

## Culture speaks volumes: How cultural products shape perceptions and consumer behavior

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### Abstract

National stereotypes refer to simplified and generalized beliefs about the traits and behaviors of people from a specific country, whereas country brand image reflects the overall perception of a nation, including its culture, values, and products. Both constructs play a pivotal role in shaping consumer behavior, tourism preferences, and international engagement. This study investigates the impact of Turkish cultural product consumption on consumers' visit intentions, purchase intentions, national stereotypes, and country brand image perceptions of Turkey. The research employs Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to analyze the relationships among the variables. Data were collected through an internet-based questionnaire, with 865 valid responses analyzed using SPSS and Amos programs. The findings indicate that the consumption of Turkish art and heritage products significantly enhances consumers' intentions to visit Turkey and to purchase Turkish products. With regard to Turkish media products, it was found that they mainly influence visit intentions and have less impact on purchase intentions. However, all cultural products form national stereotypes and perceptions of Turkey's country brand image, which in turn serve as a mediator in the relationship between cultural product consumption and consumer behavior. This study enhances our understanding of culture-based product consumption patterns, providing valuable insights into how cultural products shape consumer behavior and country brand image. Building on these findings, the current study also provides practical guidance for marketers, tourism professionals, and policymakers seeking to leverage cultural products to optimize country brand image, enhance demand, and increase consumer engagement in international markets.

**Keywords:** Country brand image, Cultural products, National stereotype, Purchase intention, Visit intention.

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## **Introduction**

Global consumer culture has led to the widespread availability of products such as sugary, caffeinated, fizzy drinks, which are recognized worldwide. Although often criticized for their quality, these products remain popular due to marketing strategies that align with local cultural contexts while promoting their origin cultures. Consumer goods are increasingly linked to popular culture and lifestyle, as individuals seek to adopt these identities through consumption (Arslan and Coşkun, 2022; Meinhold, 2002). For instance, Turkish coffee, once a local tradition, has gained international appeal through the global popularity of Turkish TV series, exemplifying how cultural products shape perceptions and behaviors.

Beyond symbolic and identity-related significance, cultural products are gaining attention for their economic and strategic value. In today's economy, cultural products contribute to employment, income, and GDP, offering growth potential (Aiello and Cacia, 2014). Accordingly, they attract interest not only from scholars but also policymakers and tourism boards, especially in countries seeking to promote national values, attract investment, and enhance their global image (Albu, 2013). Research demonstrates that exposure to cultural products influences behavior, attitudes, and perceptions, highlighting the cultural impact on thought and action (Toker and Akoğlan Kozak, 2024; Kaya, 2021). In this context, country brand image and national stereotypes emerge as key constructs in understanding the impact of cultural products on international perception. The literature identifies three main sources of country image: autonomous, induced, and organic agents (Billore, 2024; Dogra and Karri, 2021; Lee et al., 2016; Hughes and Allen, 2005; Gartner, 1994). Among these, popular culture functions as an autonomous agent, shaping perceptions via films, media, and news. While many studies explore this role (e.g., Dogra and Karri, 2021; Gartner, 1994), growing evidence suggests that TV dramas and similar cultural products positively influence perceptions of their origin countries. Yet, contradictory findings underscore the need for further research, especially regarding different types of cultural products (Lee and Bai, 2016).

Cultural products also shape travel motivations and enhance destination appeal. Films and TV dramas, as autonomous agents, are particularly effective in shaping destination image and national perceptions, influencing consumer decisions and travel behavior (Billore, 2024; Lee and Bai, 2016). Despite growing interest, research often fails to comprehensively address how various cultural products interact with constructs like national stereotypes and country brand image. This study addresses this gap by focusing on different cultural product types and their influence on behavioral intentions.

The study investigates Turkish cultural products in the MENA region, categorized as Media Cultural Products (films, series, music, celebrities) and Art-Heritage Cultural Products (heritage, crafts, fashion, architecture). Media products are mass-mediated, entertainment-oriented, and associated with modern lifestyles. Art-Heritage products emphasize tradition, aesthetics, and national identity. Turkey's cultural, historical, and religious ties with the MENA region, along with its tourism appeal, make it a relevant case for exploring how cultural products affect behavioral intentions and perceptions. Therefore, the study examines the relationships between cultural consumption, visit and purchase intentions, and the mediating roles of country brand image and national stereotypes. Through analyzing Turkish cultural products in the MENA context, this

study clarifies how these constructs interact and to what extent they influence consumer behavior. It offers theoretical and practical contributions by refining conceptualizations of cultural products and demonstrating their strategic role in enhancing national competitiveness in global markets.

## **Literature Review**

### **Cultural Products Consumption**

Cultural products are critical in forming tourism experiences and consumer behavior, influencing both individual preferences and national identities. They (media, arts, food, and heritage) have long been recognized as influential tools in tourism, promoting the development of destination brands and impacting consumer perceptions. Pietro et al. (2015) highlight the importance of innovative products and services in enriching cultural heritage and addressing the diverse needs of consumers. Similarly, a study conducted in Chinese market context (Cao and Feng, 2019) reveals that consumer demand for tourist souvenirs is driven by local characteristics, crafts, and cultural relevance and underlines the vitality of customized product development strategies. The results of these empirical studies indicate, understanding consumer needs and preferences plays a key role in effective product development and marketing strategies for cultural tourism. Furthermore, since creative tourism experiences are also a central dynamic of cultural tourism, it is necessary to leverage creative tourism to attract consumers. Besides, Richards and Wilson (2005), emphasize the elevating interest in spectacles and creative spaces as a new way of satisfying consumers searching for new experiences. These trends point to the requirement of improving the creativity and novelty in cultural tourism.

The significant impact of cultural products on country image is widely acknowledged, and it changes over time and is formed by a series of factors such as economic and political influence. Since cultural products are crucial to promote and portray identity of country (Desmarais and Bruce, 2019), researchers found the positive impact and cultivating favorable country image of Turkish TV series, -one of the cultural products- on consumers from Middle East, Balkans, and Southern Caucasus regions towards Turkey (Ağırseven and Öрки, 2017). On the other hand, music, which is one of the other cultural products, is used in the U.K. to generate tourism revenue and widen international familiarity (Chen, 2023; Ayyildiz et al., 2013). Apart from these cultural products, Abouelmagd (2023) revealed that events like festivals, art exhibitions, and performances also foster the country image and foster international familiarity in Luxor. These findings clearly demonstrate that cultural products serve a pivotal role for place marketing by streamlining the perception of the country. Accordingly, one could conclude that cultural products consumption is prominent not only affecting visitors' decisions, purchase local products but visit the country and form their perceptions towards national stereotypes.

Building on these research perspectives, the hypothesized relationships are illustrated in the research model presented in Figure 1. The model is grounded in the assumption that cultural products significantly influence consumer behavior, shape brand perception, and ultimately affect consumers' decision-making processes. Understanding these relationships is essential for capturing the broader impact of

cultural products on international tourism dynamics. Based on the results of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, two cultural product categories were identified: Media-Cultural Products (including films, TV series, music, and celebrities) and Art-Heritage Cultural Products (including heritage, handicrafts, fashion, architecture, and art). Accordingly, the following hypotheses were proposed to examine the influence of Turkish cultural products consumption on consumers from the MENA region:

- H1** Consuming Turkish media-cultural products positively influences visitors' intention to visit Turkey (H1a), intention to purchase Turkish products (H1b), perceptions of Turkey's national stereotypes (H1c), and Turkey's country brand image (H1d).
- H2** Consuming Turkish art-heritage cultural products positively influences visitors' intention to visit Turkey (H2a), intention to purchase Turkish products (H2b), Turkey's country brand image (H2c), and perceptions of Turkey's national stereotypes (H2d).

### **Country Brand Image**

In an increasingly globalized world, countries seeking to remain competitive must strategically manage their brand image (Mohib and Carroll, 2024). Country brand image refers to a comprehensive strategy that defines a nation's vision and aligns all international communications (Ma et al., 2021). Similar to advertising, it emphasizes awareness, preference, and attraction (Roth and Romeo, 1992; Ayyildiz et al., 2013). While strategies vary, successful branding highlights authenticity, creativity, cultural richness, and innovation. representations of culture, history, infrastructure, natural resources, and people collectively shape the country image (Abouelmagd, 2023; Mohib and Carroll, 2024).

Country brand image serves as a type of soft power and impacts perceptions of culture, investment, governance, diplomacy, and tourism (Nwala and Gesiere, 2024). Global events, like the World Cup and Olympics, are often facilitated to enhance image management strategies in the context of branding efforts (Nadeau et al., 2008). These events intend to contest stereotypes and develop the nation's identity through local cultural products, enhance favorable perceptions, and reform international views (Allen, 2016).

As a country containing tremendous cultural variety and leaning heavily on the tourism (Yılmaz et al., 2018), developing an impactful brand image to leverage cultural values and attract international consumers is crucial for Turkey. Cultural products play a crucial role in constructing this image by influencing intentions to visit and to purchase national goods. They also help build favorable national stereotypes. In this context, stereotypes are generalized beliefs about a country and its people, shaping perception, expectations, and international engagement (Damayanti et al., 2022). Even culturally rich countries struggle to attract tourists and investors due to negative stereotypes.

Promoting a strong brand image is essential for fostering positive attitudes and behavioral responses. Incorporating country-of-origin effects into communication strategies has been shown to enhance purchase intentions (Bertagnolli, 2013). Wang et al. (2012) further argue that both affective and cognitive dimensions of country image

influence purchasing behavior, with cognitive elements operating via product perceptions. As part of country brand identity, cultural products also influence destination choice. According to Lee and Bai (2016), exposure to pop-cultural products enhances destination image and fosters positive perceptions. Their findings emphasize the mediating role of country brand image in the relationship between cultural product consumption and behavioral intentions, such as visiting a destination or buying related goods. In this context, the hypothesized relationships are summarized in the conceptual framework presented in Figure 1. Building on this framework, the following hypotheses are proposed to explore the effect of Turkish cultural products consumption on consumer perceptions in MENA countries:

- H3** Turkey's country brand image positively influences visitors' intention to visit Turkey (**H3a**), intention to purchase Turkish products (**H3b**), and mediates the relationship between the consumption of Turkish media-cultural products and visitors' intention to visit Turkey (**H3c**) as well as their intention to purchase Turkish products (**H3d**). It also mediate the relationship between the consumption of Turkish art-cultural products and visitors' intention to visit Turkey (**H3e**) and their intention to purchase Turkish products (**H3f**).

### **National Stereotype**

Increasing international cooperation and intensified global market competition underscore the significance of positive country stereotypes in branding strategies, as these stereotypes enhance the national brand image by capitalizing on elements like the population, culture, heritage, landscape, history, products, and resources (Allen, 2016; Aydın and Arslan, 2024). These stereotypes embody perceptions rooted in a country's cultural and historical experiences, rather than reflecting a pre-existing identity. Expanding communication channels present challenges for countries with negative perceptions, as media often reinforces unfavorable stereotypes. Conversely, strategic branding and destination marketing can utilize stereotypes to shape more favorable perceptions (Yousaf, 2016). Despite being simplifications, stereotypes reflect attitudes and cultural patterns, and when effectively managed, they contribute significantly to shaping a country's brand image (Albu, 2013; Allen, 2016).

Visual and symbolic representations offer opportunities to influence global perceptions and enhance intercultural communication. Public and private actors can emphasize favorable national traits in branding efforts to promote diplomacy, support domestic products, and shape international narratives (Anholt, 2010; Allen, 2016). Though oversimplified, stereotypes often reflect authentic cultural or historical traits and can be strategically deployed. National stereotypes cover various dimensions (people, culture, politics, geography, and economy) and are frequently used in international marketing to link countries with product categories. For instance, the slogan "the power of German engineering" leverages stereotypes of precision and productivity (Motsi, 2016). Media also plays a vital role; Ware and Dupagne (1994) found that exposure to American media influenced perceptions of American culture and products.

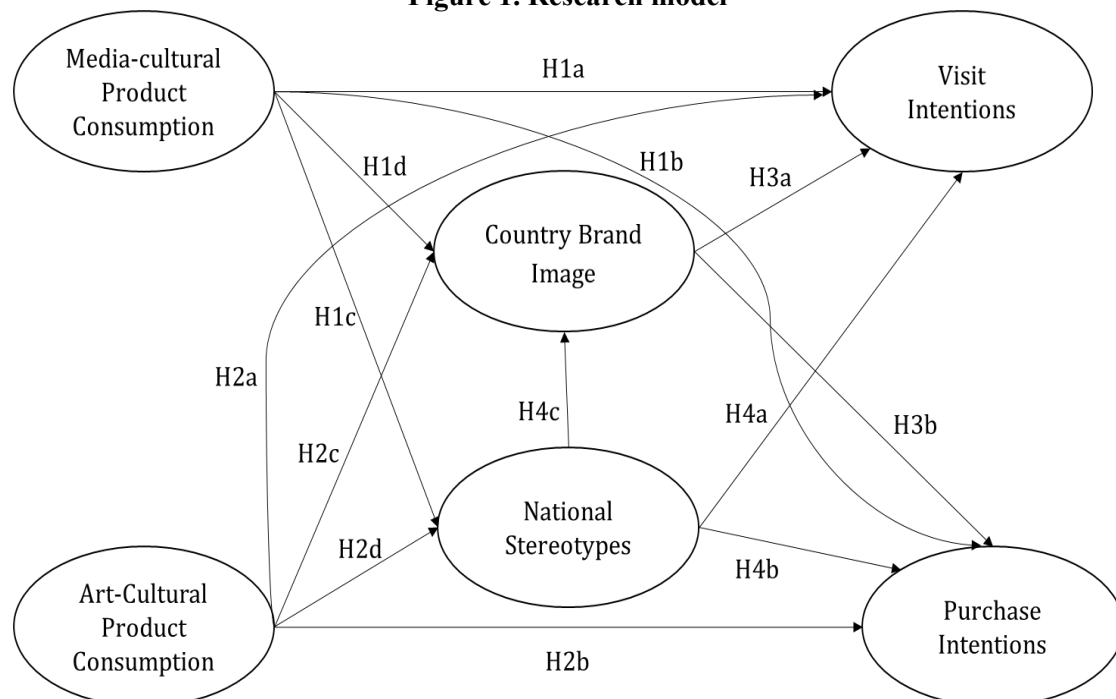
Stereotypes function as cognitive shortcuts, especially when consumers have limited knowledge. They simplify decision-making and influence trust and product evaluations. Countries like Japan and Germany benefit from such associations (Askegaard and Ger, 1998; Motsi, 2016). These mental images not only shape perceptions but foster

emotional connections with culturally unfamiliar products. National stereotypes intersect with the country-of-origin effect in shaping product evaluations. Research shows that positive stereotypes enhance product assessments and purchase intentions, while negative ones deter them (Janda and Rao, 1997; Bertagnolli, 2013). Given their impact on destination image and consumer behavior, national tourism organizations play a crucial role in shaping and maintaining these stereotypes (Freire, 2009).

Positive stereotypes influence not only perceptions of a destination but behavioral intentions, such as travel and product consumption. Based on this understanding, this study investigates the effect of Turkish national stereotypes on country brand image and behavioral intentions. It also explores their mediating role between cultural product consumption and consumer behavior. These relationships are conceptualized in the research model presented in Figure 1. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H4** Turkey's national stereotypes positively influence visitors' intention to visit Turkey (**H4a**), intention to purchase Turkish products (**H4b**), and Turkey's country brand image (**H4c**). Additionally, Turkey's national stereotypes mediate the relationship between the Turkish media-cultural products consumptions and intention to visit Turkey (**H4d**) as well as their intention to purchase Turkish products (**H4e**). They also mediate the relationship between the consumption of Turkish art-cultural products and visitors' intention to visit Turkey (**H4f**) and their intention to purchase Turkish products (**H4g**).

**Figure 1. Research model**



## Methodology

### Data Collection and Sample Characteristics

This study investigates the impact of Turkish cultural product consumption on consumers in the MENA region. Given the region's large population and wide geography (Istizada, 2018), a sample size of 384 was deemed sufficient based on standard social science thresholds and accepted for populations exceeding 1,000, where the population is considered infinite (Ural and Kılıç, 2013). Due to the impracticality of reaching the entire population, a convenience sampling method was employed. This non-probability technique, based on respondent accessibility and voluntary participation, is common in tourism and marketing research where random sampling is often unfeasible (Hansen, 2010; Sun et al., 2025; Xie et al., 2025). To efficiently reach diverse participants across MENA countries, data were collected via social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter which are effective in accessing a wide range of participants (Sue and Ritter, 2007; Hansen, 2010). Researchers aimed to maximize both the sample size and participant diversity. As a result, 865 valid responses were obtained (Table 1).

**Table 1: Participants' socio-demographic characteristics**

| Socio-demographics<br>(N=865)       |            | f   | %    | Socio-demographics<br>(N=865) |              | f   | %    |
|-------------------------------------|------------|-----|------|-------------------------------|--------------|-----|------|
| Gender                              | Male       | 411 | 47,5 | Nationality                   | Lebanon      | 121 | 14,0 |
|                                     | Female     | 454 | 52,5 |                               | Iraq         | 86  | 9,9  |
| Age (years)                         | <=20       | 112 | 12,9 |                               | Jordan       | 82  | 9,5  |
|                                     | 21-30      | 441 | 51,0 |                               | Egypt        | 75  | 8,7  |
|                                     | 31-40      | 180 | 20,8 |                               | Yemen        | 65  | 7,5  |
|                                     | 41-50      | 69  | 8,0  |                               | Palestine    | 64  | 7,4  |
|                                     | >=50       | 63  | 7,3  |                               | Qatar        | 64  | 7,4  |
| Previous Visit Experience to Turkey | No         | 475 | 54,9 |                               | Algeria      | 56  | 6,5  |
|                                     | Yes        | 390 | 45,1 |                               | Tunisia      | 48  | 5,5  |
| Length of Stay                      | Never been | 475 | 54,9 |                               | Saudi Arabia | 39  | 4,5  |
|                                     | Days       | 272 | 31,4 | Kuwait                        | 39           | 4,5 |      |
|                                     | Months     | 62  | 7,2  | Iran                          | 34           | 3,9 |      |
|                                     | > 1 year   | 56  | 6,5  | Morocco                       | 29           | 3,4 |      |
|                                     |            |     |      | Oman                          | 27           | 3,1 |      |
|                                     |            |     |      | Others                        | 32           | 4,2 |      |

### Measures

The study employed measurement tools developed in six stages, incorporating both Semantic Differential and Likert scales, commonly used to assess subjective experiences and attitudes. This multi-method approach ensured contextual relevance while preserving the original structure and validity of the scales.

The first stage involved questions on participants' socio-demographic characteristics. Second, a Cultural Product Scale was created based on a comprehensive literature

review (Straub, 1989) and standard procedures, including expert evaluations, back-translation, and a pre-test (Hair et al., 2019). Cultural product categories were identified (Scott, 2004; DCMS, 2015; Crossman, 2024; Nye, 1980), encompassing food, media (magazines, newspapers, websites, TV, social media), movies, drama, music, heritage, live performances, cultural venues (e.g., museums), festivals, traditional crafts, architecture, celebrities, fashion, sports, and language. A pilot study determined the most influential Turkish cultural products. Based on the findings, nine items were selected: (1) architecture, (2) celebrities, (3) crafts, (4) fashion, (5) food, (6) heritage, (7) movies, (8) music, and (9) series. These were measured using a 5-point Semantic Differential scale (1 = no consumption, 5 = high consumption). Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analyses grouped the items into two categories: Media Cultural Products (movies, series, music, celebrities) and Art-Heritage Cultural Products (heritage, crafts, fashion, architecture). “Food” was excluded due to low factor loading. Detailed results are provided in the Results section. In the third stage, purchase intention was measured using a 3-item scale adapted from Wang et al. (2012), modified to assess preferences for Turkish over foreign products. The fourth stage measured visit intentions using a similar adaptation. Both used 5-point Likert scales. The fifth stage employed the Nation Brands Index (Anholt, 2005) to assess country brand image across six dimensions (Zeinalpour et al., 2013), using adapted 5-point Likert items. Finally, national stereotypes were measured using Fiske et al.’s (2002) Stereotype Content Model (SCM), which distinguishes stereotypes along two dimensions. These were measured using a 5-point Semantic Differential scale. To ensure clarity and validity, expert review, back-translation, and pre-testing were conducted prior to data collection.

## Results

### Measurement Model

The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and IBM Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS). Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to test the proposed hypotheses. In the preliminary analysis, the normality of data distribution was assessed through central tendency (mean), dispersion (standard deviation), skewness, and kurtosis. The variables’ means ranged from 2.97 to 4.26, standard deviations from 0.95 to 1.18, skewness from –1.63 to 0.31, and kurtosis from –1.11 to 2.34. These values fall within the acceptable range, indicating a normal distribution (Kline, 2011; Hair et al., 2019). Construct reliability and validity were examined using Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha$ ), while convergent validity was assessed via Average Variance Extracted (AVE). As shown in Table 2, all constructs exceeded the recommended thresholds. According to established criteria, values of CR and AVE should exceed 0.50, and factor loadings should be above 0.40 (Hair et al., 2019; Bagozzi and Yi, 1988).

**Table 1: Internal consistency and convergent validity results**

| Variables                      | Items                            | Factor Loading | $\alpha$ | CR    | AVE   |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------|----------|-------|-------|
| <b>Media Cultural Products</b> | CP2 I watch Turkish movies       | .78            | .80      | 0.814 | 0.524 |
|                                | CP3 I watch Turkish series       | .77            |          |       |       |
|                                | CP4 I listen to Turkish music    | .66            |          |       |       |
|                                | CP9 I follow Turkish celebrities | .68            |          |       |       |

| Variables                      |      | Items                                                                                                          | Factor Loading | $\alpha$ | CR    | AVE   |
|--------------------------------|------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------|-------|-------|
| Art-Heritage Cultural Products | CP1  | I eat Turkish food                                                                                             | Removed        | .78      | 0.801 | 0.502 |
|                                | CP5  | I'm familiar with Turkish heritage                                                                             | .63            |          |       |       |
|                                | CP6  | I'm interested in Turkish crafts                                                                               | .81            |          |       |       |
|                                | CP7  | I'm interested in Turkish fashion                                                                              | .63            |          |       |       |
|                                | CP8  | I'm interested in Turkish architecture arts                                                                    | .70            |          |       |       |
| Country Brand Image            |      |                                                                                                                |                |          | 0.954 | 0.776 |
| Tourism                        | Tr1  | Turkey is rich in historic buildings and monuments                                                             | .85            | .92      |       |       |
|                                | Tr2  | Turkey has a vibrant city life and urban attractions                                                           | .90            |          |       |       |
|                                | Tr3  | I would like to visit Turkey if I had enough money                                                             | .84            |          |       |       |
|                                | Tr4  | Turkey is rich in natural beauty                                                                               | .94            |          |       |       |
| Culture                        | Cul1 | Turkey is an interesting and exciting place for contemporary cultures such as music, films, art and literature | .67            | .92      |       |       |
|                                | Cul2 | Turkey is outstanding in sport                                                                                 | .99            |          |       |       |
|                                | Cul3 | Turkey has a rich cultural heritage                                                                            | .99            |          |       |       |
|                                | Cul4 | Turkey has lots of cultural events and attractions                                                             | .78            |          |       |       |
| Immigration-investment         | Im1  | Turkey is a good place to live for a substantial period                                                        | .82            | .92      |       |       |
|                                | Im2  | Turkey is a good place to work for a substantial period                                                        | .74            |          |       |       |
|                                | Im3  | Turkey is a place with a high quality of life                                                                  | .88            |          |       |       |
|                                | Im4  | Turkey is a good place to study and get educational qualifications                                             | .83            |          |       |       |
|                                | Im5  | If I had businesses, I'd like to invest in Turkey                                                              | .79            |          |       |       |
|                                | Im6  | Turkey cares about equality in society                                                                         | .82            |          |       |       |
| People                         | Pp1  | People in Turkey are welcoming                                                                                 | .81            | .88      |       |       |
|                                | Pp2  | I would like to have a close friend from Turkey                                                                | .89            |          |       |       |
|                                | Pp3  | I would like to work with a person from Turkey                                                                 | .86            |          |       |       |
| Exports                        | Ex1  | Turkey has a major contribution to science and technology.                                                     | Removed        | .86      |       |       |
|                                | Ex2  | I feel good about buying products made in Turkey                                                               | .89            |          |       |       |
|                                | Ex3  | Turkey has a role in creative, cutting-edge ideas of production                                                | .86            |          |       |       |
| Government                     | Gov1 | Turkish government is competent                                                                                | .86            | .96      |       |       |
|                                | Gov2 | Turkish government is honest                                                                                   | .91            |          |       |       |
|                                | Gov3 | Turkish government respects the rights of citizens and treats them with fairness                               | .94            |          |       |       |
|                                | Gov4 | Turkish government behaves responsibly in international peace and security                                     | .93            |          |       |       |

| Variables           |      | Items                                                                | Factor Loading | $\alpha$ | CR    | AVE   |
|---------------------|------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------|-------|-------|
|                     | Gov5 | Turkish government behaves responsibly in protecting the environment | .89            |          |       |       |
|                     | Gov6 | Turkish government behaves responsibly toward reducing world poverty | .88            |          |       |       |
| National Stereotype |      |                                                                      |                |          | 0.909 | 0.834 |
| Warmth              | War1 | Friendly                                                             | .75            | .93      |       |       |
|                     | War2 | Well-intentioned                                                     | .81            |          |       |       |
|                     | War3 | Trustworthy                                                          | .85            |          |       |       |
|                     | War4 | Sincere                                                              | .85            |          |       |       |
|                     | War5 | Warm                                                                 | .85            |          |       |       |
|                     | War6 | Good-natured                                                         | .87            |          |       |       |
| Competence          | Com1 | Efficient                                                            | .82            | .92      |       |       |
|                     | Com2 | Independent                                                          | .80            |          |       |       |
|                     | Com3 | Competitive                                                          | .80            |          |       |       |
|                     | Com4 | Confident                                                            | .84            |          |       |       |
|                     | Com5 | Competent                                                            | .86            |          |       |       |
|                     | Com5 | Intelligent                                                          | .82            |          |       |       |
| Visit intention     | VI1  | Intention to visit Turkey                                            | .77            | .80      | 0.804 | 0.673 |
|                     | VI2  | Likelihood of visiting Turkey                                        | Removed        |          |       |       |
|                     | VI3  | Preference of visiting Turkey comparing to other destinations        | .87            |          |       |       |
| Purchase intention  | PI1  | Intention to buy Turkish products                                    | .94            | .90      | 0.902 | 0.755 |
|                     | PI2  | Likelihood of buying Turkish products                                | .84            |          |       |       |
|                     | PI3  | Preference of buying Turkish products comparing to other products    | .82            |          |       |       |

Prior to hypothesis testing, discriminant validity was assessed. As shown in Table 3, this requires statistically significant correlations between latent variables and that the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct exceeds its inter-construct correlations.

**Table 2: Discriminant validity results**

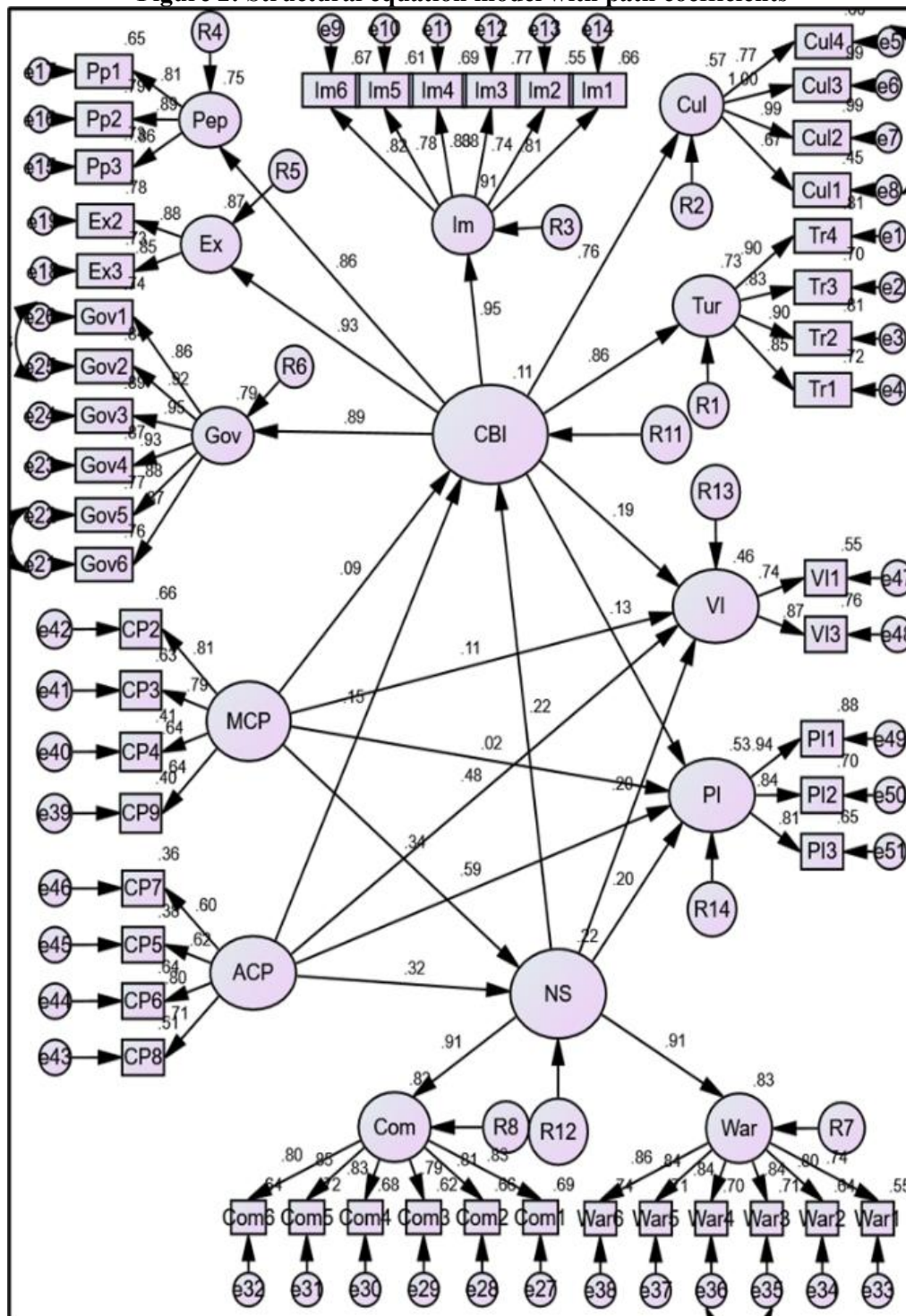
| Constructs | VI    | CBI   | NS    | PI    | ACP   | MCP   |
|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>VI</b>  | 0.820 |       |       |       |       |       |
| <b>CBI</b> | 0.396 | 0.881 |       |       |       |       |
| <b>NS</b>  | 0.498 | 0.328 | 0.913 |       |       |       |
| <b>PI</b>  | 0.753 | 0.351 | 0.497 | 0.869 |       |       |
| <b>ACP</b> | 0.577 | 0.287 | 0.471 | 0.660 | 0.709 |       |
| <b>MCP</b> | 0.471 | 0.265 | 0.482 | 0.418 | 0.607 | 0.724 |

Based on the results in Table 3, all correlations are statistically significant, and the square roots of the AVE values exceed the corresponding inter-construct correlations, confirming discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2019).

## Structural Model Hypothesis Testing

The proposed model includes multiple interrelated variables, necessitating the use of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), which allows for the simultaneous estimation of relationships among sequential constructs (Richter et al., 2016). The results, analyzed using AMOS, are illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Structural equation model with path coefficients



As illustrated in Figure 2, this study examines the interrelationships among two exogenous variables (media cultural products and art-heritage cultural products), two mediating variables (national stereotypes and country brand image), and two endogenous variables (visit intention and purchase intention).

To evaluate the hypothesized model, several fit indices were used, including the Chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio ( $\chi^2/\text{df}$ ), RMSEA, CFI, TLI, NFI, GFI, and AGFI. The  $\chi^2/\text{df}$  value was 3.87, which is below the recommended threshold of 5.0 (Marsh and Hocevar, 1985), and the RMSEA was 0.058, also within the acceptable range ( $<0.08$ ) (Hooper et al., 2008). The CFI and TLI values were 0.92 and 0.91, respectively, exceeding the recommended cutoff of 0.90, while the NFI value of 0.90 further supported the model's fit. Although the GFI (0.82) and AGFI (0.80) did not reach the ideal threshold of 0.90, they exceeded the minimum acceptable value of 0.80 (Baumgartner and Homburg, 1996; Doll et al., 1994). These indices, though borderline, do not compromise the overall validity of the model—an issue frequently encountered in complex social science models (Greenspoon and Saklofske, 1998; Lee et al., 2020; Fang et al., 2022). Taken together, these results suggest that the model demonstrates an acceptable fit.

Direct path analysis results (Table 4) show that consuming Turkish media cultural products positively influences visit intention ( $\beta = 0.107$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ), perceived country brand image ( $\beta = 0.087$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ), and national stereotypes ( $\beta = 0.338$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting H1a, H1c, and H1d. However, its effect on purchase intention was not significant ( $\beta = 0.017$ ,  $p = 0.608$ ), leading to the rejection of H1b. Similarly, consumption of Turkish art-heritage cultural products positively influences visit intention ( $\beta = 0.479$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.589$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), country brand image ( $\beta = 0.146$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ), and national stereotypes ( $\beta = 0.323$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), confirming H2a through H2d. Furthermore, country brand image has a positive impact on visit intention ( $\beta = 0.190$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.127$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), validating H3a and H3b. National stereotypes also positively affect visit intention ( $\beta = 0.199$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.202$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and country brand image ( $\beta = 0.210$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting H4a, H4b, and H4c.

**Table 3: Summary of direct effects hypothesis testing**

| Hypothesis       | Std. $\beta$ | Lower | Upper | p-value | Result    |
|------------------|--------------|-------|-------|---------|-----------|
| H1a: VI<--- MCP  | .107         | .027  | .188  | .020    | Supported |
| H1b: PI<--- MCP  | .017         | -.053 | .091  | .709    | Rejected  |
| H1c: NS<--- MCP  | .338         | .268  | .408  | .000    | Supported |
| H1d: CBI<--- MCP | .087         | .018  | .158  | .044    | Supported |
| H2a: VI<--- ACP  | .479         | .394  | .568  | .000    | Supported |
| H2b: PI<--- ACP  | .589         | .515  | .666  | .000    | Supported |
| H2c: CBI<--- ACP | .146         | .066  | .225  | .003    | Supported |
| H2d: NS<--- ACP  | .323         | .240  | .402  | .000    | Supported |
| H3a: VI<--- CBI  | .190         | .133  | .251  | .000    | Supported |
| H3b: PI<--- CBI  | .127         | .071  | .184  | .000    | Supported |
| H4a: VI<--- NS   | .199         | .102  | .288  | .002    | Supported |
| H4b: PI<--- NS   | .202         | .116  | .284  | .000    | Supported |
| H4c: CBI<--- NS  | .219         | .139  | .301  | .000    | Supported |

To test multiple mediators within a Structural Equation Model (SEM), Gaskin and Lim (2018) proposed a user-defined estimand approach using bootstrapping in the AMOS environment. In the present study, which includes multiple mediating variables, specific indirect effects were tested using bootstrapping procedures in IBM AMOS 24. As presented in Table 5, the results confirm that Turkey's country brand image and perceived national stereotypes function as mediators in several key relationships within the research model.

**Table 4: Summary of indirect effects hypothesis testing**

| Hypothesis              | Std. $\beta$ | Lower | Upper | p-Value | Result    |
|-------------------------|--------------|-------|-------|---------|-----------|
| H3c: MCP --> CBI --> VI | .029***      | .013  | .038  | .001    | Supported |
| H3d: MCP --> CBI --> PI | .022***      | .010  | .032  | .001    | Supported |
| H3e: ACP --> CBI --> VI | .032***      | .015  | .047  | .001    | Supported |
| H3f: ACP --> CBI --> PI | .024***      | .012  | .039  | .001    | Supported |
| H4d: MCP --> NS --> VI  | .056***      | .020  | .088  | .001    | Supported |
| H4e: MCP --> NS --> PI  | .063***      | .033  | .117  | .001    | Supported |
| H4f: ACP --> NS --> VI  | .050***      | .019  | .077  | .001    | Supported |
| H4g: ACP --> NS --> PI  | .055***      | .032  | .101  | .001    | Supported |

Accordingly, Turkey's country brand image significantly mediates the relationship between Turkish media cultural products and both visit intention (H3c:  $\beta = 0.029$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and purchase intention (H3d:  $\beta = 0.022$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Similarly, it mediates the effects of Turkish art-heritage cultural products on visit intention (H3e:  $\beta = 0.032$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and purchase intention (H3f:  $\beta = 0.024$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). In parallel, national stereotypes serve as a significant mediator between Turkish media cultural products and visit intention (H4d:  $\beta = 0.056$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) as well as purchase intention (H4e:  $\beta = 0.063$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). They also mediate the relationship between Turkish art-heritage cultural products and both visit intention (H4f:  $\beta = 0.050$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and purchase intention (H4g:  $\beta = 0.055$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting all related hypotheses.

## Discussion

This study investigates the impact of consuming Turkish cultural products on the consumers intention of the MENA region to visit Turkey and purchase its products. The study further explored whether country brand image and national stereotypes serve as mediators in this relationship. To achieve these goals, a comprehensive conceptual model was developed and tested regarding the cultural product consumption including the key marketing concepts. Following the current body of literature on cultural product consumption and destination branding (Xiaoming and Leng, 2004; Mihalís, 2005; Aiello and Cacia, 2014; Lin and Wang, 2016; Rodolf and Glińska, 2019; Zhang et al., 2022; Xing and Jin, 2023), the current study validates the role of cultural products in forming country brand image and impacting consumer behavior.

The study revealed that Turkish cultural products significantly affect country brand image perceptions. The study has also found that specific art-heritage cultural products consumption, e.g., architecture, heritage sites, and traditional crafts, increases positive brand image and national stereotypes of Turkey. These results align with existing research conducted regarding cultural products consumptions, including studies on

local cuisine in China (Rodolf and Glińska, 2019), theaters in Poland (Zhang et al., 2022), and cultural and entertainment products in Europe (Mihalis, 2005). The research participants exposed to Turkish art-heritage cultural products not only developed positive perceptions towards Turkey but shown increased intentions to visit the country and purchase its products. Similarly, media cultural products, such as TV dramas, movies, and music, positively influenced Turkey's brand image and national stereotypes. However, their direct effect on purchase intentions was not significant. This finding suggests that while media cultural products effectively shape perceptions of a country and motivate travel intentions, their influence on consumer behavior, specifically product purchase decisions, may require additional factors such as branding or product positioning strategies (Lin and Wang, 2016). Importantly, the study showed that media cultural products indirectly affect purchase intentions through the mediating roles of national stereotypes and country brand image, highlighting the interconnectedness of these variables.

The role of national stereotypes in shaping perceptions and intentions was particularly considerable. Respondents exposed to Turkish cultural products perceived Turkish people as competent and warm, reflecting findings from Xiaoming and Leng (2004), who highlighted similar outcomes in their study of Japanese cultural products. It was found that positive stereotypes, relating Turkish people with hospitality and creativity, played a significant role in increasing both visit and purchase intentions. These findings highlight the tremendous strength of cultural products for boosting emotional connections and favorable perceptions towards country and its culture (Chen, 2023; Said, et al., 2024). The study further explored the behavioral and intentional outcomes of cultural product consumption.

The research participants, MENA region, expressed high volume of visit intention to Turkey, frequently choosing it over the other countries. Considering these participants have exposed to cultural products, these findings indicate the effectiveness of Turkish cultural products and the value of positioning Turkey as an attractive destination. Evidence from this study align with the previous research that shed light on the pivotal role of cultural products, e.g., Turkish TV series, on consumer behavior (Balli et al., 2013; Kantarcı et al., 2016). Previous studies have shown a positive correlation between the popularity of Turkish TV series and increased tourism interactions, especially from Saudi Arabia and Bulgaria (Kantarcı et al., 2016). Consistent with these findings, increased tourist flows to Türkiye from countries where Turkish TV series are widely acknowledged have been observed. These findings support the idea that cultural products such as TV series contribute to forming destination images while influencing visit intentions. Purchase intentions were also affected, by many respondents indicating a willingness to purchase Turkish products. However, comparative preference for Turkish products over alternatives was less pronounced among some respondents, indicating a potential area of improvement in marketing strategies targeting differentiation and brand loyalty.

It is evident that the current study adds value to the literature by providing a theoretical model that combines cultural products with key marketing concepts such as country brand image, purchase intentions, and visit intentions. The study confirms the strategic importance of cultural products forming national images, enhancing destination attractiveness, and influencing consumer behavior in both tourism and product consumption contexts. This highlights their potential as powerful tools for integrated

marketing communication (Ware and Dupagne, 1994; Xiaoming and Leng, 2004; Ma et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2025). The findings confirm the role of cultural products in enhancing a country's competitiveness in global markets by focusing on information sources and socio-cultural factors in shaping the destination image. Through promoting positive stereotypes and a strong country brand image, cultural products increase both tourism and consumer demand towards a country's goods and services. Furthermore, the study highlights the need for specific strategies to maximize the impact of media and art heritage cultural products, especially in promoting long-term consumer preference for national products.

While the study provides valuable insights, researchers appreciate the limitations of the study, including its focus on the MENA region and the use of an online questionnaire for data collection. This raises questions about the generalizability of the findings to other regions. To contribute and expand the existing literature, future studies could focus on other regions, e.g., East Asia, Europe, or North America, investigating whether consumers in these regions respond similarly to cultural products or Turkish cultural products in particular. In addition, the study mainly investigates the positive aspect of cultural products effect; however, investigating potential negative influences -cultural appropriation or reinforcement of stereotypes- would provide a more balanced perspective. The role of other mediating factors, including personal experiences, social networks, or word of mouth, could also be investigated in future studies to provide a more nuanced understanding of cultural product consumption and its effects on consumer decisions.

### **Practical Implications for Stakeholders**

By focusing on Turkish cultural products and their influence on consumers in the MENA region, the insights provided by this study offer some practical value for tourism boards, destination marketers, businesses, and policymakers aiming to enhance Turkey's cultural visibility, expand its international tourist base, and reinforce its competitive position in global markets. Tourism promotion authorities, in particular, might consider placing greater emphasis on Turkish television dramas, musical content, and historical heritage assets in their outreach to audiences in the MENA region and other culturally aligned markets. A compelling example lies in the widespread appeal of Turkish series such as *Resurrection: Ertuğrul* and *Magnificent Century* across MENA countries. These productions have not only increased cultural awareness of Turkey but have also coincided with growing interest in travel to the country. The connection goes beyond cultural familiarity; it appears to transform into actual tourist engagement. In this regard, incorporating such media products into destination marketing efforts could meaningfully shape perceptions. Beyond media integration, partnerships with influencers, museums, galleries, and cultural organizations can help craft tourism experiences that are immersive and distinctive.

By highlighting the richness and variety of Turkish cultural assets, such collaborations offer pathways to engage travelers on a deeper extend. This strategy aligns with earlier works pointing to the importance of cultural products in the construction of place identity and destination branding (Kantarıcı et al., 2016; Rudolf and Glińska, 2019). For businesses and product marketers, the inclusion of Turkish products in cultural exports, such as their placement in television series or films, enhances product visibility and

fosters favorable associations with Turkey. In a similar vein, investments in cultural exchange programs and the support of cultural institutions contribute to the consolidation of Turkey's soft power and international cultural presence. In parallel, promoting traditional cultural export goods such as Turkish coffee or artisan handicrafts acknowledged by UNESCO through targeted digital campaigns, design exhibitions, and regional cultural fairs, may improve the perception of the "Made in Turkey" label and positively shape consumer attitudes. For policymakers and cultural institutions alike, safeguarding and disseminating Turkey's cultural heritage through historical sites, traditional arts, and cultural events remains essential for reinforcing the country's image as a distinctive and appealing tourism destination. Ultimately, the strategic promotion of cultural products not only supports tourism and trade but enhances Turkey's global recognition and strengthens its competitive positioning.

### **Practical Implications for Asian Business**

Given the focus of the current research falls particularly on consumers in the MENA region, it offers meaningful insights for Asian businesses aiming to incorporate cultural products into their international marketing strategies. This is particularly relevant in the context of the Middle East and North Africa, where cultural familiarity and resonance play a pivotal role in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors. The findings emphasize the transformative potential of cultural products in influencing perceptions, driving consumer preferences, and stimulating demand for a country and its associated offerings.

For Asian enterprises, the research underscores the strategic value of embedding cultural products within the broader marketing mix. By recognizing the interplay between cultural consumption, country brand image, and consumer intentions, firms can adopt more targeted and culturally attuned strategies to strengthen their market presence in the MENA region. These insights are especially pertinent to sectors such as media, entertainment, and luxury goods, where consumer decisions are often shaped by cultural affiliations and symbolic meanings.

Asian countries possess diverse and historically rich cultural heritages that hold significant potential to captivate international audiences. As illustrated in this study, cultural engagement through products can effectively stimulate tourism and interest in nationally branded goods. Such engagement stimulates curiosity about national products while also inspiring travelers from diverse regions to visit Asian destinations and experience cultural offerings. This reciprocal impact strengthens both tourism and export potential. In addition, it demonstrates how cultural products function as bridges between markets and destinations in international competition. Although many Asian economies remain in developmental phases, the findings suggest that emphasizing cultural attributes can enhance their global positioning and competitiveness relative to Western markets. When applied strategically, cultural expressions such as art, architecture, performance traditions, handicrafts, and contemporary media can create distinct value propositions and facilitate deeper penetration into international markets. From a strategic perspective, Asian firms can also benefit from the study's insights into the mediating roles of national stereotypes and country brand image. For example, the observed influence of Turkish art-heritage products on perceptions of national identity offers a relevant parallel. Asian companies may similarly draw upon local cultural

symbols to position their offerings as authentic, differentiated, and aligned with the aspirations of consumers in culturally distinct markets such as MENA.

The study's findings regarding the indirect effects of media cultural products, including television series and music, further highlight the importance of synchronized branding efforts. Integrating local storytelling, cultural motifs, and emotional narratives into marketing communications can enhance engagement and foster brand loyalty. Aligning marketing efforts with the favorable associations evoked by cultural content enables firms to deepen consumer connections and increase brand salience in emotionally meaningful ways. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that cultural identity and heritage represent valuable strategic assets for Asian firms seeking to expand internationally. By harnessing the symbolic and emotional power of cultural products, businesses can elevate brand appeal, build stronger consumer relationships, and unlock new growth opportunities within the MENA region. The findings reaffirm the capacity of cultural products to shape perceptions, guide consumer behavior, and enhance demand for both destinations and national brands.

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