





The Impact of Attitudes Toward Foreign Products on Purchase Intention with the Moderating Role of Consumer Ethnocentrism: A Study in International Marketing

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ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted with the aim of examining the impact of attitudes toward foreign products on the purchase intention of Iranian consumers and explaining the moderating role of consumer ethnocentrism in this relationship. This study was carried out within the framework of a descriptive-survey correlational design using a quantitative approach. The statistical population consisted of all undergraduate students at public and Islamic Azad universities in Tehran, who, as representatives of Generation Z, possessed extensive familiarity with global brands and continuous experience in making decisions between domestic and foreign products. Among them, 387 participants were selected through convenience sampling. The data collection instrument was a composite questionnaire consisting of three standardized scales, including the 14-item version of the CETSCALE for measuring ethnocentrism, a 5-item questionnaire assessing attitudes toward foreign products, and a 3-item purchase intention questionnaire, all of which had previously been validated in Iran. Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS version 3. The findings indicated that attitudes toward foreign products had a positive, strong, and significant effect on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.561$, $t = 9.845$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, consumer ethnocentrism significantly moderated this relationship ($\beta = -0.247$, $t = 2.816$, $p < 0.01$), such that increasing levels of ethnocentrism weakened the effect of positive attitudes on purchase intention. Simple slope analysis revealed that at low levels of ethnocentrism, the coefficient of the effect of attitudes on purchase intention was 0.708, whereas at high levels of ethnocentrism, this coefficient decreased to 0.414. The model fit indices (SRMR = 0.058, $R^2 = 0.456$, $Q^2 = 0.338$) indicated satisfactory model fit and acceptable predictive capability. The findings of the present study, while confirming the theories of reasoned action and social identity, demonstrate that even among the seemingly cosmopolitan Generation Z, ethnocentrism can alter the pathway from attitudes to purchase intention. These findings provide important implications for international marketing managers and policymakers supporting domestic production.

Keywords: Consumer ethnocentrism, attitudes toward foreign products, purchase intention, international marketing.

1. Introduction

The expansion of globalization, the unprecedented growth of international trade, and the increasing penetration of multinational brands into domestic markets have fundamentally transformed the structure of consumer decision-making in the contemporary era. Consumers are no longer confined to local markets and traditional purchasing patterns; rather, through digital technologies, social media, e-commerce platforms, and transnational communication networks, they are continuously exposed to global products, symbols, and consumption values (Cateora et al., 2024; Czinkota et al., 2022). In such an environment, attitudes toward foreign products have emerged as one of the central constructs in international marketing and consumer behavior studies because these attitudes significantly influence consumers' evaluation processes, brand preferences, and purchasing decisions (Hoyer et al., 2024; Solomon, 2023). The growing convergence of global markets has intensified competition between domestic and foreign products, making it increasingly important for scholars and marketers to understand the psychological and cultural determinants that shape consumers' responses toward imported goods (Mothersbaugh et al., 2023; Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019).

In the field of international marketing, consumer attitudes toward foreign products are commonly understood as a multidimensional evaluative orientation encompassing cognitive beliefs, affective judgments, and behavioral tendencies regarding products originating from other countries (Gelbrich et al., 2023; Witek-Hajduk & Grudecka, 2023). Positive attitudes toward foreign products are often associated with perceptions of superior quality, technological advancement, prestige, innovation, and symbolic status, whereas negative attitudes may stem from concerns related to national identity, economic dependency, or distrust toward foreign producers (Samiee et al., 2024; Torelli & Rodas, 2024). Country-of-origin literature has repeatedly demonstrated that consumers use product origin as a heuristic cue when evaluating unfamiliar brands and products, particularly in contexts characterized by high uncertainty or information asymmetry (Samiee et al., 2024; Witek-Hajduk & Grudecka, 2023). Consequently, the perception of foreignness itself may become a powerful driver of purchase intention independent of the objective attributes of the product.

Purchase intention constitutes one of the most important predictors of actual consumer behavior and occupies a central position in theories of consumer decision-making

and planned behavior (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019; Solomon, 2023). In marketing research, purchase intention reflects consumers' subjective probability and willingness to purchase a specific product in the future and is widely employed as an indicator of behavioral readiness (Hoyer et al., 2024; Mothersbaugh et al., 2023). Numerous studies have shown that consumers who hold favorable attitudes toward products are more likely to develop strong purchase intentions, especially when the products are perceived as socially desirable, functionally superior, or symbolically meaningful (Birjandi et al., 2019; Nazari & Fathi, 2019). In the context of foreign products, positive attitudes may emerge through exposure to global branding strategies, perceptions of modernity, admiration of foreign lifestyles, and the influence of digital media and cross-border cultural flows (Emontspool & Woodward, 2018; Torelli & Rodas, 2024).

The contemporary marketplace has further intensified these dynamics through digital transformation and technological innovation. The emergence of artificial intelligence, predictive analytics, and machine learning systems has significantly altered the ways consumers gather information, compare alternatives, and develop purchasing preferences (Turatti, 2025; Xiao et al., 2025). Modern consumers increasingly rely on algorithmic recommendations, online reviews, and digital influencers when evaluating domestic and foreign brands (Sowmya, 2025; Wang et al., 2025). Simultaneously, e-commerce platforms have reduced geographic and informational barriers, enabling consumers to access foreign products more easily than ever before (Sugiardi et al., 2025; Swadhi et al., 2025). These developments have contributed to the emergence of globally oriented consumption patterns, particularly among younger generations who have grown up within digitally interconnected environments. As a result, understanding the factors that shape attitudes toward foreign products has become increasingly important for international marketers seeking to position their brands effectively in emerging markets.

Among younger consumers, Generation Z represents one of the most influential demographic groups in contemporary consumption systems. This generation has been socialized within digital ecosystems characterized by continuous exposure to global information flows, international brands, and transnational cultural symbols (Sugiardi et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2025). Compared with previous generations, Generation Z consumers tend to exhibit stronger familiarity with global brands, greater engagement with online

shopping environments, and more cosmopolitan consumption tendencies (Emontspool & Woodward, 2018; Torelli & Rodas, 2024). Their consumption decisions are frequently shaped not only by functional product characteristics but also by symbolic meanings associated with identity, status, and cultural affiliation (Hoyer et al., 2024; Solomon, 2023). Consequently, attitudes toward foreign products among Generation Z may differ substantially from those observed among older generations that were socialized within less globalized contexts.

Despite the increasing globalization of consumption, national identity and ethnocentric beliefs continue to exert substantial influence on consumer behavior. Consumer ethnocentrism refers to the belief that purchasing foreign products may be inappropriate, immoral, or harmful to the domestic economy and national employment (Bryla & Domanski, 2023; Sharma et al., 2025). Ethnocentric consumers generally prefer domestic products because they perceive local consumption as a form of economic patriotism and social responsibility (Bryla & Domanski, 2023; Gelbrich et al., 2023). The concept of consumer ethnocentrism has attracted significant scholarly attention because it provides a cultural and psychological explanation for resistance toward imported products even when foreign goods are perceived as objectively superior. In many markets, ethnocentrism acts as a protective mechanism that reinforces national identity and shapes consumers' moral judgments regarding foreign consumption (Samiee et al., 2024; Witek-Hajduk & Grudecka, 2023).

The relationship between ethnocentrism and consumer behavior is particularly important in developing economies and transitional markets where concerns about domestic production, economic independence, and cultural identity are highly salient. In such contexts, consumers may experience psychological tension between admiration for foreign products and loyalty toward domestic goods (Cateora et al., 2024; Czinkota et al., 2022). This tension is especially visible in countries such as Iran, where imported products often carry symbolic associations of prestige and modernity while simultaneously provoking concerns related to economic dependency and cultural influence (Abbaszadeh & Abbaszadeh, 2016; Maleki Minbash Razgah et al., 2019). Therefore, examining the moderating role of ethnocentrism in the relationship between attitudes toward foreign products and purchase intention becomes theoretically and practically significant.

Prior empirical studies have produced substantial evidence regarding the influence of consumer attitudes on

purchase intention. Research conducted by Arabshahi et al. demonstrated that positive consumer attitudes significantly increase the intention to purchase foreign cosmetic products among Iranian men (Arabshahi et al., 2019). Similarly, Ghafourian Shagerdi et al. found that favorable attitudes toward foreign brands strengthen consumers' purchase intention through mechanisms related to country-of-origin image and xenocentrism (Ghafourian Shagerdi et al., 2021). Other domestic studies have emphasized the importance of psychological and contextual factors such as shopping value, reference effects, discount strategies, and market orientation in shaping consumers' behavioral intentions (Birjandi et al., 2019; Faryabi et al., 2019; Naami et al., 2017; Nazari & Fathi, 2019). These findings collectively suggest that purchase intention is a multidimensional construct influenced by both cognitive evaluations and sociocultural variables.

Research on ethnocentrism has likewise shown that ethnocentric beliefs negatively affect consumers' willingness to purchase foreign products. Bakhshan et al. demonstrated that ethnocentrism significantly reduces Iranian consumers' evaluation of and willingness to purchase American products (Bakhshan et al., 2016). Similar patterns have been observed in international contexts, particularly in markets where domestic production and national identity hold strong symbolic importance (Bryla & Domanski, 2023; Gelbrich et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the interaction between positive attitudes toward foreign products and ethnocentric beliefs remains insufficiently explored, especially among younger consumers in emerging economies. Although some consumers may admire the quality and prestige of foreign goods, ethnocentric tendencies may weaken the translation of these positive attitudes into actual purchase intentions. This indicates that ethnocentrism may function not merely as an independent predictor but also as a moderating mechanism influencing the strength of attitude-behavior relationships.

The Iranian market provides a particularly meaningful context for examining these relationships. Over the past two decades, Iranian consumers have experienced increasing exposure to foreign brands through digital media, informal trade networks, and online marketplaces despite economic sanctions and import restrictions (Abbaszadeh & Abbaszadeh, 2016; Maleki Minbash Razgah et al., 2019). Simultaneously, national discourse surrounding support for domestic production has intensified, encouraging consumers to prioritize Iranian-made products. This coexistence of globalization pressures and nationalistic economic

narratives has created a complex consumption environment in which consumers frequently navigate competing symbolic and economic considerations. Younger consumers, especially university students, occupy a unique position within this environment because they tend to demonstrate stronger familiarity with global consumer culture while still being influenced by local cultural and economic norms.

Theoretical perspectives from the theory of reasoned action and social identity theory provide valuable frameworks for understanding these dynamics. According to the theory of reasoned action, behavioral intentions are largely shaped by individuals' attitudes and subjective evaluations of behavior (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019; Solomon, 2023). Positive attitudes toward foreign products are therefore expected to strengthen purchase intention. However, social identity theory suggests that individuals derive part of their identity from membership in social and national groups, leading them to favor in-group products and resist out-group consumption under certain conditions (Gelbrich et al., 2023; Torelli & Rodas, 2024). Consumer ethnocentrism can thus be interpreted as an expression of social identity processes that may constrain consumers from acting fully in accordance with their favorable evaluations of foreign products.

Although previous studies have examined attitudes toward foreign products and ethnocentrism separately, relatively limited research has investigated the moderating role of ethnocentrism within the relationship between attitudes and purchase intention, particularly among Generation Z consumers in Iran. Furthermore, many prior studies have focused on specific product categories such as cosmetics or food products, limiting the broader applicability of their findings (Arabshahi et al., 2019; Bryla & Domanski, 2023). Given the rapid transformation of consumer behavior in the digital era and the increasing influence of global consumption patterns, there remains a need for updated empirical evidence capable of explaining how cultural and psychological variables jointly shape purchase intention toward foreign products.

In addition, recent advances in digital commerce and AI-driven consumer analytics have fundamentally changed the mechanisms through which attitudes and preferences are formed (Turatti, 2025; Xiao et al., 2025). Contemporary consumers increasingly engage in hybrid decision-making processes influenced simultaneously by emotional, cultural, social, and technological factors (Sharma et al., 2025; Sowmya, 2025). Consequently, classical models of consumer behavior require reexamination within

contemporary market environments characterized by algorithmic personalization, digital globalization, and accelerated information exchange. Investigating the role of ethnocentrism under these evolving conditions can contribute to both theoretical development and managerial practice in international marketing.

From a managerial perspective, understanding the interaction between attitudes toward foreign products and ethnocentrism has substantial practical implications for multinational corporations, domestic producers, and policymakers. International marketers seeking entry into emerging markets must recognize that positive consumer attitudes alone may not guarantee strong purchase intention if ethnocentric sentiments remain influential (Cateora et al., 2024; Czinkota et al., 2022). Domestic policymakers likewise require a deeper understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying foreign product consumption in order to design more effective strategies for supporting national industries and encouraging domestic purchasing behavior (Abbaszadeh & Abbaszadeh, 2016; Maleki Minbash Razgah et al., 2019). Such knowledge is especially important in societies experiencing simultaneous pressures of globalization, digitalization, and economic nationalism.

Accordingly, the present study aimed to investigate the effect of attitudes toward foreign products on purchase intention among Iranian consumers and to examine the moderating role of consumer ethnocentrism in this relationship among Generation Z university students in Tehran.

2. Methods and Materials

The present study was conducted based on the pragmatist paradigm and within the framework of a descriptive-survey correlational design. In terms of purpose, this study was classified as applied research, because its findings could be directly used in decision-making related to international marketing strategies and policymaking for supporting domestic production in Iran. In terms of the time of data collection, the study was designed as cross-sectional, and all data were collected during a specific period in the second half of 2023. A quantitative approach was selected to test the research hypotheses, because the fundamental objective of this study was not to discover new concepts, but to examine causal relationships among preidentified constructs and measure the magnitude, direction, and significance of their effects using advanced statistical techniques.

The statistical population of the present study consisted of all undergraduate students at public and Islamic Azad universities in Tehran. The focus on this educational level was due to its full correspondence with the characteristics of Generation Z, a generation that has grown up in the context of digital technologies, the Internet, and social networks and has close connections with global flows of information and consumption. Undergraduate students, as primary representatives of this generation, had extensive access to social media and international brands and continuous experience in making decisions between domestic and foreign products. Moreover, their cognitive ability to complete the questionnaire and their disciplinary, economic, and social diversity provided a suitable basis for generating desirable variance in the research data.

To determine the sample size, the common rule of thumb in partial least squares structural equation modeling was used, according to which the minimum sample size should be ten times the largest number of structural paths directed at an endogenous construct in the model. In the conceptual model of the present study, the highest number of incoming paths to the purchase intention construct was three; therefore, the minimum sample size was estimated at 30 participants. However, to increase the statistical power of the tests, reduce sampling error, and provide greater generalizability, a larger sample size was targeted. Considering the possibility of attrition and incomplete or distorted questionnaires, 420 questionnaires were distributed among students using nonrandom convenience sampling. Of these, 405 questionnaires were returned, and after screening and excluding incomplete questionnaires, indifferent responses with near-zero variance, and suspicious response patterns, 387 usable questionnaires entered the final statistical analysis stage.

The data collection instrument in the present study was a composite questionnaire consisting of three standardized and previously validated scales. All three scales had previously been used in domestic studies, and sufficient evidence of their validity and reliability was available in the Iranian cultural and linguistic context. This not only ensured the psychometric quality of the instrument but also made it possible to compare the findings of the present study with previous domestic studies. The items of all three scales were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5); thus, the measurement scale of all variables was considered interval.

To measure consumer ethnocentrism, the well-known CETSCALE, first introduced and developed by Shimp and

Sharma (1987), was used. The original version of this scale included 17 items; however, in the present study, the 14-item version validated in Iran was employed. Kaffashpour and Sepehr (2012), in a study specifically examining the psychometric properties of CETSCALE in the Iranian market, showed that the 14-item version of this scale, compared with the original 17-item version, had higher reliability (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.89) and construct validity in an Iranian sample. The items of this scale measure belief in the moral superiority of purchasing domestic products, the impropriety of buying foreign products, and the perceived economic threat resulting from imports. Examples of items in this scale include: “Iranians should always buy Iranian-made products instead of foreign products” and “Buying foreign goods harms fellow Iranians.”

To measure attitudes toward foreign products, a 5-item questionnaire previously used by Ghafourian-Shagerdi et al. (2021) in their study titled “The Effect of Consumer Xenocentrism on Purchase Intention Toward Foreign Products: An Analysis of the Role of Country-of-Origin Image and Brand Attitude” was used as the basis. These items were derived from reputable international studies in the field of consumer behavior and assess consumers’ overall affective and cognitive evaluations of foreign-made products. Ghafourian-Shagerdi et al. (2021) confirmed the content validity of this scale through expert judgment and its construct validity using confirmatory factor analysis, and they reported its reliability with a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.84. Examples of items in this scale include: “Foreign products have higher quality than domestic products” and “I trust foreign products.”

To measure purchase intention, a 3-item questionnaire was used, rooted in classical studies of consumer behavior, particularly studies based on the theory of reasoned action and the theory of planned behavior. This scale measures consumers’ mental readiness and behavioral tendency to purchase foreign products in the future. This questionnaire had previously been used by Arabshahi et al. (2019) in a study focusing on the purchase intention of foreign cosmetic products, and its validity in the Iranian context had been confirmed with a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.87. Examples of items in this scale include: “I intend to purchase foreign products in the near future” and “Even if domestic products are available, I still prefer foreign products.”

Before the final large-scale distribution of the questionnaires, the face and content validity of the instrument were reviewed by five university professors specializing in international marketing and consumer

behavior. These experts evaluated the items in terms of clarity, readability, relevance to the Iranian cultural context, and complete coverage of the constructs under measurement. Based on the feedback received, minor modifications were made to the wording of two ethnocentrism scale items to better align them with the common language used among Iranian students. In addition, a pilot study was conducted with the participation of 30 students to ensure the comprehensibility of the items and the absence of ambiguity. The results of this preliminary study showed that all items had initial factor loadings above 0.60 and that no item required deletion or major revision.

Two statistical software packages were used for data analysis. IBM SPSS Statistics version 26 was used to conduct descriptive analyses, including the calculation of mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis, the preparation of frequency distribution tables for demographic characteristics, and the examination of initial statistical assumptions such as normality of data distribution using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test and multicollinearity using the variance inflation factor (VIF). SmartPLS version 3 was also used to perform confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling based on the PLS-SEM approach.

The selection of the PLS-SEM approach was based on several methodological considerations. First, although the research constructs had strong theoretical foundations, their combination within a moderated model in which ethnocentrism was entered as a moderator in the attitude–purchase intention path had rarely been tested in the Iranian context; therefore, the model had a semi-exploratory nature. Second, PLS-SEM has higher statistical power than the covariance-based approach for complex models that include moderating effects and have medium-sized samples. Third, the objective of the study was to predict and explain the variance of the endogenous construct of purchase intention, which is fully consistent with the logic of PLS-SEM.

To test the moderating effect of consumer ethnocentrism on the relationship between attitudes toward foreign

products and purchase intention, the product indicator approach was used in SmartPLS. In this approach, the moderating variable and the predictor variable are multiplied by each other to create a new interaction variable, whose effect on the criterion variable is then tested. The measurement model was evaluated using the following indices: standardized factor loadings, with an acceptance threshold above 0.70; Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability, with an acceptance threshold above 0.70; average variance extracted (AVE) for convergent validity, with an acceptance threshold above 0.50; and the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the HTMT ratio, with an acceptance threshold below 0.85 for HTMT, for discriminant validity. The structural model fit was also evaluated using the coefficient of determination, effect size, Stone–Geisser’s predictive relevance index, and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) as a criterion of overall model goodness of fit.

3. Findings and Results

The findings of this study are organized and presented in two main sections. In the first step, the demographic profile of the participants is described to clarify the human context of the study. In the second step, the inferential findings are explained in two stages: assessment of the measurement model and testing of the structural model, so that the reliability and validity of the measurement instruments are first ensured and the research hypotheses are then statistically examined.

Of the 387 valid questionnaires, 221 respondents were male (57.1%) and 166 were female (42.9%). The mean age of the participants was 21.7 years, with a standard deviation of 2.4, and the age range extended from 18 to 30 years. In terms of university type, 218 participants were from public universities (56.3%) and 169 were from Islamic Azad universities (43.7%). Table 1 provides a summary of the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants (n = 387)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	221	57.1
	Female	166	42.9
University type	Public	218	56.3
	Islamic Azad	169	43.7
Age group	18–22 years	234	60.5
	23–26 years	122	31.5
	27–30 years	31	8.0

Before conducting inferential analyses, the initial statistical assumptions were examined. The results of the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test showed that the Z statistic for the main research constructs ranged from 0.89 to 1.31, and the corresponding significance levels (0.11 to 0.36) were all greater than 0.05; therefore, the null hypothesis of univariate normality of the data distribution was not rejected. In addition, the skewness values of all items ranged from -1.08 to 0.94, and the kurtosis values ranged from -1.52 to 1.73, which fell within the acceptable range of ± 2 . The variance inflation factor (VIF) values for all items ranged from 1.19 to 2.63, which were below the cutoff point of 5; therefore, multicollinearity among the indicators was not considered problematic.

In the measurement model assessment stage, the standardized factor loadings of each item on its parent construct were first calculated. The results showed that all 22 items, including 14 CETSCALE items, 5 attitude items, and 3 purchase intention items, had factor loadings above 0.70 and were significant at $p < 0.001$. The lowest observed

factor loading was 0.728 for the tenth CETSCALE item, and the highest factor loading was 0.915 for the second purchase intention item. These findings indicate that each item made a substantial contribution to explaining the variance of its parent construct and that the reliability of individual indicators was at a satisfactory level.

After confirming the factor loadings, the reliability and convergent validity indices were calculated at the construct level. Table 2 shows that the Cronbach’s alpha values for all three constructs, namely ethnocentrism (0.911), attitude (0.880), and purchase intention (0.858), and their composite reliability coefficients, respectively 0.924, 0.913, and 0.914, all exceeded the standard threshold of 0.70. This indicates that the items of each construct had high internal consistency and reliably measured the intended construct. The average variance extracted was also calculated above 0.50 for all three constructs, respectively 0.575, 0.671, and 0.780, indicating that the constructs explained a larger share of the variance of their items than measurement error; therefore, the convergent validity of the model was confirmed.

Table 2

Reliability and Convergent Validity Indices of the Research Constructs

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach’s α	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Consumer ethnocentrism	14	0.911	0.924	0.575
Attitude toward foreign products	5	0.880	0.913	0.671
Purchase intention	3	0.858	0.914	0.780

To examine discriminant validity, the Fornell–Larcker matrix and the HTMT ratio were used. As shown in Table 3, the square root of AVE for each construct, reported on the main diagonal, was greater than the correlation of that construct with other constructs in the off-diagonal cells. For example, the square root of AVE for ethnocentrism (0.758) was greater than the correlation between ethnocentrism and

attitude (-0.538) and the correlation between ethnocentrism and purchase intention (-0.492). Moreover, all HTMT values ranged from 0.425 to 0.651, which were far below the strict threshold of 0.85. Overall, these results show that the research constructs had sufficient conceptual and empirical distinction from one another and that the discriminant validity of the measurement model was also established.

Table 3

Fornell–Larcker Matrix for Examining Discriminant Validity

Construct	1	2	3
1. Ethnocentrism	0.758		
2. Attitude	-0.538	0.819	
3. Purchase intention	-0.492	0.625	0.883

After ensuring the adequacy of the measurement model, the structural model was estimated to test the research hypotheses. Before examining the paths, the overall model fit indices were calculated. The SRMR value was 0.058, which is below the threshold of 0.08 and indicates a satisfactory fit of the overall model. The coefficient of determination (R^2) for the endogenous construct of purchase intention was calculated as 0.456, meaning that attitudes toward foreign products and ethnocentrism jointly explained 45.6% of the variance in purchase intention, which is evaluated as moderate to relatively high explanatory power according to common criteria.

Table 4 presents the results of testing the direct paths and the moderating effect in detail. The first research hypothesis, which examined the direct effect of attitudes toward foreign products on purchase intention, was confirmed with a path coefficient of 0.561, a t-statistic of 9.845, and a significance level below 0.001. This finding indicates that the more positive consumers' attitudes toward foreign products are, the more significantly their purchase intention increases. The

f^2 effect size for this relationship was calculated as 0.302, which falls within the range of a medium effect between 0.15 and 0.35.

The second research hypothesis, namely the moderating effect of consumer ethnocentrism on the relationship between attitudes toward foreign products and purchase intention, was also confirmed. The path coefficient of the interaction effect (attitude \times ethnocentrism) was -0.247, the t-statistic was 2.816, and the significance level was 0.005. The negative sign of this coefficient indicates that ethnocentrism weakens the positive relationship between attitude and purchase intention. More precisely, as the level of consumer ethnocentrism increases, the strength of the effect of positive attitudes toward foreign products on purchase intention decreases. The f^2 effect size for this interaction was calculated as 0.061, which, although classified as a weak to medium effect according to conventional criteria between 0.02 and 0.15, is considered meaningful and noteworthy given the difficulty of detecting moderating effects in the social sciences.

Table 4

Results of Testing the Research Hypotheses (Structural Model)

Path	Path Coefficient (β)	Standard Deviation	t-statistic	Significance Level	f^2	Result
Attitude \rightarrow Purchase intention	0.561	0.057	9.845	0.000	0.302	Confirmed
Ethnocentrism \rightarrow Purchase intention	-0.204	0.059	3.458	0.001	0.047	—
Attitude \times Ethnocentrism \rightarrow Purchase intention (moderating effect)	-0.247	0.088	2.816	0.005	0.061	Confirmed

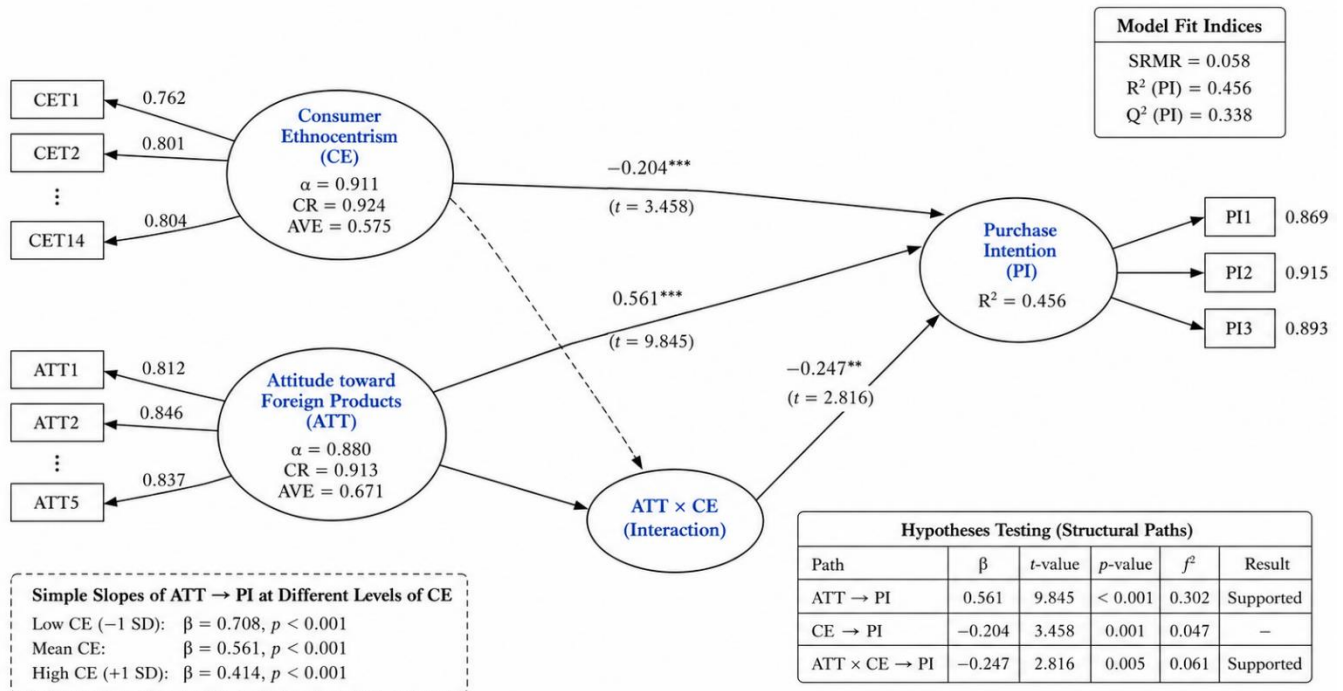
To analyze the moderating effect more deeply, simple slope analysis was used. For this purpose, the effect of attitude on purchase intention was calculated at three levels of ethnocentrism: one standard deviation below the mean, the mean, and one standard deviation above the mean. The results showed that at a low level of ethnocentrism, the coefficient of the effect of attitude on purchase intention was 0.708 ($p < 0.001$). At the medium level of ethnocentrism, this coefficient decreased to 0.561 ($p < 0.001$). At the high level of ethnocentrism, the effect coefficient declined to 0.414 ($p < 0.001$). This pattern clearly shows that as ethnocentrism increases, the power of positive attitude in

predicting purchase intention decreases, although this relationship remains positive and significant even at the highest level of ethnocentrism.

In addition to path testing, the predictive relevance index for the purchase intention construct was calculated using the blindfolding procedure. The Q^2 value was 0.338, which is substantially greater than zero and, according to interpretive criteria, indicates the moderate to relatively high predictive capability of the model for purchase intention. In other words, the research model is not only capable of explaining within-sample relationships but also has predictive generalizability.

Figure 1

The Effect of Attitudes Toward Foreign Products on Purchase Intention with the Moderating Role of Consumer Ethnocentrism



Note. Standardized coefficients are reported.
 ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Overall, the findings of this section provide a coherent picture of the relationships among the research constructs. Attitudes toward foreign products were identified as a strong driver of purchase intention; however, this direct path is weakened under the influence of consumers' ethnocentric beliefs. Ethnocentrism both directly reduces the purchase intention of foreign products and, as a moderator, weakens the effect of positive attitudes. This dual pattern reveals the complexity of the purchase decision-making process in the Iranian market and shows that even consumers who hold positive attitudes toward foreign goods may refrain from purchasing them or postpone their purchase if they adhere to ethnocentric beliefs. The strong presence of Generation Z students in this sample, who on average showed more positive attitudes toward foreign products and lower levels of ethnocentrism, may explain the relative strength of the direct attitude–purchase intention relationship in this study.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study was conducted with the aim of examining the effect of attitudes toward foreign products on purchase intention and investigating the moderating role of consumer ethnocentrism among Generation Z university students in Tehran. The findings demonstrated that attitudes

toward foreign products exerted a positive, strong, and statistically significant effect on purchase intention. In addition, consumer ethnocentrism significantly moderated this relationship, such that increasing levels of ethnocentrism weakened the strength of the positive relationship between attitudes and purchase intention. The findings further indicated that ethnocentrism had a direct negative effect on purchase intention toward foreign products. Overall, the structural model exhibited satisfactory explanatory and predictive power, indicating that the selected constructs were capable of explaining a substantial proportion of the variance in purchase intention.

The finding regarding the positive effect of attitudes toward foreign products on purchase intention is consistent with the fundamental assumptions of consumer behavior theories and international marketing literature. Theories of reasoned action and planned behavior propose that favorable attitudes toward a product or behavior increase individuals' intention to engage in that behavior (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019; Solomon, 2023). In the context of the present study, consumers who perceived foreign products as more reliable, prestigious, innovative, or higher in quality demonstrated stronger intentions to purchase them. This result aligns with previous empirical findings indicating that positive cognitive and affective evaluations of products constitute

powerful antecedents of behavioral intention (Hoyer et al., 2024; Mothersbaugh et al., 2023). The findings are also compatible with the study by Arabshahi et al., who reported that favorable consumer attitudes significantly enhanced purchase intention toward foreign cosmetic products among Iranian consumers (Arabshahi et al., 2019). Similarly, Ghafourian Shagerdi et al. concluded that positive attitudes toward foreign brands strengthen consumers' intention to purchase imported products (Ghafourian Shagerdi et al., 2021).

One important explanation for this finding lies in the symbolic and functional meanings associated with foreign products in emerging markets. In many developing economies, imported goods are frequently perceived as indicators of superior quality, technological sophistication, modernity, and social prestige (Cateora et al., 2024; Czinkota et al., 2022). Consumers often associate foreign brands with higher standards of production and innovation, particularly when domestic industries are perceived as less competitive in certain sectors. Within the Iranian context, these perceptions may be intensified by prolonged exposure to international brands through digital media and online marketplaces. Generation Z consumers, who have grown up within technologically interconnected environments, are particularly susceptible to global symbolic consumption patterns and transnational brand narratives (Emontspool & Woodward, 2018; Torelli & Rodas, 2024). As a result, positive attitudes toward foreign products may become strongly linked to consumers' aspirations for modernity, lifestyle enhancement, and global cultural affiliation.

The findings may also be interpreted in light of the rapid digitalization of consumer behavior in contemporary markets. Recent technological developments, including artificial intelligence-driven recommendation systems, digital advertising, social media influencers, and e-commerce platforms, have dramatically increased consumers' exposure to foreign products and international consumption cultures (Wang et al., 2025; Xiao et al., 2025). Through algorithmic personalization and global digital communication, consumers increasingly encounter foreign brands in highly persuasive and emotionally engaging ways. Studies have shown that digital commerce environments facilitate favorable evaluations of international products by reducing informational barriers and increasing perceived accessibility (Sowmya, 2025; Turatti, 2025). The present findings therefore reflect not only traditional marketing mechanisms but also broader transformations in digitally mediated consumer culture.

Another important finding of the study was the significant moderating role of consumer ethnocentrism in the relationship between attitudes toward foreign products and purchase intention. Specifically, the results demonstrated that as ethnocentrism increased, the positive effect of attitudes toward foreign products on purchase intention weakened. This finding is theoretically important because it indicates that positive product evaluations alone are insufficient to fully predict consumer behavior in contexts where national identity and economic loyalty remain salient. Even consumers who admire the quality or prestige of foreign products may hesitate to purchase them if they perceive such behavior as economically or morally problematic. This result supports social identity perspectives suggesting that consumers' purchasing decisions are shaped not only by utilitarian evaluations but also by their sense of belonging to social and national groups (Gelbrich et al., 2023; Torelli & Rodas, 2024).

The moderating effect observed in this study is highly consistent with the conceptual foundations of consumer ethnocentrism theory. Ethnocentric consumers tend to view the purchase of domestic products as a patriotic duty and may perceive the consumption of imported products as potentially harmful to national industries and employment (Bryla & Domanski, 2023; Samiee et al., 2024). Consequently, ethnocentric beliefs create psychological resistance against foreign consumption even when consumers acknowledge the attractiveness or superiority of imported goods. The findings support previous studies showing that ethnocentrism negatively influences consumers' willingness to purchase foreign products (Bakhshan et al., 2016; Bryla & Domanski, 2023). However, the present study extends previous literature by demonstrating that ethnocentrism functions not merely as an independent predictor but also as a moderating mechanism capable of weakening the conversion of favorable attitudes into purchase intentions.

The simple slope analysis provided additional insight into this relationship. The results showed that the effect of attitudes toward foreign products on purchase intention remained positive across all levels of ethnocentrism but became progressively weaker as ethnocentrism increased. This finding suggests that ethnocentric beliefs do not completely eliminate the attractiveness of foreign products; rather, they constrain the behavioral expression of positive attitudes. In practical terms, consumers with high ethnocentric tendencies may continue to recognize the quality or desirability of foreign products while

simultaneously experiencing psychological conflict regarding the appropriateness of purchasing them. Such ambivalence reflects the coexistence of globalization and economic nationalism in many contemporary societies (Samiee et al., 2024; Witek-Hajduk & Grudecka, 2023).

The direct negative effect of ethnocentrism on purchase intention observed in the present study is also consistent with previous domestic and international research. Bakhshan et al. reported that ethnocentric attitudes significantly reduced Iranian consumers' willingness to purchase American products (Bakhshan et al., 2016). Similarly, studies conducted in various international contexts have shown that ethnocentrism reduces consumer openness toward imported goods and strengthens preferences for domestic alternatives (Bryla & Domanski, 2023; Gelbrich et al., 2023). In societies where domestic production is closely tied to national identity and economic independence, consumers may perceive the support of local products as a moral obligation rather than a purely economic choice. Within Iran, such sentiments may be reinforced by political discourse emphasizing self-sufficiency, domestic production, and resistance to foreign economic influence (Abbaszadeh & Abbaszadeh, 2016; Maleki Minbash Razgah et al., 2019).

At the same time, the findings indicate that Generation Z consumers generally exhibited relatively strong positive attitudes toward foreign products despite the moderating influence of ethnocentrism. This pattern may reflect the unique sociocultural characteristics of younger consumers in digitally globalized environments. Unlike previous generations, Generation Z has been socialized within networks of global communication, digital entertainment, and online commerce that normalize exposure to foreign brands and lifestyles (Emontspool & Woodward, 2018; Sugiardi et al., 2025). Social media platforms, streaming services, and international influencers continuously shape younger consumers' aspirations and consumption preferences. Consequently, foreign products may carry symbolic meanings related not only to quality but also to identity construction, cosmopolitanism, and social status.

The findings of the present study also contribute to contemporary discussions regarding globalization and consumer culture. Classical international marketing theories often assumed that globalization would gradually reduce the influence of local cultural identities on consumption behavior. However, recent scholarship has increasingly emphasized that globalization and local identity frequently coexist rather than replace one another (Gelbrich et al., 2023; Torelli & Rodas, 2024). Consumers may simultaneously

admire global brands while retaining strong attachments to national values and local economic concerns. The present findings strongly support this perspective by demonstrating that Generation Z consumers can maintain positive attitudes toward foreign products while still being influenced by ethnocentric beliefs.

Another important implication of the findings concerns the predictive relevance and explanatory power of the proposed model. The acceptable values of R^2 , Q^2 , and SRMR suggest that attitudes and ethnocentrism constitute meaningful predictors of purchase intention toward foreign products. This supports prior studies emphasizing the importance of psychological and sociocultural factors in understanding consumer decision-making (Birjandi et al., 2019; Nazari & Fathi, 2019). The findings further confirm that consumer behavior in international markets cannot be adequately explained solely through economic or demographic variables. Instead, attitudes, cultural identity, symbolic meanings, and moral evaluations must also be incorporated into models of consumer behavior.

The study additionally reinforces the growing relevance of behavioral and digital perspectives in contemporary marketing research. Recent studies have highlighted the role of technological innovation, artificial intelligence, and digital ecosystems in shaping consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions (Turatti, 2025; Xiao et al., 2025). Consumers increasingly rely on online information environments when evaluating products and brands, and these environments often amplify the visibility and attractiveness of foreign products. Simultaneously, digital platforms expose consumers to nationalistic discourse and local identity narratives that may strengthen ethnocentric attitudes. Therefore, consumer behavior in the digital age is increasingly characterized by the interaction of global and local symbolic forces. The present study contributes to this emerging body of literature by demonstrating how cultural identity continues to shape consumer behavior even within technologically globalized consumption systems.

From a broader international marketing perspective, the findings highlight the importance of balancing global brand positioning with sensitivity toward local cultural values. Multinational corporations operating in emerging markets cannot assume that positive attitudes toward foreign products automatically translate into strong purchasing behavior. Ethnocentric sentiments may significantly constrain market penetration strategies, especially in contexts where domestic production and economic nationalism are socially emphasized (Cateora et al., 2024;

Czinkota et al., 2022). Therefore, foreign firms may benefit from localization strategies that reduce perceptions of cultural or economic threat while strengthening perceptions of compatibility with local values and national interests.

The findings also suggest that policymakers interested in supporting domestic industries should pay attention not only to economic incentives but also to consumers' symbolic and psychological perceptions. Consumers do not merely purchase products based on price or utility; rather, consumption decisions are often linked to identity, values, and cultural meanings (Hoyer et al., 2024; Solomon, 2023). Policies aimed at strengthening domestic consumption may therefore be more effective when they improve both the objective quality and the symbolic attractiveness of domestic brands. Enhancing innovation, branding sophistication, digital presence, and emotional resonance of domestic products may reduce consumers' tendency to associate foreign products exclusively with prestige and quality.

One of the limitations of the present study concerns the use of convenience sampling among university students in Tehran, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other demographic groups and geographic regions. Although Generation Z students constitute an important and influential consumer segment, their attitudes and purchasing tendencies may differ from those of older consumers, rural populations, or individuals with different educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. Another limitation relates to the cross-sectional design of the study, which restricts causal interpretation and does not allow examination of changes in attitudes and ethnocentrism over time. In addition, the study relied on self-report questionnaires, which may be subject to social desirability bias and response tendencies. Finally, the research focused on foreign products in general rather than specific product categories, and consumer responses may vary depending on the symbolic or functional characteristics of particular industries and brands.

Future research could expand the present model by incorporating additional psychological and contextual variables such as brand trust, perceived quality, consumer xenocentrism, materialism, digital engagement, and perceived economic threat. Comparative studies across different generations, cultures, and socioeconomic groups may also provide deeper insight into the evolving nature of ethnocentrism and global consumption behavior. Longitudinal research designs would be particularly valuable for examining how attitudes toward foreign products change over time under the influence of technological transformation and economic conditions.

Future studies may additionally investigate specific product categories such as luxury goods, technology products, fashion brands, or food products in order to determine whether the moderating role of ethnocentrism differs across consumption domains. Finally, qualitative or mixed-method approaches may provide richer understanding of the emotional and symbolic dimensions underlying consumers' evaluations of foreign products.

The findings of the present study have several practical implications for marketing managers and policymakers. International companies seeking to enter the Iranian market should recognize that positive consumer attitudes toward foreign products do not necessarily guarantee high purchase intention, particularly among consumers with strong ethnocentric tendencies. Accordingly, multinational firms may benefit from emphasizing cultural adaptation, local partnerships, and contributions to domestic economic development in their marketing communications. Domestic producers should focus not only on improving product quality but also on enhancing brand image, digital engagement, and emotional appeal in order to compete more effectively with foreign brands. Policymakers supporting domestic production may also design educational and promotional campaigns that strengthen consumer confidence in local products while avoiding excessively nationalistic messaging that could provoke resistance among younger cosmopolitan consumers. Finally, marketers targeting Generation Z should pay close attention to the influence of digital ecosystems, social media culture, and global symbolic consumption patterns when designing branding and communication strategies.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

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In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

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