments related to global brands (Diamantopoulos et al., 2019; Kolbl et al., 2019). Encountering global brands is expected to make global identity more salient. However, this should only be expected to have an appreciable effect when global identity is also a prominent part of self (Burke, 2023). It is not clear whether individuals living in a home country and immigrants from the home country living abroad have reliable differences in the average prominence of global identity. Both groups readily encounter aspects of global society, and individuals within each may enact and cultivate a global identity (Cleveland and Bartsch, 2019).

Bearing this in mind, both identities have relevance for immigrants encountering home country brands. These brands have ties to an ethnicity and the global marketplace. However, there are also limitations to predicting the relative salience and/or prominence of ethnic identity and global identity for a given immigrant. Home country brands seem likely to activate both identities in such markets, and these individuals could have a prominent ethnic identity as well as a prominent global identity. Home country brands are more mundane and common within home country markets (the country of emigration for an immigrant diaspora). Therefore, encountering a home country brand in the home country market is less likely to increase the salience of an ethnic identity (Burke and Harrod, 2021). As such, global identity is expected to have comparatively greater salience and prominence than an ethnic identity in home country markets. By extension, global identity should also be expected to have more influence upon brand judgment and decision making in these markets. The relative contribution of each identity may be comparable in explaining purchase intention towards home country brands in host country markets. Our expectation is for this pattern to manifest while also allowing for ethnic identity and global identity to interact freely, an allowance in keeping with the tenets of Identity Theory (Burke and Stets, 2022; Mackinnon, 2022). Therefore, we hypothesize:

*H6.* With the interaction term between ethnic identity and global identity included in the model, global identity retains greater contribution than ethnic identity towards predicting purchase intention in home country markets.

**Consequences and covariates of BG and BLI**

The hypotheses above incorporate BG and BLI as alternative mechanisms mediating the effects of ethnic identity and global identity on purchase intention. Figure 1 depicts these predicted relationships and includes second-stage intervening variables commonly linked with BG and BLI in extant research. These additional variables are brand identity expressiveness, brand prestige, and perceived brand quality. Both BG and BLI enhance perceptions of identity expressiveness, prestige, and quality of global brands (Ozsomer, 2012; Steenkamp and De Jong, 2010; Westjohn et al., 2012). Brands viewed as effective at representing a part of self to others, promoting a sense of self-worth, and likely to deliver in terms of functionality will enjoy elevated purchase intentions (Bartikowski and Walsh, 2015; Davvetas et al., 2015; He and Wang, 2015). Since these relationships are well-established in
extant literature, we will include them in the study and discuss their results without presenting formal hypotheses (Prasad, 2023).

Several exogenous variables may also influence BG and BLI, including gender, age, education, household income, marital status, number of years lived outside home country, brand familiarity, and cosmopolitanism (Steenkamp et al., 2003; Strizhakova et al., 2011; Zolfagharian and Ulusoy, 2017). These variables will be incorporated as covariates.

Consumer ethnocentrism and country of origin may also influence hypothesized relationships. Although Mexican Americans rarely hold ethnocentric biases against Mexican brands (Saegert et al., 1985; Zolfagharian and Sun, 2010), consumer ethnocentrism will be measured and used as a covariate. As respondents will be evaluating brands from their own home country, country of origin will not be included as a covariate.

**Methodology**

Mexican American immigrants and Mexicans living in Mexico were exposed to and evaluated real brand names from their home country. Two *a priori* criteria guided stimuli development. First, following prior practice, high/low involvement products, utilitarian/hedonic products, and food/non-food products were incorporated in a $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ product type matrix (Ozsomer, 2012). This design provided coverage of a variety of consumer decision-making situations. We incorporated the food/nonfood distinction because, relative to other product categories, food is a more poignant correlate of identity variables, especially ethnicity (Burke and Harrod, 2021; Dey et al., 2019; Ibarra-Cantu and Cheetham, 2021). Second, given our particular interest in the interplay among global identity, ethnic identity, BG, and BLI, we looked for brands that respondents would reasonably perceive as being from Mexico (De Meulenaer et al., 2015). Hence, we generated a list of 27 Mexican brands derived from the Brandz Top 50 Most Valuable Latin American Brands 2022 report (WPP, 2020). The final list of 8 brands was determined based on the results of an online pretest.

The pretest involved a total of 30 Mexican American students in the Southwestern United States who evaluated the 27 randomly ordered brands. They assessed (1) whether each brand was perceived as being from Mexico; (2) whether the product was perceived as being hedonic or utilitarian; (3) extent of involvement with the product; and (4) extent to which the brand was regarded as global or local. Items “b” and “c” were measured using long-standing scales from Ratchford (1987) following precedent in the global branding space (Ozsomer, 2012;
For item “d”, we clarified to respondents that “local brand” was a Mexican brand available for purchase in Mexico and unavailable outside Mexico, whereas “global brand” was a Mexican brand available for purchase in Mexico and in other countries, too. They rated each brand on a semantic differential scale of “extremely global” to “extremely local”.

The pretest led to the elimination of 16 brands for not satisfying one or more of the conditions specified in items “a” through “d” above. These included Lala, Alpura, GNP, Ace Seguros, Bimbo, Marinela, Bodega Aurrera, Soriana, XX Dos Equis, Modelo, Jarritos, Topo Sabores, Cholula Hot Sauce, Bufalo, Fabuloso, and Foca. Of the remaining 11, we selected Chilchota (dairy product, high-involvement, utilitarian), HDI Seguros (consumer banking, high-involvement, utilitarian), Tia Rosa (bread, high-involvement, utilitarian), Superama (supermarket, high-involvement, hedonic), Estrella Jalisco (beer, low-involvement, hedonic), Sidral Mundet (soda drink, low-involvement, hedonic), El Yucateco (hot sauce, low-involvement, hedonic), and Lirio (laundry detergent, low-involvement, utilitarian). Each of these eight brands was among the top five Mexican brands within its respective product category and was recognized as one of the most valuable brands in the region (WPP, 2020).

Measures
All variables were measured using adaptations of established measures (see Web Appendix Table A). Ethnic identity measures included the 20-item ethnic identity scale (Cleveland et al., 2011). Two items tapped the strength of identification with home and host cultures along with three items for country of birth, primary residence, and citizenship (Zolfagharian and Ulusoy, 2017). Other measures included four global identity items (Tu et al., 2012), three BG items (Steenkamp et al., 2003), three BLI items (Grayson and Martinec, 2004), four brand identity expressiveness items (Xie et al., 2015), five brand prestige items (Batra et al., 2000), four brand quality items (Erdem and Swait, 1998), and four purchase intention items (Putrevu and Lord, 1994). Covariates included the three-item brand familiarity scale (Kent and Allen, 1994), the five-item cosmopolitanism scale (Cleveland et al., 2014), the 17-item CETSCALE for consumer ethnocentrism (Shimp and Sharma, 1987), age, gender, household income, marital status, number of years lived in home vs host country, and recency of last visit to home country. “American-made” products and “Mexican-made” products were each measured using a separate CETSCALE.

A 7-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree) was used for all scaled items. For Mexicans living in Mexico, the original English questionnaire was translated into Spanish by certified translators, and the result was back translated into English by bilingual researchers to ensure sufficient linguistic equivalency. To minimize response biases typical of cross-cultural studies, negatively valenced items in adapted scales were maintained and item sequence was randomized (Tellis and Chandrasekaran, 2010). To reduce common method bias, three items measuring physical health were placed between the measurement scales for the predictor and criterion variables (Podsakoff et al., 2003): “I am a physically healthy person”; “I do not have any major physical health problems”; “I have good physical health”. Physical health is an appropriate marker variable with no established theoretical linkage with the substantive constructs in this research.

Sampling and procedure
The study focused on adult professionals who were Mexican (born and residing in Mexico) or first-generation Mexican American (born in Mexico but residing in the United States). Existing research utilizing these populations have observed notable differences between them in terms of preference and tendencies (Zolfagharian and Sun, 2010; Wilkes and Valencia, 1986; Saegert et al., 1985).
Data was collected from 120 distinct respondents for each of the eight brands in each country \( (n_{\text{USA}} = 960; n_{\text{Mexico}} = 960; N = 1,920) \), recruited through a paid online survey platform. Quota sampling ensured that the key demographic characteristics of the samples (i.e., gender, age, country of birth, country of citizenship) were roughly consistent with those of the Mexican American and Mexican populations per census statistics (see Table 1). Respondents were informed that participation was completely voluntary and anonymous. They read a brief description of the study, provided consent, and completed ethnic identity, global identity, consumer ethnocentrism, and cosmopolitanism scale items. Next, each respondent was exposed to one of the eight Mexican brands, randomly assigned, and was asked to evaluate the brand using brand familiarity, prestige, quality, and identity expressiveness scale items. The survey ended with measures of purchase intention and demographics.

**Analysis and results**

Method-related bias was checked and unidimensionality of each factor was supported as detailed in the Web Appendix. The mean ethnic identity score was significantly higher for Mexicans \( (M = 6.52) \) than Mexican Americans \( (M = 6.11; t_{(1,918)} = 117.86; p < 0.001) \). Mexican

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<td>312</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>533</td>
<td>55.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Years outside Mexico</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>951</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>&gt;20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
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**Note(s):** In thousands

**Source(s):** CIA (2020)

**Flores et al. (2017). Created by authors**

Table 1. Sample demographics

**IMR**
Americans identified significantly more strongly with home culture ($M = 6.11$) than host culture ($M = 5.58$; $t_{(1,918)} = 4.12$; $p < 0.001$).

Hypotheses were tested on mean-centered data aggregated across the eight brands using PROCESS macro with 5,000 bootstrap resamples (Hayes, 2018). Results of the eight mediation models are reported and visually delineated in Table 2. In the first model, BG mediates the effects of ethnic identity, global identity, and the interaction term (ethnic identity × global identity) on purchase intention. The second model replaces BG with BLI as the mediator. These two models test H1 through H4.

Of the nine covariates, brand familiarity was correlated with all endogenous variables while cosmopolitanism and ethnocentrism were each correlated with purchase intention only (see Web Appendix Table B). Hence, the three covariates were included in all mediation tests. Brand familiarity emerged as a significant predictor of purchase intention in three of the single-mediator models and none of the serial-mediation models. It reached significance only when both the direct and indirect effects of ethnic identity or global identity were non-significant, suggesting the presence of a suppressing relationship among predictor variables. Cosmopolitanism and ethnocentrism failed to reach significance across all models.

H1 predicted a positive mediated effect of ethnic identity on purchase intention through BG. Among Mexicans, neither the direct effect ($\beta = 0.05$; $p = 0.77$) nor the indirect effect ($\beta = 0.02$; $p = 0.87$) of ethnic identity on purchase intention via BG were significant. The same pattern was observed among Mexican Americans ($\beta = 0.07$; $p = 0.515$; $\beta = 0.01$; $p = 0.91$). Therefore, H1 is not supported in either sample. Brand familiarity was significantly associated with purchase intention in both Mexican ($\beta = 0.20$; $p < 0.01$) and Mexican American samples ($\beta = 0.24$; $p < 0.01$).

H2 considered a positive mediated effect of ethnic identity on purchase intention through BLI. Among Mexicans, neither the direct effect ($\beta = 0.05$; $p = 0.763$) nor the indirect effect ($\beta = 0.03$; $p = 0.83$) of ethnic identity on purchase intention via BLI was significant. Among Mexican Americans, while the direct effect was not significant ($\beta = 0.07$; $p = 0.52$), the indirect effect was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.19$; $p < 0.01$). Therefore, we find support for H2 in the Mexican American sample, with BLI fully mediating the positive relationship between ethnic identity and purchase intention. Brand familiarity was significantly associated with purchase intention in the Mexican sample ($\beta = 0.26$; $p < 0.01$), but not in the Mexican American samples ($\beta = 0.04$; $p = 0.792$).

H3 posited a negative mediated effect of global identity on purchase intention through BG. The direct effect and the indirect effect of global identity on purchase intention via BG were significant among Mexicans ($\beta = 0.09$; $p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.16$; $p < 0.05$) as well as Mexican Americans ($\beta = 0.10$; $p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.19$; $p < 0.01$). Therefore, H3 is supported in both samples, with BLI partially mediating the negative relationship between global identity and purchase intention. Brand familiarity failed to reach significance with either sample.

H4 predicted a positive mediated effect of global identity on purchase intention through BLI. The direct effect and the indirect effect of global identity on purchase intention via BLI were significant among Mexicans ($\beta = 0.09$; $p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.13$; $p < 0.05$) as well as Mexican Americans ($\beta = 0.10$; $p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.17$; $p < 0.01$). Therefore, H4 is supported in both samples, with BLI partially mediating the positive relationship between global identity and purchase intention. Once again, brand familiarity was non-significant with both samples.

H5 suggested that the interaction of ethnic and global identities would offer greater explanatory power than either of ethnic identity or global identity. To test this hypothesis, we compared the standardized total effects of ethnic identity, global identity, and the interaction term on purchase intention via BG and BLI as alternative mediators. Using the Mexican sample, the total effect of the interaction term on purchase intention via BG ($\beta = 0.10$) was statistically indifferent from that of ethnic identity ($\beta = 0.07$; $t_{(1,916)} = 0.71$; $p = 0.48$) but significantly stronger than that of global identity ($\beta = -0.07$; $t_{(1,916)} = 4.01$; $p < 0.001$). The
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<th>M1, M2, Y</th>
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<th><strong>Med. effect</strong></th>
<th><strong>Med. type</strong></th>
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<td>.05</td>
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<td>.09</td>
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<tr>
<td>EID<em>GID</em></td>
<td>.52**</td>
<td>.46**(4.46)**</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.27(.11,.02,0.19) Direct</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note(s):** a Covariates in all tests: brand familiarity, cosmopolitanism, ethnocentrism. b Effect of mediator(s) on DV, controlling for IV (M2 · Y coefficient is in parentheses). c Total effect = direct effect + indirect effect. d Indirect effect coefficient (lower and upper limits of confidence interval) *p < 0.05 **p < 0.01 ***p < 0.001 EID = Ethnic identity; GID = Global identity; BG = Brand globalness; BLI = Brand local iconness; IDEX = Brand identity expressiveness; PRES = Brand prestige; QUAL = Brand quality; PINT = Purchase intention

**Source(s):** Created by authors
same pattern emerged with the Mexican American sample: the total effect of the interaction term on purchase intention via BG ($\beta = 0.10; p < 0.05$) was comparable to that of ethnic identity ($\beta = 0.08; t_{(1,916)} = 0.47; p = 0.64$) but significantly stronger than that of global identity ($\beta = -0.09; t_{(1,916)} = 4.48; p < 0.001$). The superiority of the interaction term is more pronounced when BG is replaced by BLI as mediator. Using the Mexican sample, the total effect of the interaction term on purchase intention via BLI ($\beta = 0.35$) was significantly stronger than those of ethnic identity ($\beta = 0.08; t_{(1,916)} = 6.36; p < 0.001$) and global identity ($\beta = 0.22; t_{(1,916)} = 3.06; p < 0.01$). Similarly, in the Mexican sample, the total effect of the interaction term on purchase intention via BLI ($\beta = 0.38$) was significantly stronger than those of ethnic identity ($\beta = 0.26; t_{(1,916)} = 2.83; p < 0.001$) and global identity ($\beta = 0.27; t_{(1,916)} = 2.59; p < 0.01$). In summary, the burden of evidence supports H5, especially when BLI serves as mediator. Brand familiarity was not significant when the interaction term was present.

According to H6, with the interaction term between ethnic identity and global identity included in the model, global identity retains a greater contribution than ethnic identity toward explaining purchase intention among Mexicans living in Mexico. With the Mexican sample, the total effect of ethnic identity on purchase intention failed to reach statistical significance across all models ($\beta$ range: 0.05 to 0.07). In contrast, the total effect of global identity on purchase intention was significant when BLI served as mediator (i.e. in four of the eight models; $\beta$ range: 0.07 to 0.22). With the Mexican American sample, the total effect of ethnic identity reached significance in only one model where BLI was a single mediator ($\beta = 0.26$); it failed to reach significance in the other seven models ($\beta$ range: 0.07 to 0.15). In contrast, the total effect of global identity was significant in single-mediator models and in all models involving BLI ($\beta$ range: 0.09 to 0.27). These results not only support H6, but also underscore the superiority of global identity over ethnic identity in both samples.

Looking at serial mediation results in Table 2, none of the models involving ethnic identity showed significant direct or indirect effects across the two samples. In contrast, in the Mexican American sample, five of the serial mediation models involving global identity returned significant direct as well as indirect effects (i.e. Partial mediation), with the sixth model indicating a significant direct effect only. When these same tests were replicated using the Mexican sample, significant direct effects but non-significant indirect effects surfaced, signifying absence of any mediation. Serial-mediation sequences that begin with the interaction term exhibited significant direct effects across both samples when BG was involved as a mediator. When BG was replaced with BLI, five serial mediations returned significant direct and indirect effects (i.e. partial mediation), with the sixth model indicating a significant direct effect only.

**Discussion and implications**

This research focused on how ethnic and global identities impact perceptions of BG and BLI for home country brands while controlling for the effects of brand familiarity as well as ethnocentrism and cosmopolitanism. Our findings extend prior research on international branding by spotlighting ethnic and global identities, whose effects on purchase intention are mediated by BG and BLI. We also examined perceived brand prestige, quality, identity expressiveness, and purchase intention as second-stage mediators.

Global identity overshadows ethnic identity in explaining purchase intention. While we anticipated this pattern among Mexicans living in Mexico, we did not find a basis to advance a similar prediction among Mexican Americans. When Mexicans living in Mexico encounter global home country brands, their judgments and intentions are more likely to be influenced more by their global identity than their ethnic identity. For the ethnic identity of such consumers, global home country brands are rather mundane and prosaic. For their global
identity, these same brands are conspicuous and special. Our findings underscore the superiority of global identity in both samples. For Mexican Americans, too, intentions toward global home country brands were driven more by global identity than by ethnic identity.

At a more basic level, results indicate that ethnic and global identities were implicated in effects of BG and BLI. The effects of global identity on purchase intention differed depending on the mediating variable. The indirect effect was positive through BLI but negative through BG. In line with hypotheses, these findings illuminate how identities may impact brand perceptions. For ethnic identity, there was a positive indirect effect on purchase intention through BLI but only among Mexican Americans. The ethnic identity antecedent had inconclusive patterns of mediation elsewhere. In isolation, this may be an unexpected finding given the present focus on home country brands. Current allowance for a slightly more complex representation of self (i.e. addressing the interaction between identities) acknowledges that identities need not influence brand judgments in a purely additive fashion. Parts of self may compete or complement one another giving rise to important and perhaps non-intuitive patterns of effect.

**Implications for theory**

It is apparent that ethnic and global identities, as components of self, influence assessments of home country brands in an interactive manner. We found a notable interaction such that relationships implicating BLI grew stronger and those involving BG became weaker. This speaks to the importance of considering multiple identities simultaneously. Focusing on multifaceted representations of self and expecting interactions between its constituents is consistent with Identity Theory and an important path forward.

The global branding literature has not empirically examined the effects of ethnic and global identities as interacting aspects of self. Instead, literature has trended towards self as a more holistic and homogeneous property (Batra et al., 2012; Özsomer, 2012; Steenkamp et al., 2003; Strizhakova et al., 2011). Inquiry is typically directed towards understanding merger or integration of global and ethnic identities, perhaps classifying the nature of the blend into established types (Berry, 1990; Cleveland and Laroche, 2007; Kipnis et al., 2019; Peñaloza, 1994).

We treated ethnic identity and global identity as distinct dimensions of self that exert an interactive effect on consumer judgments and intentions. Marketing and consumer research has begun recognizing the need to account for multiple identity effects while maintaining the granular nature of identities within self (Forehand et al., 2021). Identity Theory and its established stream provides a robust theoretical basis from which to account for interactions between different dimensions of self (Burke and Stets, 2022). So doing is imperative given the ever-increasing cultural diversity of markets around the globe that results in and from globalization and immigration (Borjas, 1994).

This study also extends prior research on immigrant consumers via focus on home country brands in global markets (Cleveland and Chang, 2009; Zolfagharian and Ulusoy, 2017). Our results underscore consumer judgment as a function of location (i.e. residing in one’s home country or host country), ethnic identification (i.e. the extent to which immigrants identify with their ethnic roots), and global identity (i.e. whether immigrants align themselves with the meanings and values associated with the local culture or with the global consumer culture). These aspects of self tend to interact and shape differing patterns of mediation effects.

We also add to the literature on global identity in general. Research in this area is primarily concerned with how different degrees of global identity relate to brand evaluations (Bartikowski and Walsh, 2015; Makri et al., 2019; Strizhakova et al., 2011; Westjohn et al., 2012). The salience of global identity in this study lends support to the growing interest in
multifaceted conceptualizations of sense of self among immigrants (Burke and Harrod, 2021; Burke and Stets, 2022). Specifically, Mexican Americans who identify with the global consumer culture tend to appreciate globally positioned and successful Mexican brands because, for them, global success facilitates interpersonal verification of global identity.

Implications for practice
This research also has important implications for brand managers. The identities related to ethnicity and global sense of self cultivated by immigrants can enable the individual to link to a group and, at the same time, stand apart from in-group members (Brewer, 1999). Since immigrants use both local and global brands as symbolic cues to construct and reflect their unique set of identities (Strizhakova and Coulter, 2019; Yang et al., 2019; Zhou and Belk, 2004), companies need to develop and communicate the symbolic essence of their brands carefully.

Our findings indicate that global identity and ethnic identity may interact in non-intuitive ways. Efforts to bolster perceptions of BG may be limited by the interaction between these parts of self. However, steps taken to emphasize BLI may be bolstered by the interaction effect. Existing research has suggested the primacy of acculturation and commensurate practical implications of emphasizing global cultural integration (e.g. Licsandru and Cui, 2019; Cleveland et al., 2016). We observe that ethnic and global identities may not as reliably trend towards complementarity as managers expect. From immigrants’ perspective, a brand deliberately pursuing both BG and BLI strategies may be quite perplexing. Instead, a brand that has grown from its home country origins to represent an appreciable diaspora may be an easier and more desirable evaluative target (Kumar and Steenkamp, 2013).

Nonetheless, our findings also add to mounting evidence that considering multiple identities is necessary in immigrant markets. This can support predictions and guide decisions about immigrants’ feelings and reactions toward their home country brands (Askegaard et al., 2005; Üstüner and Holt, 2007; Zolfagharian et al., 2020). Since the size of the immigrant population continuously increases in the United States, Europe, and other developed countries, home country brands should account for multiple identities and their interactions. Our relatively straightforward method of treating these aspects of self as distinct, unidimensional, and continuous serves as an example technique affording analysis and interpretation of cross identity effects in an efficient and relatively easy to implement manner.

This study focused on two identities as predictors of BG and BLI. When seeking to expand brands to host countries, brand managers should be aware of differential effects of ethnic identity and global identity. Managers may (1) classify the meanings and media based on their associations with home country cultures, host country cultures, and the global consumer culture and (2) re-segment existing and new markets based on the degree to which consumers identify with their ethnic roots and where they fall on the global identity continuum (Zolfagharian et al., 2020). Broadly, managers should consider aligning their brands with home country cultural attributes and do so carefully to avoid alienating immigrants who also identify with the global consumer culture. The latter group of immigrants endorse home country brands that boast strategic international alliances, licensing agreements, and joint ventures.

Limitations and future research
Limitations of this study illuminate paths for future studies. First, we considered two identities: ethnic and global. While there are compelling reasons for focusing on these two identities when studying home country brands among immigrant populations, other identities may also be pertinent. For instance, some of the patterns that have surfaced across...
product types in prior studies, though not present in this investigation, suggest possible linkages with food-implicated identities. Research within the Identity Theory space also considers some other general role-identities such as spouse, parent, and student that can manifest across a variety of consumption contexts (Burke and Stets, 2022). Future research should build on our findings and consider immigrants’ self-structures as composed of more than two identities simultaneously. Examining the interactions of ethnic, global, and other identities can further our understanding and prediction of variation in preferences across consumption situations.

Second, existing research involving ethnic identity and global identity typically considers how such parts of self blend together. However, the observed pattern of interaction between these two identities in both immigrant and non-immigrant populations calls for additional research. We examined the effects of identities on BG and BLI for Mexican brands among Mexicans living in Mexico and first-generation Mexican American immigrants using a sample of compensated respondents. While this is typical of studies in the area, future research should consider utilizing field studies such as experiments or mall-intercept studies.

Third, whereas ethnic identity was measured using an established multidimensional scale, we adapted a four-item, unidimensional scale to measure global identity. Since cosmopolitanism is recognized as a multidimensional construct in many previous studies (Riefler and Diamantopoulos, 2009), future research can corroborate our findings using a multidimensional scale to capture cosmopolitanism.

Fourth, there are substantial non-Mexican immigrant populations, chief among them being those of Chinese (2.85 million immigrants) and Indian (2.65 million immigrants) heritage (Migration Policy Institute, 2020). Future research should attempt to replicate the current findings in such immigrant populations in the United States as well as in other developed countries. Future research can also compare different generations of immigrants to ascertain whether and in what direction the findings may fluctuate (Zolfagharian and Ulusoy, 2017). So doing can help theorize generalized similarities and differences in ethnic identity and global identity between immigrants and their country fellows residing in home countries.

Finally, our study focused on immigrants who migrated upward (from a developing country like Mexico to a developed country like the United States). Future research should consider how different types of migration, including lateral (from a developed to another developed country or from a developing to another developing country), upward (from a developing to a developed country), and downward (from a developed to a developing country) may reveal differences in immigrant attitudes and intentions toward home, host, and foreign country brands (Zolfagharian and Ulusoy, 2017).

Notes
1. Given our focus on brands from the immigrants’ home country, our subsequent usage of the term “brands” refers to home country brands unless otherwise specified.
2. The Web Appendix provides additional detail on effects patterns between food/non-food products, high/low involvement products, and hedonic/utilitarian products.

References


Further reading


Appendix
The supplementary material for this article can be found online.

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