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The Influence of Social Identity and Cultural Authenticity in Shaping Consumer Behaviour in Fashion among students in a Public University in Ghana

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Abstract

Purpose: The study examined how social identity and cultural authenticity guide fashion buying behaviour among university students at a public University in Ghana. It studied how factors such as group belonging, cultural pride, and peer influence determine students' preferences for local versus global fashion brands.

Methodology/Design: A quantitative cross-sectional design was used for the study. A structured questionnaire was administered to a stratified random sample of 392 students aged 18 upwards. The data gathered were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows, version 26, applying descriptive statistics and regression analysis to evaluate correlations among social identity, cultural authenticity, brand perception, and fashion behaviour.

Findings: The outcome of the study demonstrated that social identity strongly influenced purchasing intentions ($\beta = 0.576$, $p < 0.001$), brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.307$, $p < 0.001$), and preference for local brands ($\beta = 0.613$, $p < 0.001$). Cultural authenticity had a substantial impact on choice for local brands, with ethnic and local craftsmanship appearing as the best predictor ($\beta = 0.551$, $p < 0.001$). In addition, brand perception partially mediated the relationship between social identity and cultural authenticity and fashion customer behaviour, and students favoured apparel labels that resonated with their cultural identity and social affiliations.

Practical and Social Implications: The findings of the study underline the necessity to integrate cultural components and identity values into local fashion branding efforts. For policymakers and fashion marketers, this research provides empirical data supporting programmes that promote cultural authenticity and identity-driven branding as instruments for sustainable fashion development in Ghana.

Originality: This study contributes to literature on fashion consumer behaviour in African contexts by presenting a localised analysis of identity, culture, and branding influences among Ghanaian university students. It uniquely posits brand perception as a mediator between social structures and fashion behaviour within a Sub-Saharan African university setting.

Keywords
Brand perception, cultural authenticity, cultural pride, fashion consumer behaviour, peer influence, social identity

1 | INTRODUCTION

Fashion plays a critical role in how individuals function as consumers, and it is closely tied to social identity and cultural authenticity. Globally, scientists have explored how fashion choices are influenced by an individual's sense of identity, which is shaped by social groupings, cultural ideas, and personal experiences (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The view of social identification theory implies that individuals identify themselves into various groups, affecting their likes and actions, including fashion consumption (Stets & Burke, 2000). Cultural authenticity, defined as the perceived distinctiveness and traditional portrayal of fashion goods, also plays a key role in shaping consumer tastes (Zhang & Kim, 2013). In many regions of the world, especially in multicultural communities, teenage consumers navigate between traditional and modern fashion trends, integrating their cultural heritage with global fashion influences (Aggarwal et al., 2025). Studies have found that in Western nations, young consumers' fashion choices are often affected by a combination of self-expression, group conformity, and brand loyalty, which

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coincide with their social identity (O'Cass & Siahtiri, 2013). Despite rising literature, little is known about how social identity and cultural authenticity affect young fashion consumption in non-Western contexts.

Young consumers, particularly university students, manage complicated identity dynamics, choosing between local and global fashion influences based on their perceived cultural authenticity and societal expectations (Aggarwal et al., 2025). In Africa, the friction between the growing esteem for Afrocentric fashion and the ongoing dominance of Western and global fashion names (Okonkwo, 2007) further complicates the challenge. Eurocentric beauty and fashion standards lead many young Africans to prefer international brands to local ones (Daitey et al., 2025). Despite this, most studies on how social identity and cultural authenticity affect fashion consumption in Africa focus on consumer behaviour patterns rather than university students' experiences. Research by O'Cass and Siahtiri (2013) found that young consumers often relate their fashion choices with their social groupings to generate a sense of belonging. Additionally, Dzramedo et al. (2023) observed that cultural authenticity stimulates African youth to embrace local fashion styles as a method of displaying cultural pride. However, while these studies highlight the relationship between fashion, identity, and culture, they fail to provide a thorough grasp of how these components interact in specific socio-economic and educational institutions, such as Universities. Studies in Africa have largely studied consumer choices at the general population levels, creating a gap in knowing how university students, as a distinct group, negotiate fashion consumption in connection to social identity and cultural authenticity.

In Ghana, studies on fashion consumption have largely addressed the value of traditional fabrics, cultural symbolism, and the impact of globalisation on fashion preferences (William & Nathalie, 2025; Normanyo, 2021; Amankwah et al., 2012). Research by Daitey et al. (2025) indicated that young Ghanaians often perceive local fashion as a cultural statement but save its use for special occasions, preferring foreign brands for daily use due to their association with social standing. Existing studies have urged future studies on the motivations behind fashion choices, with special demands for qualitative study (Clottey & Gyampoh, 2025). However, little is known about how social identity and cultural authenticity intersect to impact fashion choices among university students in Ghana. This study seeks to fill a gap in the literature by investigating the influence of social identity and cultural authenticity on fashion consumption behaviour among students at a selected public University in Ghana. The research questions that guided the study were; how does social identity influence fashion choices among students at a selected public University in Ghana?; what role does cultural authenticity play in shaping fashion behaviour among the students?; does brand perception mediate the relationship between social identity, cultural authenticity, and fashion consumer behaviour among university students? The findings provide more localised and contextual understanding of fashion consumer behaviour in Ghana, having practical consequences for local fashion enterprises, legislators, and cultural activists.

1.1| Social Identity Theory (SIT)

The study employed the Social Identity Theory (SIT), formulated by Tajfel and Turner (1979), to explain the impact of group membership, cultural identification, and peer influence on fashion consumption. SIT focuses on four main ideas: social categorisation, social identification, social comparison, and in-group favoritism/conformity. Social categorisation helped in this study by illustrating how students conceptualise fashion through cultural authenticity (Zhang & Kim, 2013), while social identification stresses the way students embrace fashion styles that signify group affiliation (Stets & Burke, 2000; O'Cass & Siahtiri, 2013). Social comparison, on the other hand, looks at how cultural pride and evaluations of groups affect people's preferences for brands (Baucum, 2017; Escalas & Bettman, 2005). According to Escalas and Bettman (2005) "when brand associations are used to construct the self or to communicate the self-concept to others, a connection is formed with the brand". They continued that "the influence of in-group versus out-group brand usage differs depending on whether the consumer has a primarily independent or interdependent self-construal and that these effects are moderated by the degree to which the brands are symbolic, that is, communicate something about the user". In-group favouritism and conformity are the other aspects of the theory that also guided this research. These structures collectively offer a thorough framework for examining the fashion choices of university students in a selected public University in Ghana.

1.2| Influence of Social Identity on Fashion Consumer Behaviour

Social Identity Theory (SIT) emphasises the pivotal influence of group affiliations on consumer behaviour, especially in the realm of fashion, where clothing functions as a medium for expressing identity

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and belonging (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). O'Cass and Siahtiri (2013) discovered that peer affiliations and group membership substantially affect purchasing choices, whereas Aggarwal et al. (2025) validated that social identity pressures promote conformity in brand selection among adolescents. Badaoui, Lebrun, Su & Bouchet (2018) demonstrated that young consumers embrace peer-driven trends to enhance social acceptance, thereby reinforcing Stets and Burke's (2000) assertion that self-worth is derived from group affiliations. On the other hand, Workman and Kidd (2000) pointed out that some people, especially in individualistic settings, intentionally set themselves apart by making unique fashion choices. In addition to immediate purchases, belonging to a group also makes people more loyal to a brand. Escalas and Bettman (2005) and Ghosh et al. (2025) showed that people make long-term commitments to brands that represent their group identity. Nevertheless, Daitey et al. (2025), within a Ghanaian framework, noted that although global brands are associated with status, factors such as economic accessibility and cultural authenticity frequently influence enduring loyalty to local brands. These studies collectively confirm that social identity substantially influences fashion consumption; however, its impact is likely to be moderated by cultural context, peer dynamics, and economic conditions, elements and this study aims to further investigate this within a Ghanaian university environment.

Building on this body of work, more recent identity-based consumer-behaviour scholarship has refined the mechanisms through which group identification translates into brand choice. Reed et al. (2012) developed an integrative framework of identity-based consumer behaviour, arguing that identity salience and identity verification jointly determine the persistence of identity-driven preferences, an argument particularly relevant in dense, identity-rich environments such as university campuses. Belk (2013) extended his classic notion of the extended self to digital and possession-based identity expression, demonstrating that fashion artefacts increasingly serve as instruments of self-presentation in peer-saturated social-media contexts. White et al. (2012) further showed that consumers actively dissociate from out-groups by avoiding products associated with dissociative reference groups, suggesting that Ghanaian students may deliberately reject brands perceived as misaligned with their salient social identity. Closer to the African setting, Adjei-Appoh et al. (2022) reported that social-identity congruence with a clothing brand significantly predicted both purchase intention and word-of-mouth among Ghanaian young adults, while Nwankwo et al. (2014) found that group conformity and aspirational reference groups remain among the strongest predictors of luxury and apparel consumption in Sub-Saharan markets. These scholarly body of literature confirm that the social-identity mechanism is empirically robust across cultures, while underscoring the value of context-specific evidence such as the present study.

1.3 | Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework presents the relationships between key variables in the study, visually illustrating how social identity and cultural authenticity influence fashion consumer behaviour (Figure 1).

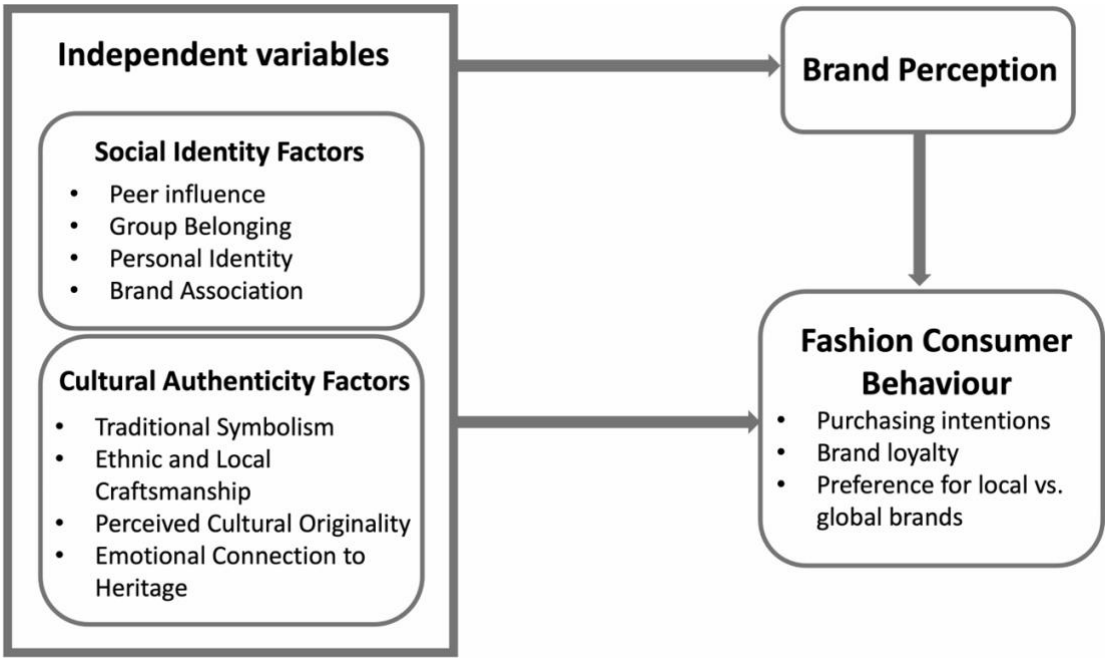


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework showing the relationship among Social Identity, Cultural Authenticity, Brand Perception and Fashion Consumer Behaviour (Authors Construct).

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The framework was designed drawing insights from the Social Identity Theory (SIT) by Tajfel and Turner (1979) as its foundational framework, while incorporating cultural authenticity to explain the influence of psychological and cultural factors on fashion consumer behaviour. The framework asserts that social identity, which is expressed through peer influence, group affiliation, and individual identity, interacts with cultural authenticity to shape brand perception, which subsequently mediates consumer behaviour outcomes, including purchasing intentions, brand loyalty, and the preference for local versus foreign fashion brands. Stets and Burke (2000) noted that social identity is formed through group affiliations and profoundly influences individual decision-making, including choices related to fashion. However, Yeboah et al. (2025) found a significant relationship between materialism value, self-gratification, social status and fashion clothing purchasing behaviour, but not peer influence, in their study using social practice theory to examine attitudes towards fashion clothing purchasing behaviour among young adult consumers in emerging markets. Culturally, authenticity affects how people judge brands. Zhang and Kim (2013) show that people tend to like fashion items that are in line with their cultural background. In this context, brand perception is defined as the intermediary variable that connects social identity and cultural authenticity to consumer behaviour. The study employed this framework to clarify the interplay between social identity dynamics and cultural authenticity in influencing the fashion consumption patterns of students at a selected University in Ghana.

1.4| Influence of Cultural Authenticity on Fashion Consumer Behaviour

Cultural authenticity is noted to be a significant factor influencing fashion consumer behaviour, as individuals typically prefer apparel that embodies their cultural heritage and identity. Zhang and Kim (2013) characterised cultural authenticity as the extent to which a brand corresponds with cultural values, traditions, and historical narratives, discovering that consumers favour brands that maintain and embody cultural identity. Fataar (2025) found that brands that are culturally authentic build loyalty and emotional connections, especially among young people in multicultural settings who mix traditional and modern styles. Wilcox et al. (2009) additionally demonstrated that culturally authentic brands are regarded as more credible and significant than their globalised counterparts. Bobie (2022) and Okonkwo (2007) discussed the return of Afrocentric fashion in Africa, noting that clothes like kente and Ankara prints that mix traditional styles with modern ones are becoming more popular. In practice, though, there are contradictions. Takyi et al. (2025) noted that Ghanaian youth, despite valuing cultural authenticity, frequently favour international brands for their status and accessibility. Safo-Ankama and Donkor (2023) also state that traditional clothing is often only worn on special occasions, while global brands are more common in everyday life. These findings collectively demonstrate that cultural authenticity is another fundamental aspect of fashion consumer behaviour. Ginting et al. (2023) observed that for the younger generation, fashion is a means to show their identity and preference, and ownership of a specific fashion brand can determine a certain social status.

Recent work has further unpacked the construct of cultural authenticity in fashion. Beverland (2005) characterised brand authenticity as a multidimensional craft narrative anchored in heritage, sincerity and commitment to quality, while Napoli et al. (2014) operationalised consumer-based brand authenticity along three dimensions: quality commitment, heritage and sincerity, which have since been widely adopted in fashion-consumer research. Morhart et al. (2015) demonstrated that perceived brand authenticity drives emotional brand attachment and behavioural loyalty, especially among consumers for whom self-congruence with the brand is high. In African and Ghanaian contexts, Asante et al. (2020) and, Essel and Amissah (2015) documented how indigenous textile motifs (kente, adinkra, batakari) operate as carriers of collective memory and ethnic pride, and how their re-appropriation by contemporary designers re-positions local fashion as both authentic and aspirational. Bruce-Amartey Jr et al. (2025) similarly showed that perceived authenticity of Ghanaian-made apparel is a stronger predictor of repurchase intention than price, reinforcing the present study's emphasis on ethnic and local craftsmanship as the principal predictor of preference for local brands.

1.5 | Brand Perception and Fashion Consumer Behaviour

Another factor noted to influence fashion consumer behaviour is brand perception as it affects purchasing intentions, brand loyalty, and consumer preferences. Keller (1993) characterised brand perception as the consumers' interpretation and assessment of a brand's attributes, image, and market positioning, a concept especially pertinent in fashion, where brands represent prestige, quality, and identity. Ko et al. (2019) stated that perceptions of brand reputation, heritage, and authenticity significantly enhance purchasing intentions, while Choi et al. (2024) showed that alignment with a brand's

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personality fosters emotional attachment and long-term loyalty. These findings highlight that brand perception encompasses not only functional qualities but also the symbolic and emotional meanings consumers attach to fashion brands.

Oliveira et al. (2023) and Aaker (1996) note that brand equity, comprising perceived quality, awareness, and associations, underpins purchasing decisions. Similarly, Escalas and Bettman (2005) revealed that young consumers select brands that reinforce their self-concept and align with social group identities, connecting brand perception to SIT. However, Massi et al. (2023) found that negative perceptions arising from inconsistent quality or authenticity erode trust and reduce loyalty. In Ghana, Aggarwal et al. (2025) observed that international brands are associated with prestige and quality, but local brands gain consumer preference when they emphasise cultural authenticity. Collectively, these studies indicate that brand perception in fashion is multidimensional, shaped by cultural relevance, perceived quality, and emotional meaning, and ultimately likely to mediate the relationship between social identity, cultural authenticity, and consumer behaviour outcomes such as loyalty and purchasing intentions. Complementary brand-equity scholarship strengthens this position. Aaker (1997) proposed the brand-personality framework, demonstrating that consumers attribute human-like traits to brands and gravitate toward those whose personality mirrors their own self-concept, an argument later refined for emerging markets by Sung and Tinkham (2005). Yoo et al. (2000) empirically established that perceived quality, brand awareness and brand associations jointly determine overall brand equity, while Foroudi (2019) showed that in the apparel sector, brand image and corporate reputation exert a particularly strong influence on purchase intention through the mediating role of consumer trust. In African contexts, Selase Asamoah (2014) reported that perceived brand quality and brand-origin congruence with national identity significantly shape consumer evaluations of locally manufactured apparel. These findings collectively support the conceptualisation of brand perception in the present study as a multidimensional construct that mediates the translation of identity- and culture-based antecedents into observable fashion behaviour.

1.6| African Consumer Behaviour Perspectives

Beyond identity- and brand-centred frameworks, a stream of cross-cultural consumer-behaviour scholarship offers foundational grounding for studying African fashion consumers. Burgess and Steenkamp (2006) argued that consumer-behaviour theories developed in Western contexts must be empirically re-examined in emerging markets because cultural, economic, and institutional conditions reshape established constructs. Cleveland et al. (2009) extended this view by showing that consumer acculturation to global consumer culture coexists with ethnic identification, producing hybrid consumption patterns relevant to African youth who negotiate global and indigenous fashion influences. Strizhakova and Coulter (2015) further demonstrated that in emerging markets, perceived brand globalness and brand localness operate simultaneously, with local-icon brands gaining traction when they signal cultural authenticity. Within the African and Ghanaian contexts specifically, Lindridge and Dibb (2003) emphasised the need to incorporate ethnicity and cultural identity into consumer-behaviour models, while Quartey and Abor (2011) documented how consumer attitudes towards Ghanaian textiles are shaped by perceived quality, price, and the symbolic value of cultural patronage. More recent work by Mensah et al. (2025) and Boadee (2024) confirms that African consumers increasingly weigh cultural pride, perceived authenticity, and social media-mediated peer signals when forming brand evaluations. These studies establish a theoretical and empirical platform for examining how social identity and cultural authenticity jointly shape fashion behaviour among Ghanaian university students, and they justify the integrative model adopted in the present study.

2 | METHODOLOGY

2.1| Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional design, facilitating measurement of associations among key variables at a single point in time and testing of hypothesised relationships.

2.2| Population and Sampling

The target population for this study was regular postgraduate students at a selected University in Ghana. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to select the participants. In the first stage, stratified random sampling was used to divide the university into faculties and departments. In the

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second stage, simple random sampling was used to select specific departments. Finally, convenience sampling was used to select individual students from the chosen departments aged from 18 upwards. A sample size of 392 graduate students was determined for the research using the Yamane (1967) (as cited in Hasan & Kumar, 2024) formula for a finite population of 2,931.

2.3| Instrument for Data Collection

A structured questionnaire was used to gather the data for the study. Information collected centred on respondents' demographics, social identity factors (peer influence, group belonging, personal identity, brand association), cultural authenticity factors (traditional symbolism, ethnic/local craftsmanship, perceived cultural originality, emotional connection to heritage), and purchasing outcomes (purchasing intentions, brand loyalty, local vs. global brand preference).

2.4| Data Collection Procedure and Ethical Considerations

Data collection was conducted over a period of two months. Respondents were provided with a detailed informed consent form, clearly outlining the study's objectives, procedures, their right to withdraw at any time without consequences, assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Questionnaires were administered physically to students in their various departments and halls of residence. The questionnaire was completed and picked up at a single point.

2.5| Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows, version 26. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations) were used to summarise the demographic characteristics of the participants and the key variables. Inferential statistics, including Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis, were employed to test the possible research hypotheses and examine the relationships between social identity, cultural authenticity, brand perception, and fashion consumption behaviour.

3 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1|Results

3.1.1| Demographic Information of the Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are summarised in Table 1. In terms of age distribution, the majority of participants were aged between 18 and 25 years (65.6%), followed by those aged 26 to 35 years (26.5%), 36 to 45 years (6.1%), and 46 years and above (1.8%). The sample was predominantly female, with 92.1% identifying as female and only 7.9% as male. Regarding the level of study, 74.5% of the respondents were enrolled at the Level 800 stage, while 25.5% were at Level 900. For ethnic distribution, the results in Table 1 revealed that Ewe students comprised the largest group (47.7%), followed by Akan (36.0%), with smaller representations from Mole Dagbani (5.9%), Guan (5.9%), Ga-Dangme (2.8%), and Mande-Busanga (1.8%). Regarding religious affiliation, a vast majority of participants identified as Christians (93.9%), with the remaining 6.0% identifying as Muslims. For purchasing habits, more than half of the respondents (51.0%) reported purchasing fashion items annually, 29.3% every three to six months, 16.1% monthly and only 3.6% weekly. It is noteworthy that the age distribution, with 65.6% of participants falling within the 18-25 age range, reflects the unique structure of postgraduate education in Ghana. This younger demographic presence is attributable to several factors characteristic of the Ghanaian higher education system: first, many students pursue postgraduate studies immediately after completing their undergraduate degrees without significant career breaks, thus maintaining a younger student population; second, the selected university operates several professional postgraduate diploma and certificate programmes that attract recent graduates seeking to enhance their qualifications; third, the sandwich and regular postgraduate programmes in faculties such as Home Economics and Education attract younger working professionals who combine work with study. This age profile, therefore, accurately represents the actual postgraduate student population at the study institution rather than indicating sampling error, and it aligns with documented patterns of postgraduate education in similar Ghanaian universities where early career advancement through postgraduate qualifications is common.

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Table 1. Demographic characteristics

Variable	Category	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Age	18 – 25	257	65.6
	26 – 35	104	26.5
	36 – 45	24	6.1
	46 and above	7	1.8
	Total	392	100.0
Sex	Male	31	7.9
	Female	361	92.1
	Total	392	100.0
Ethnicity	Akan	141	36.0
	Ewe	187	47.7
	Ga-Dangme	11	2.8
	Mole-Dagbani	23	5.9
	Guan	23	5.9
	Mande-Busanga	7	1.8
	Total	392	100.0
Religious Affiliation	Christianity	368	93.9
	Islam	24	6.1
	Total	392	100.0

3.1.2| Fashion purchase preference among students

The fashion purchasing preferences of the students are presented in Figure 2. The majority of the participants (63.0%) indicated that they primarily purchase their fashion items from local fashion stores or markets. Custom-made clothing from designers or tailors was the next preferred source, accounting for 19.1% of the respondents. Online platforms were less commonly preferred, representing 11.2% of the participants. Only a small proportion of the respondents (6.6%) reported a preference for purchasing fashion items from international brands. The results suggest that the majority of participants favour accessible and localised options for acquiring fashion products, with relatively few relying on international sources.

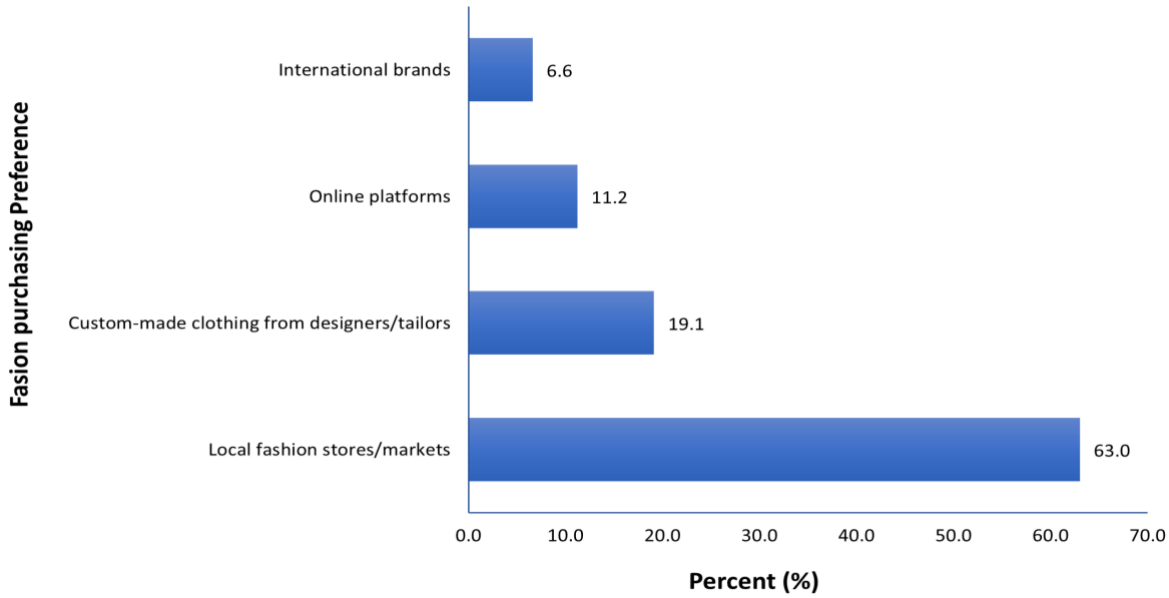


Figure 2. Primary Sources of Fashion Purchases among Selected University Students

3.1.3| Influence of Social Identity on Fashion Behaviour

The first research question sought to examine how social identity influences fashion choices, considering peer influence, group belonging, personal identity, and brand association among students at the selected public university, and the findings are detailed in Table 2. The regression analysis results, shown in Table 2, revealed that social identity had a statistically significant effect on the combined dependent variables, Wilks' Lambda = 0.710, F(3) = 52.911, p = 0.001, with a large effect size indicated by a partial η^2 of 0.290. This result confirms that social identity plays a meaningful role in shaping students' fashion behaviour across several related domains. Detailed univariate analysis of the individual dependent variables indicated that social identity significantly influenced purchasing intentions (B =

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0.576, R^2 = 0.166, F(1) = 77.349, p = 0.001, partial η^2 = 0.166), suggesting that students with stronger social identities are more likely to exhibit higher purchasing intentions for fashion products. Social identity also had a positive, though smaller, influence on brand loyalty (B = 0.307, R^2 = 0.041, F(1) = 16.629, p = 0.001, partial η^2 = 0.041), indicating that identity factors moderately enhance students' commitment to fashion brands. Furthermore, social identity demonstrated a substantial influence on the preference for local versus global brands (B = 0.613, R^2 = 0.252, F(1) = 131.139, p = 0.001, partial η^2 = 0.252), suggesting that a stronger sense of identity is strongly associated with a preference for local fashion brands.

Table 2. Multivariate effects of social identity on fashion consumer behaviour among university students

Effect	Wilks' Lambda	*B*	R^2	F	df	p-value	Partial η^2
Social Identity	0.710			52.911	3	0.001	0.290
Dependent Variable							
Purchasing Intentions		0.576	0.166	77.349	1	0.001	0.166
Brand Loyalty		0.307	0.041	16.629	1	0.001	0.041
Preference for Local vs Global Brands		0.613	0.252	131.139	1	0.001	0.252

3.1.4| Influence of Cultural Authenticity on Fashion Behaviour

The second research question sought to establish the role of cultural authenticity in shaping students' fashion behaviour. The results of the data analysed are presented in Table 3. The Multivariate analysis revealed that cultural authenticity factors had a statistically significant effect on students' fashion preferences, Wilks' Lambda = 0.705, F = 39.673, p = 0.001, with a large effect size indicated by a partial η^2 of 0.295 (Table 3). At the univariate level, cultural authenticity factors significantly influenced preference for local brands, Wilks' Lambda = 0.678, F = 44.998, p = 0.001, partial η^2 = 0.322, suggesting that cultural authenticity strongly predicts preference for locally made fashion products. However, cultural authenticity factors did not have a statistically significant effect on preference for international brands, Wilks' Lambda = 0.977, F = 2.250, p = 0.063, partial η^2 = 0.023, indicating that the influence of cultural authenticity on international brand preference is minimal among the respondents.

Examining the individual predictors under preference for local brands, traditional symbolism significantly influenced local brand preference (B = 0.474, R^2 = 0.175, F = 81.339, p < 0.001, partial η^2 = 0.175), suggesting that students who value traditional symbols are more inclined towards local brands. Ethnic and local craftsmanship emerged as the strongest predictor (B = 0.551, R^2 = 0.262, F = 135.852, p < 0.001, partial η^2 = 0.262), followed by emotional connection to heritage (B = 0.430, R^2 = 0.188, F = 88.556, p < 0.001, partial η^2 = 0.188) and perceived cultural originality (B = 0.418, R^2 = 0.169, F = 77.748, p < 0.001, partial η^2 = 0.169). Under preference for international brands, traditional symbolism (B = 0.084, R^2 = 0.022, F = 8.617, p = 0.004, partial η^2 = 0.022), perceived cultural originality (B = 0.057, R^2 = 0.015, F = 5.985, p = 0.015, partial η^2 = 0.015), and emotional connection to heritage (B = 0.063, R^2 = 0.018, F = 7.207, p = 0.008, partial η^2 = 0.018) were significant but exhibited relatively small effects. However, ethnic and local craftsmanship did not significantly predict preference for international brands (B = -0.013, R^2 = 0.003, F = 0.988, p = 0.321, partial η^2 = 0.003), as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Multivariate and univariate effects of cultural authenticity factors on students' fashion preferences

Effect	Wilks' Lambda	F	*B*	R^2	p-value	Partial η^2
Cultural authenticity factors	0.705	39.673			0.001	0.295
Local	0.678	44.998			0.001	0.322
International	0.977	2.250			0.063	0.023
Dependent Variable	Cultural Authenticity Predictors					

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Local Brands	Traditional Symbolism	81.339	0.474	0.175	0.000	0.175
	Ethnic and Local Craftsmanship	135.852	0.551	0.262	0.000	0.262
	Perceived Cultural Originality	77.748	0.418	0.169	0.000	0.169
	Emotional Connection to Heritage	88.556	0.430	0.188	0.000	0.188
International Brands	Traditional Symbolism	8.617	0.084	0.022	0.004	0.022
	Ethnic and Local Craftsmanship	0.988	-0.013	0.003	0.321	0.003
	Perceived Cultural Originality	5.985	0.057	0.015	0.015	0.015
	Emotional Connection to Heritage	7.207	0.063	0.018	0.008	0.018

3.1.5| Mediation effect of brand perception on the relationship between social identity, cultural authenticity, and fashion consumer behaviour

The third research question was to determine whether brand perception mediates the relationship between social identity, cultural authenticity, and fashion consumer behaviour among university students. Table 4 presents the results of the mediation analysis. The findings showed that social identity significantly predicted brand perception (B = 0.5653, SE = 0.0680, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.4320, 0.6985]), indicating that students with a strong sense of social identity were more likely to develop positive brand perceptions. Similarly, cultural authenticity also significantly predicted brand perception (B = 0.4412, SE = 0.0552, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.3331, 0.5493]), suggesting that valuing cultural authenticity enhances favourable brand perceptions among the students. The constant term in the model predicting brand perception was not statistically significant (B = 0.1632, SE = 0.2140, p = 0.446, 95% CI [-0.2561, 0.5826]), implying that without the influence of social identity and cultural authenticity, the baseline brand perception was not different from zero.

For the outcome variable, fashion consumer behaviour, brand perception was found to be a strong positive predictor (B = 0.3382, SE = 0.0349, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.2699, 0.4066]). This result confirms that higher brand perception significantly enhances fashion consumer behaviour among students. Additionally, social identity maintained a significant direct effect on fashion consumer behaviour even after accounting for brand perception (B = 0.1277, SE = 0.0505, p = 0.012, 95% CI [0.0286, 0.2267]), suggesting that while part of the effect is mediated through brand perception, social identity also directly influences fashion behaviour. Cultural authenticity also had a significant direct effect on fashion consumer behaviour (B = 0.2301, SE = 0.0408, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.1502, 0.3101]), indicating that cultural values and authenticity drive fashion behaviour both directly and through brand perception. The mediation analysis indicates that brand perception partially mediates the relationship between social identity and cultural authenticity and fashion consumer behaviour. The strength of the indirect pathways confirms that while social identity and cultural authenticity individually affect participants' fashion behaviour, their influence shows through the development of positive brand perceptions. These results indicate the critical role of brand perception in translating identity and cultural values into actionable fashion behaviours among university students, as summarised in Table 4.

Table 4. Mediating Role of Brand Perception between Social Identity, Cultural Authenticity, and Fashion Consumer Behaviour

Structural Path	**Coefficient (B)**	**Standard Error**	**p-value**	**95% CI**
Brand perception				
→ Social identity	0.5653	0.0680	0.000	[0.4320, 0.6985]
→ Cultural authenticity	0.4412	0.0552	0.000	[0.3331, 0.5493]
→ Constant	0.1632	0.2140	0.446	[-0.2561, 0.5826]
Fashion Consumer Behaviour				
→ Brand perception	0.3382	0.0349	0.000	[0.2699, 0.4066]
→ Social identity	0.1277	0.0505	0.012	[0.0286, 0.2267]
→ Cultural authenticity	0.2301	0.0408	0.000	[0.1502, 0.3101]
→ Constant	1.0149	0.1466	0.000	[0.7276, 1.3021]

The model residual variances further demonstrated the explanatory power of the mediation model. As shown in Table 5, the residual variance for brand perception was 0.392 (SE = 0.028, 95% CI [0.340, 0.452]). This suggests that approximately 60.8% of the variance in brand perception was explained by social identity and cultural authenticity combined, indicating a strong model fit for the predictor variables. Similarly, the residual variance for fashion consumer behaviour was 0.184 (SE = 0.013, 95% CI [0.160, 0.212]), meaning that 81.6% of the variance in fashion consumer behaviour was accounted for by brand

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perception, social identity, and cultural authenticity together. These results demonstrate that the model explained a substantial proportion of variance in both brand perception and fashion consumer behaviour.

Table 5. Model Residual Variances

Variable	Residual Variance	Standard Error	95% CI
Brand Perception	0.392	0.028	[0.340, 0.452]
Fashion Consumer Behaviour	0.184	0.013	[0.160, 0.212]

3.2 | Discussion

The findings from this study confirm that social identity significantly influences fashion behaviour among university students in the study area. This aligns with the Social Identity Theory (SIT) by Tajfel and Turner (1979), which indicates that individuals derive part of their self-concept from group membership and tend to conform to group norms. The findings show that students are more likely to buy clothing commonly worn by their group members, indicating a strong desire for group belonging and conformity. The study's results are consistent with previous research by O'Cass and Siahtiri (2013) and Nguyen et al. (2025), who also found that peer influence and group norms play a crucial role in shaping fashion consumption among young consumers. The emphasis on personal identity, where fashion choices reflect individuality and confidence, suggests a dual influence: while students conform to group trends, they also use fashion as a means of self-expression. This highlights the complex interplay between individual and collective identities in shaping fashion behaviour.

On cultural authenticity, the findings indicate that cultural authenticity significantly influences fashion behaviour among the studied participants, especially in their preference for items that reflect their cultural heritage. This aligns with the work of Zhang and Kim (2013) and DeBerry-Spence and Izberk-Bilgin (2021), who emphasised the role of cultural values and traditions in consumer preferences. The study's most significant finding is the partial mediation effect of brand perception on the relationship between social identity, cultural authenticity, and fashion consumer behaviour. This means that while social identity and cultural authenticity directly influence fashion choices, a substantial portion of their impact is channelled through how students perceive brands. The strong positive paths from social identity to brand perception and from cultural authenticity to brand perception indicate that brands that align with students' social groups and cultural values are more favourably perceived. Furthermore, the significant path from brand perception to fashion consumer behaviour highlights that these positive perceptions translate into actual purchasing decisions. This finding is consistent with Keller (1993) and Escalas and Bettman (2005), who emphasised the importance of brand image and its alignment with consumer self-concept and social groups.

This study provides an understanding of the multifaceted influences on fashion consumption behaviour among university students in Ghana. It demonstrates that fashion is more than clothing; it is a visible expression of identity, values, and membership in various social and cultural communities. The research confirms that fashion choices reflect both internal self-concept and external group dynamics. Cultural authenticity was also found to be a key influence on students' preference for local fashion brands. Students who valued traditional symbolism, local craftsmanship, and emotional connection to heritage were more likely to support and prefer locally made clothing over foreign brands. The mediating role of brand perception highlighted how students' attitudes toward brands serve as a bridge between their identity (both social and cultural) and their fashion behaviour. Brands that students view as representing their values, social groups, or cultural heritage tend to drive stronger fashion engagement. This means that students do not only buy clothes because they are fashionable but also because those brands validate who they are or who they aspire to be. The study demonstrates that identity and culture do not just directly shape behaviour but do so indirectly by shaping how students perceive and relate to fashion brands.

4 | IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

The findings of the study show the need of integrating cultural components and identity values into local fashion branding efforts. For policymakers and fashion marketers, this research provides empirical data supporting programmes that promote cultural authenticity and identity-driven branding as instruments for sustainable fashion development in Ghana. For fashion marketers and designers in Ghana, this study offers insights into the preferences and motivations of young consumers. The findings

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suggest that branding strategies should be tailored to resonate with the social and cultural identities of the youth. Local designers should focus on creating a strong brand identity that balances modernity with tradition to compete effectively with global brands.

4.1 | Theoretical Contribution

Theoretically, this study makes three contributions. First, it affirms the explanatory value of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) in a Sub-Saharan African higher-education context by empirically demonstrating that peer influence, group belonging and personal identity continue to drive purchasing intentions, brand loyalty and local-brand preference, thereby extending the geographic generalisability of SIT propositions previously tested mostly in Western and Asian settings (O'Cass & Siahtiri, 2013; Escalas & Bettman, 2005). Second, it refines the cultural-authenticity literature (Zhang & Kim, 2013) by disaggregating cultural authenticity into four distinct sub-constructs and showing that ethnic and local craftsmanship is the strongest predictor of preference for local brands, while perceived cultural originality and emotional connection to heritage operate as secondary drivers. Third, the study contributes a Ghanaian-specific mediation model in which brand perception partially mediates the link between identity-cultural antecedents and fashion behaviour, challenging the assumption that identity and cultural variables influence behaviour largely directly. Drawing on Social Identity Theory and scholarship on cultural authenticity and brand equity, this study advances an integrative framework that answers persistent calls for contextually grounded consumer behaviour theorising in African markets (Burgess & Steenkamp, 2006; Lindridge & Dibb, 2003).

5 | LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Limited generalizability is a key constraint, as the findings may not fully apply beyond the selected public University in Ghana, given that fashion consumption behaviour may vary across other university students in Ghana. Furthermore, the study sample exhibited a significant gender imbalance, with 92.1% of participants being female. This skew toward female respondents, while partly reflecting higher female enrolment in the sampled faculties and the general tendency of females to be more engaged with fashion-related surveys, substantially limits the generalizability of the findings to male university students. The perspectives of male students on fashion consumption, social identity, and cultural authenticity may differ considerably and warrant dedicated future research. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of this study limits causal inference; longitudinal designs in future studies would allow for examining how these relationships evolve over time.

6 | CONCLUSION AND FUTURE STUDIES

This study provides an understanding of the multifaceted influences on fashion consumption behaviour among selected university students in Ghana. The research confirms that fashion choices reflect both internal self-concept and external group dynamics. Cultural authenticity was found to be a key influence on students' preference for local fashion brands. Students who valued traditional symbolism, local craftsmanship, and emotional connection to heritage were more likely to support and prefer locally made clothing to foreign brands. The mediating role of brand perception showed how students' attitudes toward brands serve as a bridge between their identity (both social and cultural) and their fashion behaviour. Brands that students view as representing their values, social groups, or cultural heritage tend to drive stronger fashion engagement. However, these conclusions should be interpreted with caution given the sampling limitations, particularly the gender imbalance (92.1% female participants) and the focus on a single public university, which may limit the generalizability of findings to broader populations. It is recommended that brands targeting youth markets in Ghana should consciously incorporate traditional patterns, fabrics, and symbols into modern fashion to appeal to students' sense of cultural pride and identity. Also, local designers should build brand identities that reflect both modernity and tradition. By doing so, they can compete with international brands and better engage young consumers who value authenticity but also seek contemporary appeal. In addition, future research could investigate the role of gender and socio-economic status in shaping fashion consumption behaviours, as these factors were not the primary focus of the current study.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data supporting this research article are included within the paper.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this work, the authors made use of ChatGPT version 4 for proofreading to provide a more formal way of reporting. After using this tool/service, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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