Article

Towards a Korean Sustainable Business Model at National Level: The Influence of Cultural and Political Perceptions of National Image on Consumers' Behavior

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Abstract: Despite the increasing uptake of the term sustainable business model (SBM), the concept has mainly focused on business strategies. However, integrating the SBM into a longer-term and macroscopic framework would make it more sustainable. This article explored the SBM as a national strategy that operates beyond a corporate level. In this respect, the study examined the ways in which cultural and political perceptions of a nation can influence consumers' choices. This article particularly examined the explanatory power of two ideational driving forces: perceptions of cultural heritage, and perceptions of politics and foreign relations. By assessing a dataset of the views of 223 African students studying in Korea, this study confirmed that national image meaningfully affects consumer behavior (intention to recommend). Furthermore, the study provided new evidence that cultural and political perceptions of a nation have a significantly positive effect on national image. It was also found that national image played a role as a mediating variable relating to cultural/political perceptions and intention to recommend. By extending the concept of the SBM to a national level, this article lays the foundation for a win–win situation between decision makers in both business and political sectors.

Keywords: sustainable business model; intention to recommend; national image; cultural heritage; politics and foreign relations; African–Korean relations

1. Introduction

The modus operandi of sustainable business models (SBMs) should be neither static nor merely materialistic. Rather, it is social representation (or the social imaginary)—the set of values, institutions, and symbols—that enhances SBMs [1,2]. This study regards such representation as the societal foundation for an SBM. Just as in the case of a firm, the same principles apply for a country. A country creates, captures, delivers, and mediatizes its national image (a representation of the form of a country) [3]. In that respect, a national image is a meaningful object by which a country is understood.

In the same vein, it is important to acknowledge that a national image is not exclusively formed by economic or material products. The national image is also an aggregate effect of social components: culture, political values, and foreign policies [3]. From this vantage point, this study aims to explore the possibility of SBM usage at the national level by examining principal social representations, especially within the context of African–Korean relations. By the SBM at the national level, we mean the SBM as a national strategy that goes beyond a business or corporate level. Here, the Korean Wave (Hallyu) is employed as an archetypical case that shows the linkage between the SBM as a business strategy and the SBM as a national strategy. The term Korean Wave, originally coined by Chinese media in the late 1990s to describe "the meteoric rise in the popularity of Korean pop culture in Asian countries" [4] (p. 135), now refers to "the global popularity of Korea's cultural economy exporting pop culture, entertainment, music, TV dramas and movies" [5] (p. 19).

The Korean Wave is an exemplary case, not only because it has transformed itself from an Asian phenomenon into a global phenomenon but also because it represents Korea's national image [5,6]. Of particular note is the fact that the Korean Wave is a phenomenon as a result of the combined strategies adopted by business and government sectors rather than a national policy [7]. For example, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Korea launched a Hallyu Department in 2020 [8], but the Korean government's support for the expansion of the Korean Wave could not have been possible without domestically nurtured competitiveness and the high quality of the entertainment industry in the first place [6]. At the same time, however, this also demonstrates the way that business models are intertwined with government action. Moreover, the Korean Wave consists both of material components within a product described as a K-something entity (e.g., K-pop, K-drama, K-quarantine, etc.) and of social components (i.e., exchanges of political, social, and cultural values) [9,10]. In other words, the sustainability of the Korean Wave goes beyond the schemes of Hallyu production.

Despite a surge of studies on the Korean Wave and its impacts, however, most studies have focused either on the concept of the Korean Wave itself or on its influence [9–12], and whether it acts as an independent variable or has a moderating effect. Less attention has been paid to the potential links between the phenomenon and the construction of a potential SBM as a macro-level scheme. Although it is understandable that the concept of the SBM is naturally considered as a business strategy [13], making the most of its social facet in the context of national image is certainly necessary, given that national image engenders sustainability, and vice versa [14,15]. In that respect, the main purpose of this article is to explore the ways in which the national image of Korea is connected to targeted consumers' perceptions of Korean products, with two ideational concepts that construct national image being central to the process. In doing so, the study will provide both policy and business sectors with operational, tactical, and strategic implications for enhancing Korea's national image as part of an effective marketing strategy.

The rest of this article proceeds as follows. The literature review investigates several bodies of literature regarding the main concepts of this study and introduces the hypotheses. It begins by looking at previous studies that have connected national image and consumers' recommendation intention. This is a good starting point from which to demonstrate the significance of integrating SBM into the national level. The section then explains the reason why two ideational concepts—perceptions of cultural heritage, and perceptions of politics and foreign relations—need to be distinctively considered as significant variables that contribute to the construction of national image. In the following two sections, the article turns its attention to methods and results. The methods section begins with an explanation of the hypothesized structural equation model (SEM), and then introduces the survey respondents. The results section provides the descriptive statistics of the observed variables as well as the tested path model which shows the total, direct, and indirect effects of the paths. Next, the discussion presents the significance of the SBM at a macro/state level and, subsequently, considers policy implications that can be extrapolated from the survey results. The limitations of the study and the direction of future research are then considered. The article concludes by summarizing the lessons observed from the results.

2. Literature Review

2.1. National Image and Consumers' Intention to Recommend

The concept of national image remains within the macroscopic view. The concept of sustainability, by contrast, has naturally been applied either to persuading companies to modify and transform (i.e., business and management) or to maximizing material and energy efficiency (i.e., environmental science) [13,16]. Perhaps this is the reason why the concept of the SBM has been relatively delimited within the realm of companies and commercial businesses. That being said, there has also been a notion that the SBM provides "the conceptual link between sustainable innovation and economic performance at higher system levels" [17] (p. 2). This connection means that the SBM is not only about considering shareholders but also

about contemplating stakeholders, including the government, intermediaries, end users, and potential users that interchange pertinent knowledge and opinions regarding product values.

In contrast to the concept of the SBM, in terms of the level of scope and analysis, previous studies on the relationship between national image and consumer behavior have varied. Given that image is a holistic collection of individual beliefs, thoughts and impressions in relation to a specific object [18], it is understandable that national image relating to a description, reputation, and stereotype of a specific country can affect consumer behavior [19,20]. To demonstrate this point, Lantz and Loeb [21] observed that national image can be more important in forming consumer behavior than a brand, price, and even product quality.

In the case of Korea, its national image is found to be significant in forming the behavior of overseas consumers [12]. Researchers have also found that, regardless of whether it is analyzed at a micro or macro level, national image has a positive effect on brand attitude [22], meaning that consumer attitude toward products are in general affected by the image of the state that produces the items. It is in this respect that the perception of national image "matters more often than the reality" [14] (p. 1). As Heywood rightly puts it, "perception may not only be more important than reality; in practical terms, perception may be reality" [23] (p. 194). Indeed, national branding matters.

This study postulates that consumers' intention to recommend can be a foundation of an SBM at a state level. Put differently, intention to recommend and national image are closely interconnected. It is well known that the word of mouth is one of the most important means whereby firm performance can be predicted [24]. Some evidence demonstrates that intention to recommend is better than customer satisfaction in terms of predicting firm performance [25,26]. As a "superior predictor of future performance" [24] (p. 212), it would be important to understand precisely which values can constitute intention to recommend, especially those that are not easily captured in customer satisfaction. The following section introduces such values. Before proceeding, however, based on the literature and the above assumptions, the following hypothesis was examined:

Hypothesis H1. *The effect of national image on intention to recommend will be positive and significant.*

2.2. Distinctive Foundation of National Image: Cultural Heritage, and Politics and Foreign Relations

The intention to recommend, as measured in this research survey, needs to reflect something that has rarely been captured in measuring customer satisfaction. This study posits that cultural heritage can be such a value and, therefore, also posits that the concept of cultural heritage needs to be distinguished from culture as a general rule. Since culture is an umbrella term whose meaning includes a range of sub-concepts, such as knowledge, experience, values, attitudes, beliefs, and mode of behavior [27], the term culture in and of itself may not be so much a distinctive value as a general foundation on which researchers can recognize "socially shared knowledge" [28] (p. 141).

Interestingly, the verb definition of the term 'culture' matches the meaning of sustainability. Albeit connoting a biological meaning, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, culture means maintaining in conditions suitable for growth. The concept of cultural heritage as a distinctive foundation of culture arises from this meaning. Culture, ultimately, derives its ideational driving force from its heritage. Just as in the case of culture, cultural heritage could be either tangible or intangible [29]. However, what distinguishes cultural heritage from culture is that the former is a holistic aggregation of cultural identity that has long been shared and refined in a certain society [30]. For foreign users of Korean products, for instance, whether they are students studying in Korea, tourists, or just viewers of Korean TV dramas in their home countries, they are expected to be exposed to Korean cultural heritage, in terms of both tangible (e.g., paintings and monuments) and intangible heritage (e.g., oral traditions, performing arts, and rituals) [31,32]. The influence of the Korean TV dramas *Daejanggeum* and *Jumong* in Asia and the Middle East would be cases in point [33,34]. It is in this context

that cultural heritage as a variable can be differentiated from the general meaning of culture. In short, cultural heritage is a distinctive and enduring foundation of national image, thereby becoming a source of an SBM.

Ochieng and Kim's study on cultural exchange demonstrates the importance of the role of cultural heritage in relation to consumers' purchasing behavior [9]. Regarding the effect of the Korean Wave in Africa, the study found that "most Africans surveyed perceive value proximity with Korea" through "Confucius values, such as filial piety, family love and respect for the elderly" [9] (p. 381). What should be noted here is that this exchange not only refers to Korea's cultural heritage, but also relates to commonly shared knowledge, i.e., universal values. In other words, it is socially shared heritage that sustains positive economic externalities. Cheon and Choi [15] also demonstrated that Korean cultural heritage has had a positive and significant effect on both national image and intention to recommend. Based on the preceding discussion, a series of hypotheses were examined:

Hypothesis H2a. *The effect of cultural heritage on national image will be positive and significant.*

Hypothesis H3a. *The effect of cultural heritage on intention to recommend will be positive and significant.*

Politics and foreign relations (PF) is another value that can provide a fresh insight into constructing an SBM at a state level, as few previous studies have linked this value to customer behavior. As has already been indicated, the value would derive from consumers' perceptions of PF, rather than from PF themselves. In that respect, PF is an instrumental concept. Perhaps the most pertinent term with regard to PF would be 'soft power', as coined by Nye [35]. Soft power is an appealing value system. It is "the ability to get what you want by attracting and persuading others to adopt your goals" [36]. Soft power emanates from both culture and policies. As aforementioned, if a country has good cultural heritage that can be integrated into universal values, then it becomes an asset that needs to be politically and diplomatically nourished by relevant stakeholders, not to mention the government. Given that PF are, in the end, the management of relations with external entities and individuals [37], leading consumers' perceptions of PF in a positive way is another key to the success of an SBM.

Despite the relative absence of the literature dealing with SBMs from the perspective of PF [13,16], by investigating Chinese consumers' behavior toward Korean products, Shen et al. [12] observed that the consumers were more likely to embrace the content-producing country's products when the relationship between the two countries was better. On the flip side of the coin, Klein et al. [38] (p. 89) found that "animosity toward a foreign nation" negatively affected consumers' attitudes toward products produced by the country, irrespective of product quality. In this respect, the THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) dispute between Seoul and Beijing could be yet another representative example that demonstrates the importance of the role of PF in constructing an SBM at a state level. Since Korea announced the deployment of the THAAD missile defense system, which China strongly opposed, Korean products have been hit by the Chinese consumer boycott [12]. Given the preceding discussion, two hypotheses can be deduced:

Hypothesis H2b. *The effect of PF on national image will be positive and significant.*

Hypothesis H3b. *The effect of PF on intention to recommend will be positive and significant.*

Last but by no means least, the mediation effect of national image between cultural heritage and intention to recommend, as well as between PF and intention to recommend, was investigated.

3. Methods

3.1. The Hypothesized Model

The hypotheses introduced in the above section were organized into a model (Figure 1). This hypothesized model contained direct paths between the variables as well as indirect paths from cultural heritage (CH) and politics and foreign relations (PF) to intention to recommend (IR), indicating a potential mediating effect of national image (NI). In this way, the research will narrow the knowledge gap between the SBM as a business strategy and the SBM as a national strategy. These hypothesized paths were tested using structural equation modelling (SEM). SEM, the multivariate data analysis method, was used in the study since it not only evaluates the causal relationships between the multiple variables simultaneously but also tests both direct and indirect effects in the model.
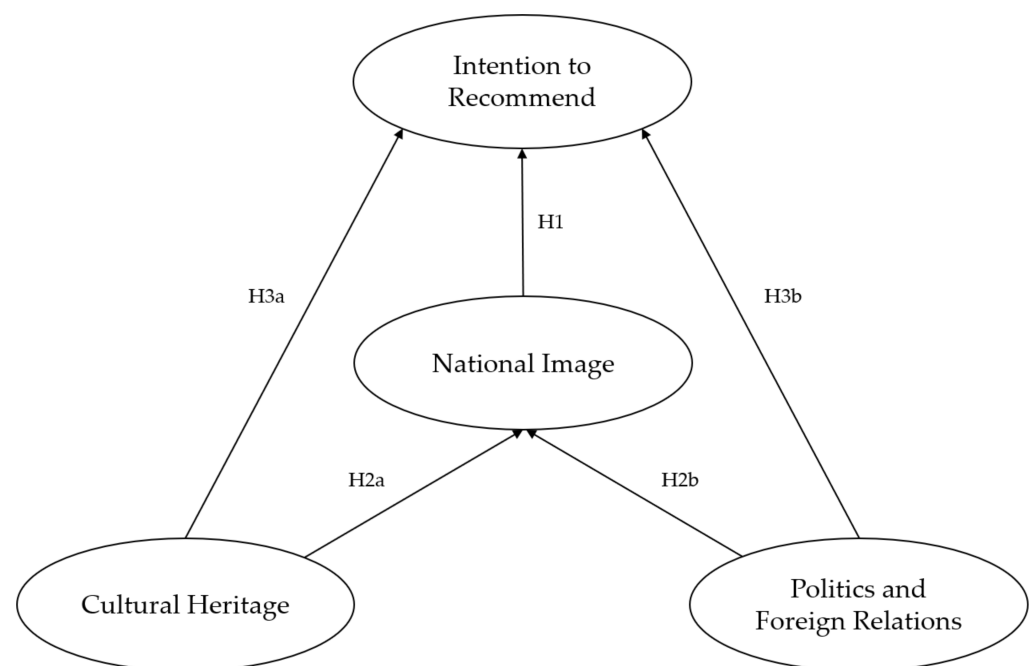
Figure 1. The hypothesized model.

3.2. Participants

The survey respondents consisted of African students studying in Korea. An appropriate sample size was calculated using G*Power [39]. It was found that the study should involve at least 45 responses with a statistical power of 0.95 and a medium effect size [40]. Since the study was designed to perform structural equation modelling (SEM), the aim was to recruit a larger number of responses than the suggested size for performing SEM (i.e., 200) [41,42]. A total of 223 students (159 males and 64 females) from 31 different African countries took part in the study. For example, 24 participants were from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the same number (*n* = 24) were from Ghana. Twenty were from Kenya, 15 were from Nigeria, and 13 participants were from Algeria. One participant was from each of the following countries: Botswana, Chad, Guinea, Liberia, Mozambique, and Somalia. They were asked to choose their age group from the following list: (1) 20 or younger; (2) 21 to 30; (3) 31 to 40; (4) 41 to 50; (5) 51 or more. More than half of the participants (*n* = 120) responded that they were in the age group of 31 to 40 years old. In addition, 79 were between 21 to 30 years old, 23 between 41 to 50 years old, and one was below 20 years old. The survey respondents were also asked to choose their current education level from the following list: (1) enrolled in bachelor's degree; (2) completed bachelor's degree; (3) enrolled in master's degree; (4) completed master's degree; (5) enrolled in doctoral degree; (6) completed doctoral degree. Fourteen participants were enrolled in their bachelor's degree and 15 had completed their bachelor's degree. Forty-eight were

master's students and 83 had finished their master's degree at the time of survey. In addition, 48 were doctoral students and 15 had completed their Ph.D. at the time. Table 1 summarizes the details of the participants.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants (*n* = 223).

Sex	*n*	%
Male	159	71.3
Female	64	28.7
Age group	***n***	**%**
Lower than 20	1	0.4
21–30	79	35.4
31–40	120	53.8
41–50	23	10.3
Education level	***n***	**%**
Enrolled in Bachelor's	14	6.3
Completed Bachelor's	15	6.7
Enrolled in Master's	48	21.5
Completed Master's	83	37.2
Enrolled in Doctorate	48	21.5
Completed Doctorate	15	6.7

3.3. Questionnaire

The hypothesized model (Figure 1) contained four latent variables: cultural heritage (CH), politics and foreign relations (PF), national image (NI), and intention to recommend (IR). Table 2 lists the question items which were used to measure the latent variables. The question items were adopted from and reconstructed based on items used in previous studies [43,44]. The participants were asked to respond to each question item using a 5-point (1 to 5) Likert scale. The questionnaire was completed using online and paper forms. It was distributed to African students residing in Korea and the data collection was performed in November and December 2019. The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS and AMOS v.27.

Table 2. Question items used in the present study.

Latent Variable	Observed Variable	Question Item
Cultural Heritage	CH1	Do you think that the quality of Korean cultural heritage is high?
	CH2	What is your overall impression of Korea's cultural heritage?
Politics and Foreign Relations	PF1	What is your overall impression of Korean politic and foreign relations?
	PF2	Do you think Korean politics and foreign relations have improved over time?
	PF3	Do you think Korean politics and foreign relations have a higher level of integrity when compared to other countries?
	PF4	Do you think your country and Korea have friendly relationships?
	PF5	Do you think Korean politics and foreign relations will develop over time?
National Image	NI1	Korea is reliable.
	NI2	Korea fulfills its social responsibilities.
	NI3	Korea is reasonable.
	NI4	I think positively about Korea in general.
Intention to Recommend	IR1	I can recommend Korean products to people around me.
	IR2	I want to tell people around me about my experience using Korean products.
	IR3	I want to introduce Korean products to people around me.
	IR4	I am willing to encourage people around me to buy Korean products.

4. Results

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics of the observed variables. In addition, Table 4 presents the reliability and validity of the model. By performing a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), factor loadings and average variance extracted (AVE) were calculated to assess convergence among the sets of items used to measure the latent variables. Composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha examined the reliability and internal consistency of the measured variables [45,46]. The cutoff values of AVE and CR are 0.5 and 0.7, respectively [47]. Internal consistency reliability is widely accepted with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.70 or higher [46]. As shown in Table 4, the factor loadings of all observed variables were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) and greater than 0.6. AVE, CR, and alpha values were above the cutoff level, confirming the validity and reliability of the model.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the items.

Latent Variable	Observed Variable	Median	Mean	S.D.	Min.	Max.
Cultural Heritage	CH1	4	3.9	0.8	1	5
	CH2	4	3.8	0.6	1	5
Politics and Foreign Relations	PF1	3	3.5	0.7	1	5
	PF2	4	3.8	0.9	1	5
	PF3	4	3.7	0.9	1	5
	PF4	4	4.0	1.0	1	5
	PF5	4	4.2	0.8	2	5
National Image	NI1	4	4.2	0.8	1	5
	NI2	4	3.8	0.9	1	5
	NI3	4	3.8	0.9	1	5
	NI4	4	4.1	0.8	1	5
Intention to Recommend	IR1	4	4.1	0.8	1	5
	IR2	4	3.9	0.9	1	5
	IR3	4	3.9	0.8	1	5
	IR4	4	4.0	0.9	1	5

Table 4. Reliability and validity of the items (*n* = 223).

Latent Variable	Observed Variable	β [a]	CR [b]	AVE [c]	α [d]
Cultural Heritage	CH1	0.704	0.771	0.631	0.747
	CH2	0.875			
Politics and Foreign Relations	PF1	0.732	0.846	0.527	0.804
	PF2	0.704			
	PF3	0.685			
	PF4	0.627			
	PF5	0.861			
National Image	NI1	0.777	0.873	0.633	0.876
	NI2	0.730			
	NI3	0.845			
	NI4	0.826			
Intention to Recommend	IR1	0.793	0.948	0.822	0.944
	IR2	0.940			
	IR3	0.951			
	IR4	0.933			

Notes: [a] standardized factor loadings were all significant at $p < 0.01$; [b] composite reliabilities; [c] average variance extracted; [d] Cronbach's alpha; model fit indices: χ^2 = 158.481, df = 77, GFI = 0.914, CFI = 0.964, TLI = 0.951, RMSEA = 0.069; $p < 0.01$.

The fit indices of the CFA model were examined in order to assess the model validity. Normed Chi-square (χ^2/df) is a ratio of Chi-square to the degrees of freedom which presents how well the model fits. Researchers' recommendations on the acceptable range of this index have slightly varied. For example, Marsh and Hocevar [48] recommend 2 to 5, whereas Hair et al. [45] suggest the figure should range from 1 to 3. The χ^2/df of the present CFA model was 2.058, which meets both recommendations. Moreover, the cutoff values of the goodness of fit index (GFI), comparative fit index (CFI), and Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) are 0.90 [45,49]. Those of the current model were also satisfactory, as they were 0.914, 0.964 and 0.951, respectively. Lastly, the lower adjusted root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) generally associates with a model that fits a population well. An RMSEA in the range of 0.08 to 0.10 indicates a mediocre fit [50] and a value greater than 0.10 indicates a poor fit [51]. The RMSEA of the present CFA model was 0.069, which presents as an acceptable model fit.

A path model analysis was carried out and Figure 2 presents the standardized regression weights of the paths. It was found that NI had a significant effect on IR. This result indicates that a positive national image of Korea is likely to increase one's intention to recommend Korean products to other people. Second, the results showed that CH had a significant effect on NI, suggesting a positive perception of Korean cultural heritage may lead to a positive national image of Korea. Third, PF had a significant effect on NI. It can be seen that one's positive perception of Korean politics and foreign relations (including the relationship between Korea and the targeted consumers' countries) may help to develop a better national image. Fourth, there was no significant effect found between CH and IR, and finally, PF also did not have a significant effect on IR. These results indicate that one's intention to recommend Korean products is not directly affected by one's perception of Korea's cultural heritage, nor its politics and foreign relations.
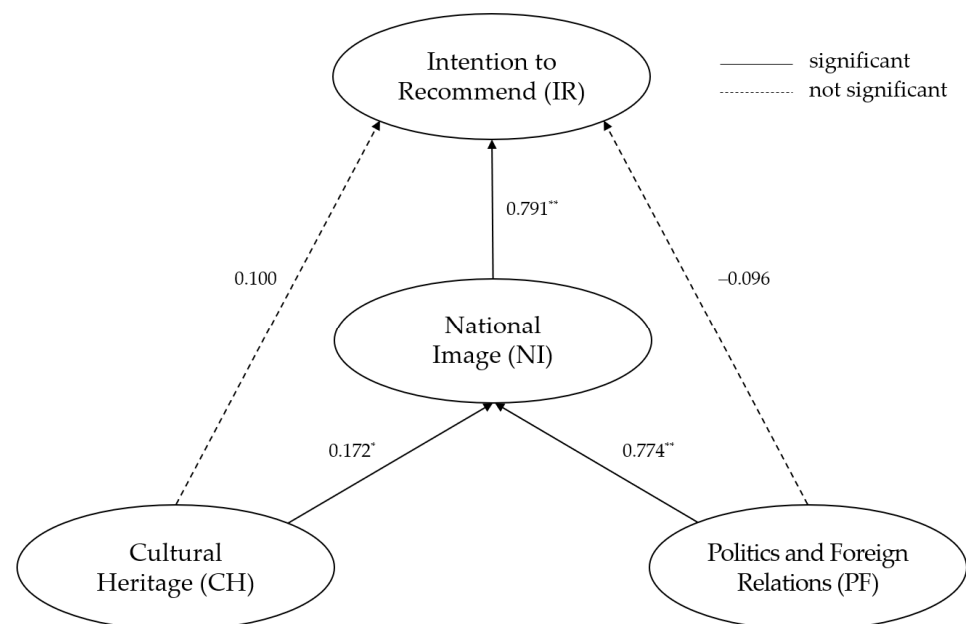
Figure 2. Tested path model; * *p* < 0.05, ** *p* < 0.01.

As shown in Figure 2, CH had no significant direct effect on IR. However, CH had a significant direct effect on NI, which again directly affected IR, indicating a complete mediation effect of NI in the relationship between CH and IR. A similar tendency was found in the relationship between PF and IR. NI was a mediating variable so that PF could have an indirect effect on IR. In order to assess whether the mediation effects were significant, bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals were calculated (1000 bootstrap samples with 95% confidence interval).

Table 5 presents the standardized total, direct, and indirect effects of the tested paths. First, the results showed that NI had a significant total and direct effect on IR (β = 0.791, $p < 0.01$). Second, CH had significant total (β = 0.236, $p < 0.01$) and indirect (β = 0.136, $p < 0.05$) effects on IR, presenting the mediation effect of NI between CH and IR. CH also had a significant total and direct effect on NI (β = 0.172, $p < 0.05$). Third, NI also played a role as a mediating variable between PF and IR, as PF had significant total (β = 0.516, $p < 0.01$) and indirect (β = 0.612, $p < 0.01$) effects on IR. PF had a significant total and direct effect on NI (β = 0.774, $p < 0.01$). The model fit indices indicated the model was a good fit. Moreover, a Sobel test [52,53] confirmed the mediation effect of NI between CH and IR (z = 2.75, $p < 0.01$) and PF and IR (z = 4.68, $p < 0.01$).

Table 5. Standardized total (direct, indirect) effects.

Variable	IR	NI
NI	0.791 ** (0.791 **, 0.000)	
CH	0.236 ** (0.100, 0.136 *)	0.172 * (0.172 *, 0.000)
PF	0.516 ** (−0.096, 0.612 **)	0.774 ** (0.774 **, 0.000)

Notes: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$. Model fit indices: χ^2 = 200.207, df = 77, GFI = 0.901, CFI = 0.945, TLI = 0.925, RMSEA = 0.085; $p < 0.01$.

5. Discussion

This research is an attempt to construct an SBM at a macro/state level. As part of this process, the study examined the relationships among consumers' perceptions of cultural heritage, politics and foreign relations, national image, and intention to recommend. African students studying in Korea were selected as targeted consumers. There are several reasons for this decision. First, unlike China, Japan, and even Southeast Asian countries, Africa is deemed not only geographically but also geopolitically an alienated place from Korea. Africa is often seen—by outsiders—as a place which has a sui generis identity of culture, politics and foreign relations. At the same time, however, Africa is increasingly seen as an emerging place from which sustainable consumer power can arise [54,55]. To put it differently, if Korea can show that its SBM within the context of Africa is a viable proposition, it will indicate not only the strength of the Korean SBM itself, but also the fact that the Korean SBM can operate based on an emerging continent where commercial activities are burgeoning [55,56].

Second, more importantly, the respondents surveyed in this study are going to play an important role in creating and forming mainstream opinions within the society after returning to Africa. The students are highly likely to be main actors of their respective countries and, therefore, their intention to recommend can lend significant weight to strengthening the SBM at a state level. Some might say that as the students interviewed were residing in Korea, they could have had predilections for Korea, whereby the survey results could be misleading. However, a counterargument can also be made in this regard, as the students are the only group who can give a first-hand account of Korea, not only based on their experience of Korean products, but also predicated upon the fact that they are witnesses to Korea's cultural heritage, whether it be in a tangible or intangible form.

Several implications can be extrapolated from the study results. To begin, we have confirmed that national image meaningfully affects intention to recommend. This finding is in line with previous studies, which have suggested that national image had a significant positive effect on consumer behavior [12,19,21,22]. We then turned to the two ideational variables: perceptions of cultural heritage and PF. By distinguishing the concept of cultural heritage from culture, on the one hand, we have shown that the perception of cultural heritage can function as a foundation for improving national image; hence, it reinforces the SBM. On the other hand, we have provided new evidence that perceptions of PF had a significantly positive effect on national image. At the same time, interestingly, we have observed that neither of the variables—perceptions of cultural heritage or PF—had a direct effect on the intention to recommend in terms of consumer behavior. That said, both factors still have some effects on the intention to recommend with the help of national image as

the mediator. Stated differently, national image is best understood as the main facilitator among cultural heritage, PF, and intention to recommend.

These findings lead us to contemplate the practical implications of the study. First, public perceptions of national image are indeed important. Thus, building national image with a mid- and long-term perspective should be a significant part of constructing the SBM. For example, despite the gradually increasing mutual exchange between Korea and Africa, the depth and scope of the exchange is still insignificant compared with the latter's relationships with Europe (in the context of politics and culture) or China (in the context of aid and infrastructure). Without forming a relatively consistent and firm national image, the effect of the K-Wave of different cultural sources in Africa is likely to be delimited by other actors that have a higher level of geographical and geopolitical interests in the region. Building such a steadfast national image can begin with the targeted region's younger generation gaining first-hand experiences of the country that produces relevant content. This implies both operational and tactical dimensions of the SBM at the national level. While the Korean government can be in charge of deepening and widening the level of mutual exchange with African countries based on the aforementioned common ground between the two regions (an operational dimension), business-level actors can focus on excavating target markets (a tactical dimension). Of course, this should be carried out in a friendly and nonthreatening fashion [7].

Next, and relatedly, the evidence that national image is predicated upon cultural heritage sheds light on expanding common ground between Korea and Africa. A previous study observed that the cultural roots of both regions could boil down to Confucian values [4], an idea that also corroborates the results of this study. The cultural affinity between the two regions indicates that both Korea and Africa already have a firm foundation in terms of the prospects for building a positive Korean national image. What needs to be achieved, therefore, is to nurture, cultivate, and cherish the cultural heritage in such a way that an SBM at a state level can build on targeted consumers' positive perception of the content-producing country. As in the case of *Daejanggeum* and *Jumong*, both of which were awash with the components of Korean cultural heritage, the future direction of the K-Wave should also consider the utilization of relevant areas [9,32,57]. This approach, then, would be in line with a more strategic dimension. In addition, with regard to the role of PF, one thing to note is that even though PF had a direct effect on national image, the same direct effect was not conveyed to consumers' intention to recommend in a proper and significant fashion. This means that even if a state's PF with a targeted country is damaged due to the clashes of vital interests for each country—as was seen in the case of the THAAD dispute between China and Korea—so long as the image of a destination country (including those of cultural heritage and ensuing cultural products) is looked upon with favor by targeted consumers, the SBM can be sustained. If anything, in the case of the relationship between Korea and Africa, the possibility of such clashes of vital interests is considerably low. This could be another strategic point that needs to be taken into consideration. Korea's charm in Africa can thus be sustainable in practice on the grounds that the Korean cultural heritage has the potential to be integrated into universal values which Africa has also actively embraced [58].

6. Conclusions

This article joins the discussion on the concept of SBMs by exploring the possibility of their usage at the national level. In the debate on the SBM at a macro level, we have identified two key ideational variables: perceptions of cultural heritage, and perceptions of politics and foreign relations. While corroborating the results of previous studies on national image and its effects on consumer behavior (in this case, consumers' intention to recommend), we have demonstrated that cultural and political perceptions of a nation can have an effect on consumers' choices. What is interesting is that although neither cultural nor political perceptions directly affected consumers' choices, both variables had significant direct effects on national image, which, in turn, led us to contemplate the mediating role of

national image as well as the dynamics of a tripartite mechanism (cultural and political perceptions, national image, and intention to recommend). In the process, three dimensions with implications for augmenting the Korean SBM within the context of African–Korean relations were drawn: deepening and widening the level of mutual exchange with African countries by the Korean government (an operational dimension); excavating target markets based on commonalities between the two regions by Korean business actors (a tactical dimension), and cultivating the cultural heritage and political relations in a way that an SBM at a state level can build on the targeted consumers' positive perception of the content-producing country (a strategic dimension).

Albeit being distinctive and prospective, the empirical results of this study should not be overstressed. As noted, especially from the Korean perspective, the respondents surveyed in this study in and of themselves represent a great asset in constructing the SBM at a state level. While the African students residing in Korea are certainly likely to be leading voices when returning to their respective countries, this does not mean that the study results can be generalized without caution. The respondents' perceptions of Korea had been delimited by their own time span in the country, their own experiences, and their own circumstances. The result should not, thus, be seen as the final conclusion. If the scope of the respondents is extended beyond the level of those who have been to Korea, the findings will undoubtedly supplement the current research. Deepening and widening the level of ideational factors surveyed may also be necessary. Despite cultural heritage and PF being introduced as distinctive ideational driving forces for designing the SBM, the items of each factor remain at a relatively general level. Future studies may extend the measures of cultural heritage and PF. For instance, assessments on religious doctrine (e.g., Confucianism in Korea and its counterpart in Africa) and relationships between local authorities as well as central governments would yield a further insight into SBMs.

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