

EXPLORING THE DIMENSIONS OF COUNTRY OF ORIGIN AND ITS LEVERAGE ON CONSUMER BUYING PREFERENCES: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF PAKISTANI CONSUMER MARKET

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Abstract

This research paper aims to explore and enhance the understanding about the country of origin and its leveraging effect on consumer buying preferences. Firms all around the world consider expanding their businesses into foreign markets. Through reduction in trade barriers and perfections in communication, the dream of becoming a “Global Company” seems relatively easy. Branding with relevant differentiation and value proposition is considered a sound methodology to create patron loyalty across the world. However, the customer’s brand assessment procedure is a complex phenomenon with a sum of factors. One crucial, albeit often ignored, factor is the Country of Origin (COO) of the brand. This paper attempts to explore that how the consumer buying preferences are being affected due to the product’s origin, or “made in” tag. It is an exploratory study, which tries to analyze in detail, through structured interview method, that what kind of impact COO has over customer preference, in which product categories this influence is high and what factors have a potential negative impact on purchase decision. For firms viewing the world as their market, prerequisite for marketers is to realize the consequences of COO effects on their brands and establish policies to counter / control (as the case may be) the influence of COO on its brand. This qualitative research also considers and reviews the effect of COO on brand assessments through the study of backgrounds available in current management literature. It also focuses on the aspects that affect the degree of impact of the COO on the brand. Finally, this study paves the path for the strategists to take advantage of the findings and consider COO image as professed by the customer. This study led to endorsements on how to grab the COO effect for Multinational and Local (Pakistani) firms who intended to enlarge to foreign markets.

Keywords: *Country of Origin, Consumer Buying Preference, Brand Assessment, Country Image, Foreign Products.*

1) INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The rapid growths in telecommunication and transference means are fetching geologically distant countries closer to each other. Countries are invigorated to contribute aggressively in this inclination by surrendering communication and trade barriers, which avert the interchange of services and products among states in the worldwide marketplace.

Countries are commencing to expose more communication networks with the rest of the world. With the advancement of globalization, patrons are offered with more assortments of product varieties, and their latent product choice embrace a higher percentage of products from non-domestic sources. In such a modest scenario, branding is used lengthily to separate one's product from the contestants.

The problem this paper endeavors to discourse is the influence of the Country of Origin on brand scheme for global firms, with precise focus on its inferences for MNC's design to aim the Pakistani market. The ambition is to realize how country-of-origin metaphors affect behavior, and how they can be positioned in the marketing tactic.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

To explore the various dimensions of country of origin and finding its leveraging effect onto the consumer buying preferences within the context of Pakistani consumer market through qualitative research approach.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The core objectives of this study are:

1. To understand the dimensions of Country of Origin (COO), in the context strategic branding tool.
2. To explore the contribution and direction of COO in shaping up consumer buying preferences.
3. To provide a framework for the marketing/branding strategist to incorporate COO in their planning activities more effectively.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Globalization is not a dream any more. It is not a distant reality, it is not a concept. Globalization is a fact and nobody can deny it. The multinational companies and aspiring multinational companies both want a better understanding of the global market as they have understood that the international market belong to those who understand the local customer better.

This study explores and extends one particular dimension of the branding strategy which is COO. Through this study we are trying to provide a conceptual structural framework which is based on the perceptions and experiences of Pakistani consumers about foreign country products. The study tries to explore the preferred countries, motives behind these preferences, comparative analysis of local and imported products, and reasons behind animosity, if any, for some countries.

The existing literature does not comprehensively covers these issues and if there are any studies done in this regard, their context, setting, and approach is totally different. "Go Global" companies need to understand the consumer preferences and for this it is important if they

explore the relationship between COO and consumer preferences. In this study, we tried to bridge this gap. The study further invites some new horizons and themes to be explored under thematic analysis. The findings of this study tend to contribute originally in assessing the valuable views captured in structured interviews from Pakistani consumers of foreign products.

1.5 Theoretical Perspective

The structure of the article represents the idea of exploring the relationship between the COO and consumer buying preferences. The focus was to explore new dimensions of this relationship. At present, the companies have and can have a diversified image, with emerging from one country, having head office in some other country and operations in another. Before launching their products in a new country these companies must understand what their customer value more when it comes to evaluating a product in context of its COO. By understanding this aspect they can effectively design their marketing/branding strategies. This paper will help the companies understand this relationship and to develop a unique proposal with the emerging dimensions under the theoretical lens of the integration of COO and consumer buying behavior with customer based brand equity theory (Keller, 2005).

1.6 Research Method

The research method used in this study is exploratory. This study is inductive in nature in order to generate a theory after making in-detail analysis. It is a qualitative research therefore an interpretive and naturalistic approach is considered here.

1.7 Definition of Key terms

Country of Origin

Researchers have defined the term Country of Origin (COO) in many different ways. (Cateora & Graham, 1999), in their study regarding International Marketing, has defined COO as the influence which the country of manufacturer has on a consumer's positive or negative perception of a product. Every brand belongs to some country and the countries which own these brands are called the COO. Ferrari is an Italian brand and we can say that Italy is the country of origin of Ferrari. Dell belongs to America, so Dell's country of Origin is America. And same goes for the Toyota and Honda, where COO for both the companies is Japan.

The definitions produced by different researchers do vary, but all the previous researches depicts the product's COO provides an important information cue to the customer, which has a known impact on the product's adoption, evaluation, and consumers' perception and willingness to purchase the foreign products.

Country Image

A general overview of the literature available on the subject presents many diversified definitions of Country Image (CI). Since the scope of CI is interdisciplinary the definition can be complex and conceptually diversified. For comprehension purpose we are taking definitions from different eras in chronological order.

(Bannister & Saunders, 1978) defined Country image as an overall image which consist of variables like economic and political development, peculiar products, traditions, level of industrialization, historical events and relationship, and of technological development. Similarly, later in 1998, Szeles defined it as an internal and external framework of opinions and beliefs on

people, nation and country and the simultaneously objective and subjective psychological contents of heterogeneous and generalized value judgement thereof.

Finally, (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2006) introduced a simplified version of CI definition by explaining it as an overall image of a country that one evaluates in relation to brands and products.

Consumer Buying Preference

Consumer preference is also a complex phenomenon. Every consumer has a different set of preferences and values which cannot be easily determined under the realm of economics. The research shows that this set of preferences depends upon culture, education, and individual tastes, among a plethora of other factors.

Out of many popular definitions of consumer preferences we have selected the definition of (Veres & Tarján, 2013), which states that consumer preference is the subjective (individual) taste, as measured by utility, of various bundles of goods. Consumer preference permit the consumer to rank these bundles of goods according to the levels of utility they give the consumer. It should also be considered that these preferences are independent of income and prices. Also, the Ability of the customer to purchase these goods does not determine a consumer's likes or dislikes. A customer can have a preference for Ferrari over GMC but only have the financial means to drive a Suzuki.

Foreign Products

A foreign product is any product which is available for sale in a home country but does not belong to same country (Torres et. al, 2007). There are a plenty of choices available to the consumers and they can choose foreign products ranging from soft drinks to high tech digital gadgets. Decades ago, these products were limited in number and their access was also confined to the few. But now whosoever can afford it, buy it. It is also a proven fact that products from other countries draw consumers' attention by the performance, name of the producer, design, or the products' country-of-origin (Cai & Swagler, 2002).

1.8 Delimitations

The study avoids the inadequate research planning which is accompanied by the unclear generalizations. The boundaries of the study design are set clearly here. The study is narrowed down to a particular group of customers who are regular buyers of foreign products or who can buy and does not buy imported products because of animosity. The preferences of these customers are the subject matter of this study. The participants of this study have specifically talked about and shared their experiences pertaining to their preferences and the reasons behind these preferences. They discussed different scenarios which they have experienced in past or could face in the future.

We did not study the population who could not afford to buy or do not have an access to foreign products. We also did not study the behaviors of our sample which were not included or relevant to the existing study.

1.9 Limitations of the Study

1. In depth interview is considered an effective method to deeply understand the human behavior. But during these interviews we felt that if, somehow, a focus group discussion is

arranged for the same subject matter, we would gather some diverse and unique dimensions of customer preferences for imported products.

2. Cross-cultural comparisons could further be conducted involving diverse range of behavior of customers to understand the cultural differences across the world.
3. The sample size could further be increased inviting more number of participants and as the sample is very gender biased in the current study, it could be neutralized in future researches.
4. The interviews were conducted in a controlled environment and scenarios were created hypothetically. This may mean that the subjects acted differently than that when they make real purchase decisions. Without observing the consumers in the real shopping environment, it is difficult to delineate consumers' true decision-making processes.
5. The findings are peculiar and context-specific, required to be cautiously extended to other settings. The study could be expanded in the emerging economies.
6. The further researches may explore the other dimensions country of origin, with different sample sets and environmental settings.
7. It was a qualitative study and although we have tried to minimize the researchers' bias, still we understand that the study is not impartial and free from bias. Future researchers can improve this weakness of our study through their own techniques.

1.10 Summary

This section attempts to familiarize the contextual background, problem statement and purpose of designing this study. The COO depicts the positive or negative effect of a manufacturing country on the preference of host country's customers. The study was conducted to explore the dimensions of customer buying preferences and the reasons of animosity, if it exists. The section also includes the rationale of conducting this research. Key terms have also been defined. In order to effectively design their marketing strategies for international growth, the multinational companies must take interest in knowing the buyers' preferences and try to understand different variables in their true sense. The next section highlights the review of previous researches and also provide a critical analysis of the gaps which urge the authors to conduct this study in the proposed settings.

2) LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Background of the Research

Country of origin refer to evidence concerning to where an artifact is produced (the "made in" concept). It is also defined as the constructive or undesirable impact/connotations that a product's country of manufacture may have on shoppers' verdict procedures or succeeding behavior (Elliott & Cameron, 1994).

Country of origin is defined as the state where head office of the firm marketing the artifact or brand is sited. Though we recognized that the artifact might not inevitably be manufactured in that country due to reason of offshore, we assume the artifact or brand is recognized with that state.

For instance, France is renowned for fashion industry, Japan recognized for automated/electric goods and Germany, for high level of equipment.

(Roth & Romeo, 1992), contribute a new definition of country of origin as the inclusive opinion customers' form about products from a specific state, created on their previous acuties of the country's invention and marketing fortes and flaws.

The traditional school of thought argued that the COO is measured as an extrinsic sign of the amplified artifact. It aid as an empirical to condense supposed perils. It encapsulates material about that artifact and utilities as a receptionist to additional data. But prior revisions, (Bloemer, Kasper et al, 1995) have revealed that this prevailing method flops while benevolent to the factual COO image. In fact, it basically determined, not more or less, the liking of the artifact under consideration from a specific state.

The contemporary point of view raised the issue that in conventional method COO influence depends upon the liking an artifact which belongs to a particular state. Alternatively, it has to ensure with customer's assessment of a certain artifact inventing from a particular state. Instead, COO can be demarcated as the evaluative propensities (these can be beliefs, attitude and preferences) towards an artifact from a specific state.

Importance of COO in today's business environment

As the fabrication of artifacts and the exploration for novel marketplaces surges worldwide, recognizing end user choice likings linked to an artifact's country-of-origin turn into gradually more significant. For accomplishment in the varying worldwide market will need companies to completely realize their place in this respect. Assumed the prompt advancement and market chances that are accessible in emerging states, it turns out to be imperative to obtain facts for these souks (Jenes & Malota, 2013).

This constructive or uninvited state labeling is an imperative aspect for international organizations who trying to enter into overseas markets. Buyers' approaches headed for imports from numerous states can fluctuate expressively from one state to another. Even patrons in the same state can have considerably diverse insights of the country-of-origin. It monitors that it is indispensable to recognize country-of-origin influences on apiece state that a firm is seeing as disseminating to and doing this on a timely basis.

In broad sense, an artifact is scrutinized laterally two types of variables (Ding, 2013):

- 1) Basic variables (e.g. taste, design, performance, etc.) which are primary fragment of the artifact.
- 2) Extrinsic variables (e.g.: price, brand, warranty, country of origin etc.) which are latent bases of material to the shopper before ingestion.

COO image is defined as the inclusive insight shopper's form of artifacts from a specific state, established on their previous insights of the state's fabrication and marketing strong point and flaws. Thus, COO denotes acute evidence to shopper's assertiveness and chance of procuring artifacts.

There are numerous strategies bearing in mind about the country of origin (Niss, 1996)

- Mainly, patrons in established states have a broad inclination for national artifacts.
- Next, patrons do not practice the state of origin as a remote assessment benchmark.
- Third, the impact of country of origin inclines to be solider when the shopper is not acquainted with the artifact or built-up company.

Models Explaining COO effect on Product Evaluation

1. Tri-Component Model:

COO clue can go into the shopper comportment sequence in three phases: cognitive stage,

affective stage and behavior stage (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2006). If the COO clue is supposed to be at the cognitive phase, it will have emotional impact to the buyer's indulgent toward the state's characteristic (Samli, 1995). In the affective phase, COO clue is imitating to the assertiveness or sensation of shoppers toward the state building up done through interaction, relationship or previously awareness with them. The last is behavior phase, whereby COO symbol will help to either supports the artifact characteristics or opinions, or may be contradict these.

2. Halo Model

Halo effect will be existing when shopper has no understanding with the artifact finished in the esteemed state. Due to the restricted understanding of the artifact, patrons use state metaphor as an artifact sign to form discrete credence of artifact's feature, which will frame the general brand outlook (Sheth & Gross, 1991). A conviction about one artifact feature (in this case, the state in which the artifact was finished) produces a belief erection about unacquainted characters that are compatible with the renowned attribute.

3. Summary Construct Model

Familiarity is not unavoidably that of the individual, but individuals are inclined by the knowledge of others through data streams such as word of mouth and mass media. The shopper's familiarity about the particular state image can make simpler the insight to features of unaware products by using the material on the other acquainted artifacts to form their supposed country images (Han, 1989). This country image in a straight line affects Brand Attitude.

4. Single Flexible Model

Contrasting to the former ideal, both state image and credence can instantaneously have emotional impact to the shopper's assertiveness in capricious degree (Knight & Calantone, 2000). However, state image can in a straight line affect to brand attitude itself or it might tortuously influence brand attitude through forming the credence before verbalizing the assertiveness.

Country and Cultural Signifiers:

Numerous artifacts and brands propel indications that can be mapped out back to their country of origin thus performing as folk signifiers. That basis prompts are already decisively engraved within prosperous brand names. For example, IBM intensely recommends American, and Fosters is persistently accentuated as being "Australian for Beer".

Thus simply influencing the different enormities of the country of origin ideas does not eradicate the possessions of these signs. Country of origin of brand should not vary with a transformation in industrial locality. For instance, an American brand, Reebok, is mass-produced in Korea. Sony produces are finished in Malaysia and Indonesia but are still deliberated as Japanese produces. The apparent origin of a brand prerequisite not identical as the state publicized on the "made-in" tag. This variance is predominantly related in light of the increasing tendency towards offshore manufacturing by conglomerates.

Factors affecting influence of COO

1. Time

State images will revolutionize when patrons become more aware with the state or when the manufactured article genuine worth improves over time. A virtuous example is with Japanese

finished cars, where COO belongings altered from undesirable to constructive through the latter couple of periods.

2. Consumer Expertise

COO impacts will be sturdier when the shopper is not acquainted with classification of an artifact, which can be classified in novice clutch (Usunier, 2000). Novices are the patrons who have the time restraint and deficiency of adequate artifact understanding.

They conceivably use COO clue in any statuses. On the other side, knowledgeable patrons only have faith in on COO clue when the product features are ambiguous.

3. Demographics

The shopper awareness toward COO can differ by demographics i.e. gender or age factor, education and salary level (Kotabe & Helson, 1998). Studies have revealed that COO impacts would be durable between the senior, less refined and constitutionally conventional patrons.

4. Similarity between countries

The shopper insight of COO fluctuates from one state to another. Such discrepancy is only because of the degree of resemblance of credence, ethnic and politically responsive structures among home-based state and COO of produces (Zhang, 1996).

5. Product Categories

The exercise of COO sign is generally durable by the explicit nature of product. Therefore, COO consequence differs by product type. Normally, those products which can be classified as “high envelopment” products (such as durables) are supplementary related to the notion of COO than “low envelopment” goods.

6. Economic Development

In established states, countrywide produces are probable to be desired than imports. On the other side, in emerging states local produces are probable to be appraised less constructively than imported produces specifically from established states.

7. Ethnocentricity

Though, in the framework of cost-effective growth assumed above, the dispute of “ethnocentricity” of the horde state turns out to be serious (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2002). Ethnocentric patrons are to be expected to sense that it is unsuitable and erroneous to buying overseas finished produces. It is contended by (LeVine & Campbell, 1974), that in established states, shopper ethnocentrism is perceived as the utmost significant issue for the reason that they additional acquainted therefore they have a preference to buy national produces to retain native jobs and consequently rise their state’s GDP, and as a result, COO effects have a nominal character to perform.

Hence, patrons with truncated ethnocentric attitude are more probable to use COO cue to deduce artifact quality. Whereas, patrons with extraordinary ethnocentric attitude look at COO as a way to express devotion as so replicated in their buying comportment.

The case of Hybrid Products

A hybrid product is defined as one that is patented or planned by one state but manufactured in

some other state (Chao, 1993). This prerequisite has been made indispensable to look outside one constituency to be capable of to strive in the worldwide market.

Image can be defined for such brands as a blend of sources of multiple states. For example, in manufacturing of automobiles, raw material sources from one state, different country assemble raw material and the command center of the parental concern actuality in another state.

Commonly there are four mechanisms of such businesses:

1. Country of association, that is, the particular state allied with the brand.
2. Country of design / manufacturing
3. Country of assemblage
4. Country of modules / fragments

There are contradictory views regarding the significance of the four arguments. For example, Philip Kotler states: this issue as, “brands distinct and sustained due to their quality, regardless of the sources of manufacture or possession. GAP manufacture most of its attire lines in Central America. But its present-day style for young generation of Americans has no connotation with Costa Rica or Guatemala. Hugo Boss yields its shirts in China for American profession concerned citizens. These shirts do not convey any link with Chinese. Brand evenhandedness is erected upon the emotive senses of brand design and brand advertising. As stated earlier that it is independent of source of production and ownership.

Mixed results extracted from large number of studies, exporters should not ignore the probable undesirable influence of sourcing states, which hypothetically moves shopper’s product assessment.

2.2 The Gaps in the Literature

The above literature discusses the latest studies and has identified some key research gaps regarding the COO and its link with customer purchase preference. These gaps need to be evaluated and addressed in order to improve the marketing/branding strategies and overall results and outcomes of an organization. The gaps, which need to be addressed, are as follows:

- The effect of COO needs to be understood in totality and it is only possible through qualitative methods to deeply comprehend the issues related to it.
- In many empirical studies, the COO and consumer buying behavior relationship is examined within various settings which should be approached qualitatively.
- In consumer animosity, the effect of religion is never undertaken as a significant variable. In this era where the forces of de-globalization are actively working across globe, it is important to understand this variable with qualitative approaches.
- Previous researches neglected the role of patriotism or nationalism, and whenever it is discussed the approach was quantitative in nature.
- The studies did not address that how the country image effect the customer preference in different product categories, while it is suspected that the COO may not affect all the product categories in the same manner.

2.2 Theoretical Construct

Every company strives for growth and one of the best tool for growth is by entering into new markets. Tri-component model, Halo model, Summary construct model and Flexible model tried

to explain the effects of COO but they did not comprehensively study the COO effect on consumer preferences. There are about forty thousand multinationals in the world and they all are growth hungry. These companies need to understand the consumer behavior of a region before entering in that area for a successful launch. There is a need of some theoretical model which can help the multinational companies or aspiring multinational companies to understand the buyer preference related to COO. There is a huge opportunity to work in this area as the scope is wide open and the demand for this research is really high.

2.3 Summary

This section summarizes the literature about COO, customer purchasing preference and attitude towards imported products. The literature shows that prior research studies have been undertaken in developed countries as most of the multinationals belong to those countries and also most of their business is coming out of developed countries. These studies have neglected the emerging countries like Pakistan, China and India, which could become the new Big markets for these multinationals.

The literature was reviewed for finding the gaps and it was concluded that despite the availability of various models to explain COO effect on consumer behavior, still there is a need to understand the consumer preferences more deeply. It is also implied that dimensions of patriotism, religious commitment and political tensions among countries are never considered as part of influencing factors. Also very few researchers used the qualitative lens to analyse the issue and even they did not consider the emerging markets as their potential research market. The critical analysis of the existing literature identified the under-researched area in COO to illuminate the contextual dimensions in which its effect can be used as a powerful business strategy and its strength is fully envisaged. Recognizing the country-of-origin effect on consumers' buying intentions and quantifying the effect not only will help consumers understand the rationality of their purchase behavior, but also will help international producers and marketers. For producers and marketers, the image of products' origins can act as significant barriers to or facilitators of entry into a foreign market.

Nowadays it is still imperative and valuable for marketers to know what images consumers hold about the country of origin and whether these images will affect consumers buying behaviors.

In the next subsequent section, the methodology has been defined to address the research questions by taking particular sample out of total population.

3) RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Questions

A better understanding of the issues, discussed in the previous section, enable the marketer to take more informed steps for the success in international market. This study was conducted to shed some light on the investigation of the following issues.

1. Do the customers like to buy products from a particular country rather than buying the similar kind of products from some other country?

2. Do the customers willingly pay more for a set of products which are imported from a certain country than for the similar products from another country? If yes, what are the factors due to which they are ready to pay the price differential or bear the hassle to access the products?
3. Do the customers' preference change if they find the COO in direct conflict with their religious or political affiliation?

3.2 Setting

The 'Made In' issue is a matter of great concern in many marketplaces. The notion is not only important on international level, but it is also significant at the regards of domestic versus foreign products. Governments and producers may become proactive in domestic promotions of native industries for economic reasons. Once they know that country-of-origin images do occur, managers would be better served to know how a particular country-of-origin image compares to the images of competing producers, and to know what kind of business growth planning should be used to improve consumers' adoption of their goods and services.

This exploratory study is primarily qualitative in nature and the data was collected from the Pakistani consumers. Pakistan is an emerging market with a lot of potential for multinational companies. The researches like this will help them understand the buying behavior of local consumers. The selected consumers were approached through personal links and screened through their purchasing habits. The interviews were conducted in the controlled environment for which the time and place were already decided with the respondents.

3.3 Population

The total population for the study was the general Pakistani consumers, who belong to various parts of Pakistan but currently living in Lahore. Out of this population, the sample of six consumers was chosen in order to address the purpose of this study.

3.4 Data Source

The respondents were selected through convenience sampling technique, with the screening criteria of foreign product customers. Idea of this technique was to find the connotation and enthusiasm behind behavior of the participants. As the comments and feedback of the respondents is required so non-probability samples/ random sampling will be more helpful. The total number of respondents were six in number with a diversity in gender, age, occupation and SEC.

The decision to have respondents that were as heterogeneous as possible in terms of age, sex, and socio-economic grade was based on the general notion, common to most market researchers, that heterogeneous groups are more likely to provide a diverse and in-depth range of responses. The respondents were contacted before the interview and screened for their usage of the respective product, apart from gender, age, and socioeconomic group. Each interview took about thirty to forty five minutes and all the interviews were conducted during November-December 2014, in Lahore city.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

1. The study was conducted with being aware of the ethical considerations and complied with the professional and ethical guidelines and procedures.
2. After proper preparation and training, the welfare and rights of the human subjects have been protected.

3. The secrecy, interests and identities of the consumers have been protected.
4. The guarantee was given to the participant for the confidentiality of the information given by them.
5. The data collected is stable and reliable. The results are adequately credible and accurate to address the research questions.

3.6 Research Design

A qualitative and interpretive approach was used here in this study. Research design includes a collection of beliefs of a researcher about the nature of knowledge and acquiring that knowledge from the world. There are two major research paradigms prevailing in research (Bryman & Bell, 2009)(Creswell, 2009). Constructivists believe on the multiple realities and subjective meanings of a social action by seeking an understanding of the world in which they live and work. Interpretivism is linked with qualitative method of subjective data based on text and images. Moreover qualitative approach is inductive in nature used to generate a theory making an in-depth analysis.

3.7 Data Collection

In this study the recorded semi-structured interviews were conducted for data collection. This method is optimal when you want to get in depth information about an issue. This type of interview is used to explore in detail the respondent's own perceptions and accounts. Interviews were started by open questions and then some questions related to topic or issue that was under investigation were asked.

In total, six in-depth interviews were conducted from the consumers of imported/foreign products. These interviews were recorded and were carefully transcribed and analyzed by using QSR Nvivo 10 software. The transcriptions depicted true and accurate picture of the perceptions and experiences of the participants.

3.8 Interview Protocol

The interview protocol (See Appendix 1) comprising of the open-ended and semi-structured questions was used as an instrument to collect primary data. This protocol was difficult to design, as it had to include the most relevant concepts and issues. The interview protocol was based on ideas from authentic literature review along with the objectives and questions of this study. There was an attempt to design the instrument with a view to cover the core dimensions of the main purpose of the study.

The discussions followed a loosely structured schedule, which was designed to allow respondents freedom to explore issues that were of interest to them, while providing the necessary structure to hold the discussion together and guide them to topics of interest to the researcher where necessary. The discussions were opened with quite general questions about the products, their main characteristics and distinguishing features. Then the discussions were channeled towards choice criteria, user groups, consumption occasions, and benefits sought from the product.

The second half of the discussions was then focused onto images of products from different countries of origin and on the cues used in choice decisions. For most part of the interviews stimuli were verbal, i.e. in the form of fairly general questions.

3.9 Data Analysis Strategy

The analysis was carried out from recordings of the interviews and notes taken during and after the interviews. The analysis followed a fairly flexible approach, mostly focusing on content. The computer software QSR NVIVO 10 was used as tool for analysis of data. In NVIVO, all data were imported then transcribed data into textual form for analysis. After transcribing data, the researcher explored the themes and code them. For the coding of data, auto coding method was used and then it was converted into nodes. After the classification of data, Queries were run for generating the word frequency, text search, matrix coding queries and tree map of data.

Finally, the research model of this study was explored by choosing all main themes which were coded into and linked with both case nodes and theme nodes. Being an exploratory study, content analysis was also applied.

3.10 Summary

This section of methodology summarizes the research questions, settings, population, and sources of data, ethical considerations, research design, the interview instrument and protocol and the strategy of data analysis. The participants included the six Pakistani consumers, who belong to different walks of life. The data were gathered by conducting semi-structured one-to-one interviews

The multi-dimensional perspectives were collected under the framework of competency. The sample was a true and reliable representative of Pakistani consumers who regularly buys imported products and six interviews provide fair enough information for the study purpose. The data collection also involved the writing process as the notes were taken for the interviews. The respondents were fully engaged and they participated and cooperated up to their level best. Thematic analysis was employed to extract the main themes and develop coding framework matrices. The frequency analysis was also used for exploring the participant proportion who repeatedly used the same main themes during their interviews showing the number of times the dimensions were emphasized by the managers.

The next subsequent section includes the important findings and results found in analyzing the data within the software of QSR NVivo.10.

4) FINDINGS

4.1 Participants

The six participants with whom semi-structured interviewing were undertaken for purpose of this study were coded as Mr. A, Mr. B, Mr. C, Mr. D, Mr. E, and Ms. E. This coding was done to keep their identity protected and to meet the ethical standard criteria of this research.

4.2 Data Analysis Strategy

Once the data were collected, it was analyzed after coding and linking to the case nodes and theme nodes. Framework matrices were developed, queries were run like the word text and word frequency queries. The thematic analysis helped to explore the main themes out of the qualitative data.

4.3 Data Analysis and Coding

The interview data were coded at existing nodes and then linked with the nodes. Coding helps to put the material into references of nodes.

Thematic analysis provided flexibility, enrichment and more comprehensive demonstration of data. The purpose of this study was achieved through thematic analysis as the subjective-nature views of general consumers were interpreted first and then the data were presented in a way in which the information provides peculiar findings. Thus the objectives of this qualitative study could have been achieved by using the most-fit and suitable method of thematic analysis. Data were coded in the software and unique themes were extracted out of this coding.

4.3.1 Summary of Frequency Queries

For analysis purpose, we used word count to check the frequency of words all participants used in their interviews and their weighted in the interviews. Participants as combined used 'products' 99 times and it is 6.98% of complete interview. Local used 99 times in interview by the participant and it is 3.36% of overall interview. Foreign used 68 times and 2.54% of total interview. Brand is used 13 times, quality is also used 13 times, and good is used 10 times, buying 7 times and country six times. Since each respondent repeated the same word periodically so the word frequency count exceeds the number of respondents.

The summary table for prominent word frequencies, a table is provided in the following;

Word	Length	Count	Weighted (%)
products	8	187	6.98
product	7	99	3.69
local	5	90	3.36
foreign	7	68	2.54
good	4	61	2.28
quality	7	61	2.28
buying	6	37	1.38
imported	8	37	1.38
things	6	32	1.19
think	5	26	0.97

Table 01: Word frequencies for all interviews.

Respondents were of the view that the COO always have an impact on their choices. As all the respondents were Muslims, they also mentioned that when it comes to imported edible items they become more conscious and not only that they check the Halal stamp on the product but also they care for COO and even if the food is Halal they do not buy this food if that is produced in certain non-Muslim countries. Similarly, it was noticed that the stereotyping prevails in the minds of the respondents. They tend to associate some particular products with clear preference from some specific countries.

The consumer preferences are clearly affected by COO and the country image. This effect is being formed because of their deep down beliefs about those countries. And these beliefs are based on their perception about other countries' religious state, political ties and views about Muslim community or Muslim world as a whole.

3.4.2 Analysis and Results

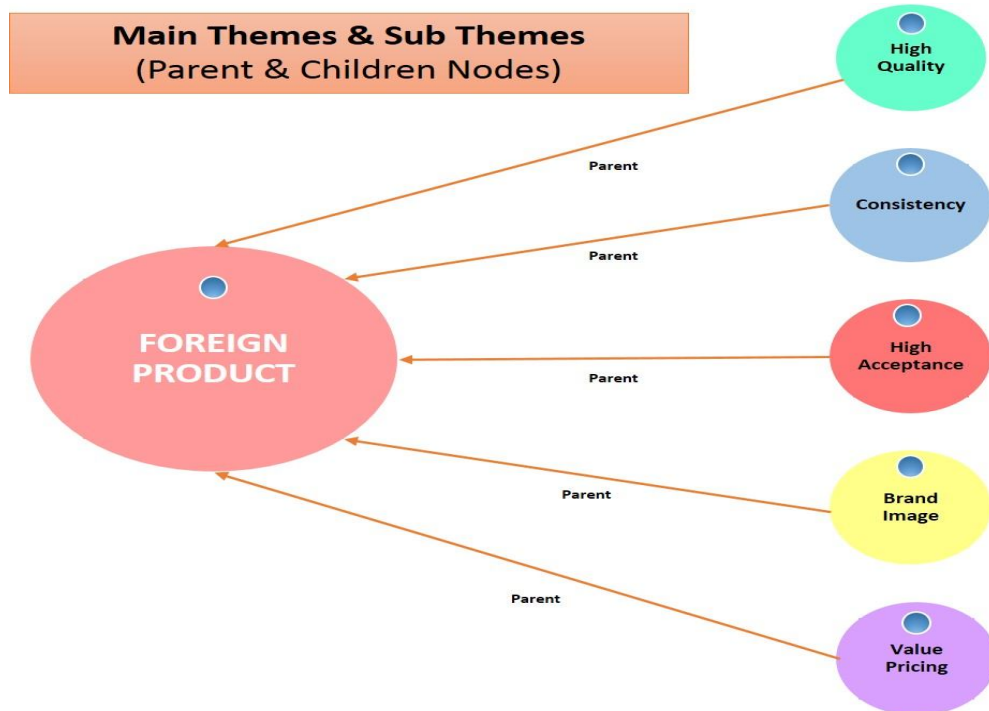
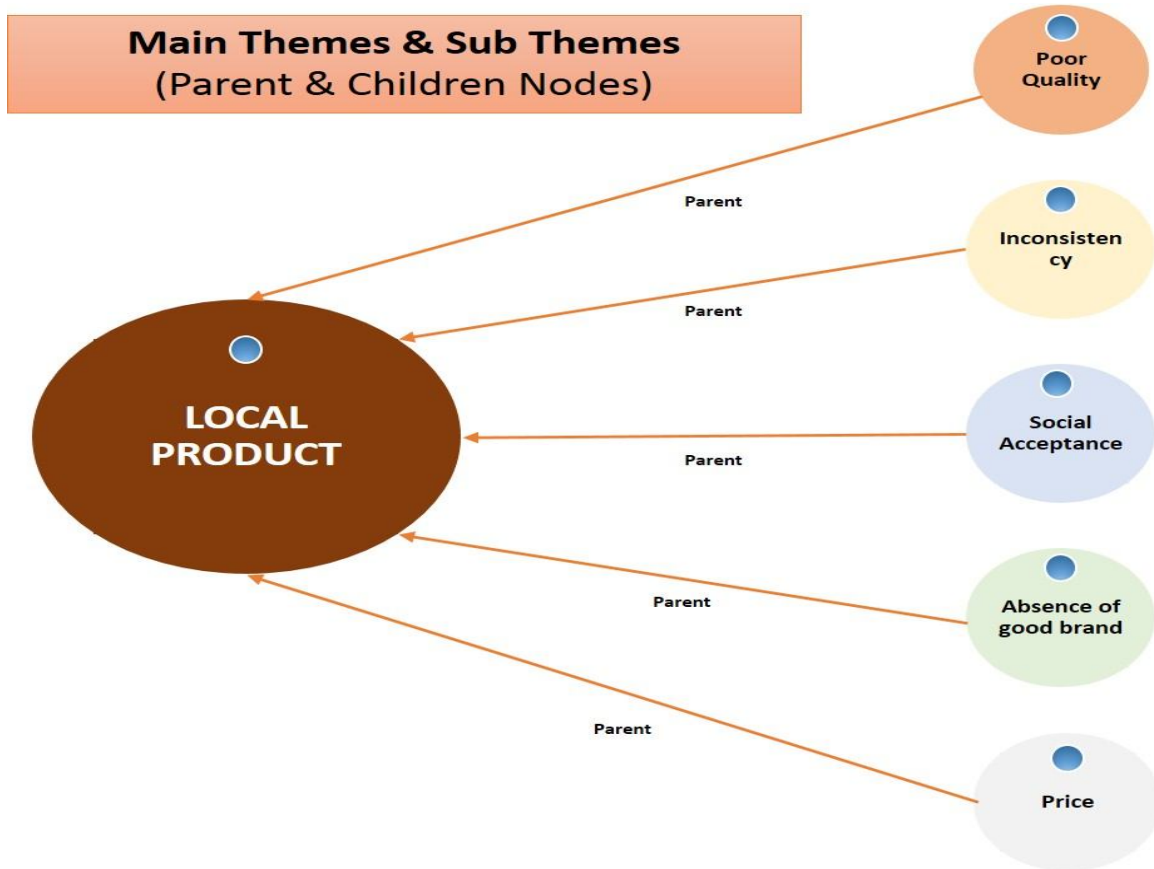


Figure 2: Theme # 2 “Foreign Products”

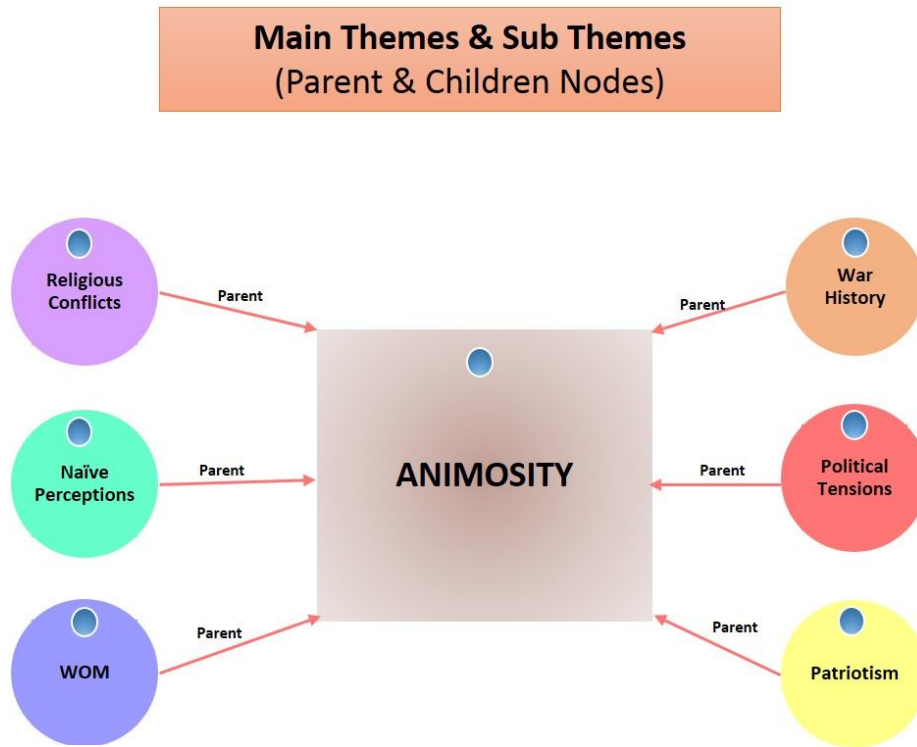


Figure 3: Theme # 3 “Animosity”

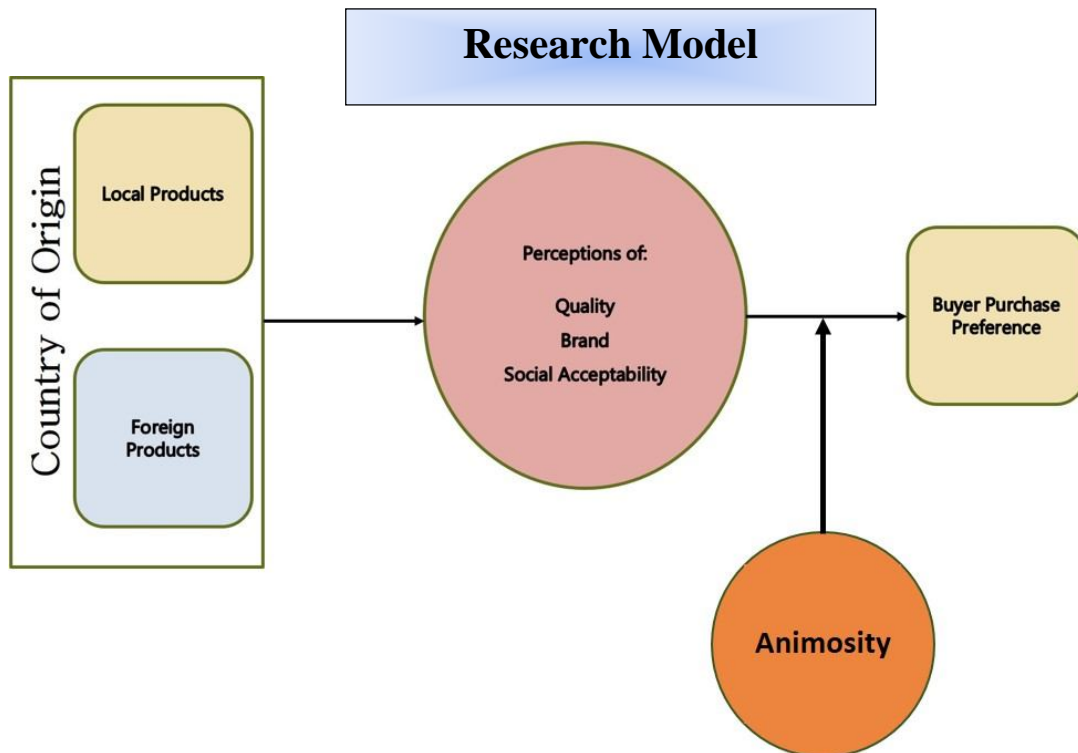


Figure 4: Model showing main themes and their relationship.

4) INTERPRETATION OF MAIN THEMES

4.1 Main Themes

4.1.1 *Quality of Products*

A good brand cannot be built around a bad product. A good product is a compulsory condition for the success of any Marketing or Branding strategy. Quality cannot be defined in absolute terms, and it is always described as the expectations of the customers. The interviews revealed that consumers have totally different perceptions about the local and imported products. Where the image of imported products is relatively much higher than the image of a local product. It was also discovered that although some countries have relatively much higher image in certain product categories, almost every country is ranked higher when discussed about the quality comparison with the local products.

The dimensions of quality which most of the customers discussed were durability, performance, guarantees, sales return policies, and prompt services.

4.1.2 Brand Image

Without a good brand name a good product is nothing. Every company strives to build a good brand name which will help them to go for product extensions and line extensions. The respondents were of the view that except for a few garments brands, Pakistan does not have good brands in any sector. This is why, whether they like it or not they have to opt for the imported products. Imported brands does not only fulfils the promise of quality but also give them a feeling of association with high caliber group and social acceptance.

4.1.3 Social Acceptance

A major factor is prioritizing the imported products over local products was the social acceptability issue. The respondents explained that for them it is very important that whatever they wear or carry that must give them some edge in the crowd. They are status conscious, image conscious and style conscious. And this is why they believe that even if the imported products are expensive, they justify that price premium.

4.1.4 Animosity

Apart from animosity, the rest of results are not very different from the previous researches. Although in those researches these issues were not taken into consideration in the same manner or setting or with the same depth and intensity, but our research also confirms their results. But when it comes to animosity, the previous researches generally focused or found out that the reasons were mostly political or cultural. But an in-depth analysis of Pakistani consumers show that the animosity could be based on the basis of religion and if it is based on religion the intensity of such animosity will be very high. Because of the intensity of issue the effect of animosity is shown as the controlling factor which overcomes the effect of price, brand image, product quality and social acceptance. So, if a product is good in performance, low in price, high in image but is made in a country which has some religious conflict with Islam, the Muslim buyer are prone to decline that product.

5) DISCUSSION

Most consumers of Pakistan know the country of origin when they purchase any electronic products, but they are mostly educated consumers. Lower class consumers are the price conscious. Middle class consumers are mostly quality conscious. Upper class consumers are status conscious. When the consumers have alternatives about the products then most of the consumers purchase the products on the basis of the country of origin. Most of the consumers in Pakistan refused to purchase the product without knowing product's country of origin. Most consumers of educated class believe that the country of origin of the product also determines the quality of the products.

Majority of consumers of Pakistan said that, whenever they go for shopping and have not sufficient information, then they purchase products on the basis of country of origin of the product. Majority consumers of Pakistan are strongly agree that when buying an automobile, TV set and Mobile phone, they always purchase these products with the proper search and gathering information about their country of origin.

6) Conclusion

The proposed model is derived from the in depth analysis of the interviews. The overall summary of the interviews concludes that the consumers of Pakistan generally prefer foreign products over local products and for this they are ready to pay a price premium. In their point of view the reason of this preference is mainly; the quality of the product, the brand image of the foreign companies and the social acceptability of foreign brands and products in Pakistani community.

There are a number of trends and avenues which can be worked on, based on the analysis of this study. One of the important area in this regard is the animosity against many other countries on the basis of different factors, especially the religious factor. The researcher could further explore this path in future.

So far, none of such study has been conducted in Pakistani environment, also the area was never been explored from the qualitative lenses. This study could be regarded as an exploratory research in this direction and invites the attention of other scholars to further investigate it in detail.

6.1 Recommendations & Implications for Theory, Research and Practice

The current research broadly validates the prior models of COO effect. The major difference we have found in the current study and the previous researches are the role and dimensions of animosity. In the previous studies it had a minor effect, especially in western countries framework, while studies in Japan and China revealed that animosity has a significant effect on consumer choice. But all of them neglected the role of religion in creating animosity for any country. This current study highlights this ignored element and explore its role in shaping the consumer preference.

The researchers of COO can further look into this direction and explore it to find new avenues. The marketing strategists can also learn from the findings and use it to effectively form their planning for the current markets or to enter into new geographical areas.

6.2 Summary

This study provides in-depth analysis of qualitative data and robust scope for the further horizons which might be accounted for both the local companies and the organizations who want to enter into new emerging economies, especially Pakistan.

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Appendix-I Interview Protocol

Introduction:

Pakistan is a developing country and despite being considered a poor nation most of its imports consist of Luxury products. This study is being conducted to understand that while buying an imported product (FMCG, consumer durable or luxury item), what different factors affect the consumer buying behavior, especially we need to understand the connection between Country of Origin and consumer buying intention.

To facilitate our note-taking, we would like to audio tape our conversations with your kind approval. For your information, only researchers on the project will be privy to the tapes which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. We ensure that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm.

Thank you for your agreeing to participate.

We have planned this interview to last no longer than thirty minutes. During this time, we have several questions that we would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning.

Interviewee Background:

Name: _____

Occupation: _____ Age (Above 18): _____

Phone (Optional): _____

Q1: Do you buy some/any products which are imported from other countries? Normally what are those products?

Probe: Suggestions about different sectors/products

Q2: What preference, if any, do you usually have between Local & Foreign products?

Probe: If an alternate is available, will you still go for a foreign product?

Q3: When you buy an imported product, what are the motivators behind that decision?

Probe: On what ground you reject a local product?

Q4: While buying a foreign product, what factors do you consider more?

Probe: Can you identify One factor as the most important factor.

Probe: discuss different products and ask about the important factors which affect the buying decision.

Appendix-III Word Search Query for Local



Appendix-IV Word Search Query for Foreign



Appendix-V
Word Frequency Query

