

# **An Analysis of Country of Origin Effect Based on The Product-Brand Centric Model**

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**ABSTRACT** The main objective of the study was to examine country of origin influence on global brands based on the Product-Brand Centric Model, which assumes that consumers associate image of a country not only with specific capabilities relating to an industry/product category but also with the capability of creating strong global brands. For the purpose of the study, the author focused on global brands originated from Japan and South Korea, i.e. Sony, Toshiba, Samsung and LG, which were famous brands of mobile phone and laptop. The selection of product category and brands was based on product and brand familiarity. The study used convenience sampling technique towards undergraduate students at the Faculty of Economics - The University of Mataram, Indonesia. The study found that Japan had a higher advantage on laptop leading to better image of Toshiba and Sony. Meanwhile, South Korea had a better reputation on mobile phone and was able to create a strong brand, i.e. Samsung. LG was the only brand that could not cultivate its home country's advantage in producing those products.

**Keywords: Product-Brand Centric Model, Country of Origin, Brand Image and Product Image**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Globalisation escalates competition among products and brands from various countries in the Indonesian market. Globalisation also brings another consequence, i.e. Indonesian consumers become more familiar with foreign products and brands. They have more choices of products and brands which could meet their needs. Globalisation creates a greater chance to the customers to compare domestic and foreign products available while shopping (Shirin & Kambiz, 2011; Barbu, 2011). They may evaluate products based on features, brands, price, packaging product image, product category, and country of origin since those factors affect consumer behaviour (Karami, Pourian, & Olfati, 2011).

Kesie, Rajh, and Kraljevic (2003) claimed that various studies concluded that country image is composed from belief about product categories, especially categories which have positive image. This is due to different brands within the same category have similar attributes and can be used to influence the same segment. This reflects generalisation of stimuli in consumer behaviour. A new brand from a particular country, which has a positive image may find consumer perception is consistent with famous brands in the same product category from the country. Then, country image has a great role in consumers perception towards product and brand from a particular country (Wang & Yang, 2008). Brand origin has been known to be of a greater influence of consumer's buying habits especially in emerging markets where brand origin of foreign products is often associated with high status (Abedniya & Zaem, 2011).

Consumer evaluation on a particular product may reveal the effect of country of origin (Koschate-Fischer, Diamantopoulos & Oldenkotte, 2012). Country Of Origin (hereafter, COO) information has a role in the evaluation process of products from a country (Barbu, 2011). This suggests consumers perception of a country affects their evaluations on products and brands from the country. Brand image and country of origin image are believed to influence the building of producer's competitive strategy and exploiting the image can be a vital instrument of its marketing strategy (Kesie, Rajh, & Kraljevic, 2003). If a country has a positive image on specific product category, consumers perceive the products more favourable leading to positive attitude and higher buying intention (Wang & Yang, 2008). This means that a country may enjoy positive image generating advantages for brands. Positive image supports brands from the country becoming global brands. Image of a brand can be closely linked to the country of image (Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch, & Paliawadana, 2009), then strong positive image of a country creates an advantage for brands (Wang & Yang, 2008). However, it still needs to examine how favourable image of a country can be enjoyed by all global brands from the country. To be more specific, there is a call for further investigations on whether global brands are perceived consistently by consumers if they are in the same product category and from the same COO.

Companies in a country with less favourable image have to develop a strategy to compensate such image (Speece & Nguyen, 2005). A number of study reported that brands from other countries face negative perceptions relative to Japan (Popodopoulos & Heslop, 1993; Speece & Nguyen, 2005). Electronic products made in Japan have a favourable image, while Korean electronic products still show a less favourable image in Asia (Speece & Nguyen, 2005). Bilkey (1993), however, pointed that both countries have been successful in improving image. Japan took almost 20 years while South Korea required half the time to improve their country image. As a result, a tight competition in the global consumer electronic market is between Japanese and Korean brands (Speece & Nguyen, 2005). This study therefore investigates the effect of country of origin of the two main Asian industrialised countries based on product-brand centric model by providing evidences from a small provincial city, namely Mataram – Lombok. This study examined image of global brands from those countries e.g. Sony, Toshiba, Samsung and LG and two product categories, e.g mobile phone and laptop.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Country of Origin Image and Brand Origin**

Country image has been defined by Martin and Eroglu (1993) as the total of descriptive, inferential and informational beliefs one has about a particular country. Country image reflects one's perception of country of origin in term of the technology, economics and standard of living (Chinen & Sun, 2011). The image also refers to emotions towards the country and pride (Roth, 2006). Country of origin is often associated with the information pertaining to where a particular product is made or manufactured, i.e. the "made in" concept (Barbu, 2011). When consumers are unfamiliar with a product or a brand, they usually take into account country of origin of the product in purchasing decision (Speece & Nguyen, 2005). Therefore, it is all about belief, ideas and impressions that people hold about a particular country leading to preconceptions about products from the country (Notari, Ferencz, Levai, & Czeglédi, 2011). This concept assumes that evaluations of a product are depended on consumer knowledge of the country in which it is made (Hong & Wyer, 1989).

Country of origin effect refers to the influence of all factors associated with a country and that plays a role on the process of evaluation of products and brands from that country (Lu & Heslop, 2008; Barbu, 2011). Further, COO is a cue that consumers used in product and brand evaluation (Oyeniya, 2009) and COO effect can be viewed as the impact of consumers' perception about a country on their evaluation of the country's products and brands (Loo & Davies, 2006).

Phau's study (2010) strongly suggested that there is a declining importance towards COO which refers to "made in" as an information cue to assist consumer evaluation. Products in global market are often designed, manufactured and assembled in multiple countries and thus brand origin more often reflects the quality and image of global brands. Brand has long been believed as a signal of quality and the dimensions of brand image affect consumer perceptions and preference (Essoussi & Merunka, 2007). Then, the brand owners are better to emphasise brand origin along with brand name in global market campaign.

COO effect can have several dimensions including brand origin or country of brand origin that is embedded within brand image. Then COO is part of brand image, the more favourable image of brand origin, the more positive brand image, vis versa (Speece & Nguyen, 2005). The growth of multinational companies and the emergence of hybrid products with components come from multi countries have blurred the accuracy and validity of "made in" label and thus it sometimes difficult to identify country of origin. Today's consumers associate a brand name to a country where the brand comes from, for example; McDonald's and KFC with the USA, Toyota and Honda with Japan (Shirin & Kambiz, 2011). Kesie, Rajh, and Kraljevic, (2003) therefore introduced new concept of brand origin instead of country of origin image or country image. They defined brand origin as the place/country to which brand is perceived belong to by its target customers. This new concept seemed to be more suitable in today's dynamic world as the same brand is produced in more than one country with different level of development and thus brand of a product does not necessarily reflect country of production. This means that a brand can also refer implicitly to the country of brand origin regardless of the place of manufacture (Essoussi & Merunka, 2007). Country of origin of a brand may not change with a change of the country of manufacture and brand image may not be influenced by the place where the products are actually manufactured. Similar to Kesie, Rajh, and Kraljevic (2003), the concept of country of origin is then redefined as a country which consumers ascribe the origin of the brand to, regardless of where the product was actually produced (Shirin & Kambiz, 2011). That means country of origin refers to the home country of the brand and product, and its image in consumers' mind (Karami, Pourian, & Olfati, 2011).

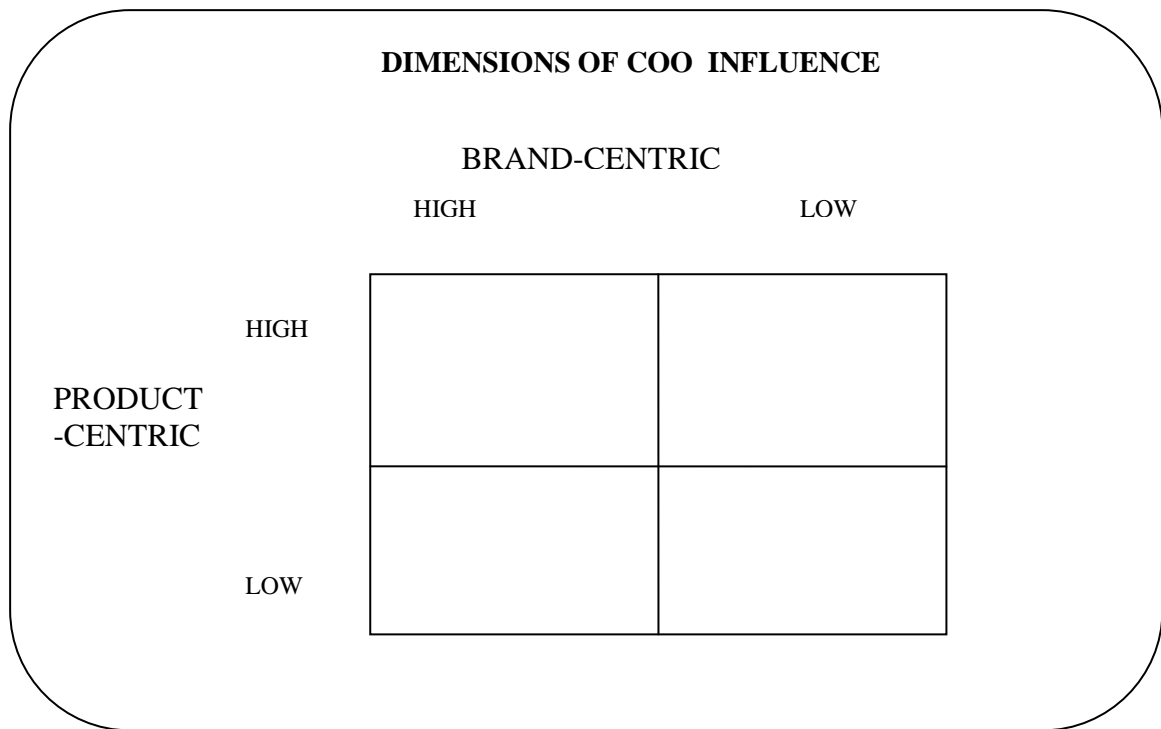
## **2.2. The Product-Brand Centric Model**

Hong and Wyer (1989) explained that COO information influence consumer evaluation on particular products. COO effect may depend on product category and dimensions (Wang & Yang, 2008; Biswas, Chowdhury, & Kabir, 2011) and a consumer tends to associate a product category with a given country (Essoussi & Merunka, 2007). This seems to suggest that a country's capability to produce certain products is often used by consumers as an important information cue in purchasing product (Biswas, Chowdhury, & Kabir, 2011; Karami, Pourian, & Olfati, 2011). Consumers who already knew that a product originated from a country with positive reputation for high quality products may use their knowledge in making a decision to purchase.

The literatures on COO effect tend to rely on the model which was developed by Roth and Romeo (1992) and previous studies confounded country image with product image (Shirin & Kambiz, 2011). The model however describes a product-centric perspective matching certain countries with particular product categories. It assumes that consumers buy product from countries, which have superior capability and positive reputation in producing high quality products. Roth and Romeo (1992) defined country image as the overall consumer perception about products from a particular country based on their prior perceptions of the country's production and marketing abilities. Product image may have an effect on the perception of products quality manufactured in a certain country (Hong & Wyer, 1989). Consumers often associate product image of a given country and product category is an important aspect of COO effect (Oyeniya, 2009).

Nonetheless, Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch, and Palihawadana (2009) found that effects of COO are also brand centric, they propose a product-brand centric model. This new model assumes consumers often associate a country's image not only with the specific capabilities relating to an industry or product category, but also with the more comprehensive capabilities of producing good brands. Put simply, the model describes the effect of COO can be seen on product image and brand image. This suggests that a country with positive reputation on certain product categories may also has some reputable brands in global market. Therefore, COO and brand image relate to product category (Wang & Yang, 2008). Brand familiarity and product knowledge are the dimensions of COO effect (Phau & Suntornd, 2006). Brand familiarity refers to the consumer knowledge regarding the brand that exists in a product category, while product category knowledge relates to knowledge about the features or attributes of product. These knowledge may discourage consumers to search for more information (Phau & Suntornd, 2006).

Based on a study on Australian consumer behaviour, Phau and Suntornd (2006) found that when Australian consumers are familiar with a particular brand in a product category, there is a less need to search for more information including COO and product attributes information. Consumers are often exposed to branded products from various countries and a brand has a significant influence on consumer evaluation. This is due to a brand can be perceived as a signal of quality, and the dimensions of brand image affect consumer perceptions and preference. The role of brand can not be ignored in explaining consumer behaviour. A brand can implicitly reflect its country of origin image, which can be exploited to build its identity in the global market (Essoussi & Merunka, 2007). This indicates country of origin image can influence brand image. Koschate-Fischer, Diamantopoulos and Oldenkotte (2012) further argued that consumers tend to purchase a branded product that originates from a COO with favourable image than for a branded products from a country with a less favourable image. These arguments justify the use of the Product-Brand Centric Model for the purpose of the current study. Figure 1 illustrates the model. A country and its global brands can be mapped according to the level of brands image and product category image. This illustrates how consumers associate country image with two main capabilities, i.e. creating global brands and producing a certain product category. The role of COO not only as a driver of product image but also as a driver of brand image (Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch, & Palihawadana, 2009).



**Figure 1. Product-Brand Centric Model by Diamatopoulos, et al. (2009)**

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Selection of countries, product categories and brands

This study focused on brands originated from two main Asian Countries whose global brands in various product categories. The selected Asian countries were Japan and South Korea as these countries are the key competitors in the global market (Speece & Nguyen, 2005). Following this, the author identified two products i.e. mobile phone and laptop for which product familiarity was high as they were well-known by target respondents. These products were believed to be owned and used by almost every undergraduate student in the University of Mataram. Subsequently, global brands of laptop from Japan were identified, e.g. Sony and Toshiba. Meanwhile, for mobile phone category, Sony of Japan was the only brand selected. This did not mean there was no other brand from the country, but Sony was currently the only well known Japanese brand of mobile phone in the city. Samsung and LG were the global brands originated from South Korea. These familiar brands were selected for both product categories. In sum, the selection of products and brands was based on familiarity of the products and brands.

#### 3.2. Data collection

Data collection was obtained from undergraduate students at the Faculty of Economics– the University of Mataram between November – Desember 2012. Sampling technique was convenience. Approximately, 200 survey sheets were distributed and 188 usable completed survey sheets were gathered. Among the respondents, there were 102 male and 86 female students aged early 20 years-old. The respondents were students of the three departments as follows: Management (68%), Accounting (17,6%) and Economics (14,4%).

A structured and pre-tested questionnaire was developed based on an adaptation from the work of Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch, and Palihawadana (2009). The questionnaire was written in Bahasa Indonesia, asking respondents to assess the product cues of laptop and mobile phone. The structure of the questionnaire was as follows: first, two parts explored information on product image in which product dimensions of mobile phone and laptop from Japan and South Korea were listed. These parts were to represent product centric of each product category consisting six dimensions capturing the marketing mix elements, i.e. external features (4 items), technology (2 items), product quality (3 items), pricing (2 items), distribution (2 items), and promotion (3 items). These parts were followed by brand image of Sony, Samsung and LG for mobilephone. The final part was brand image of Toshiba, Sony, Samsung and LG for laptop. Brand image was intended to represent brand centric consisting 4 items. The measurement of brand image relied on the work of Balabanis and Diamatopoulos (2011). In the recent study, the author measured brand image evaluations on a four-item asking respondents to rate each brand in terms of value for money,

reliability, performance, and quality. The statements on the questionnaire measured on five-point scale (1 = very low, 5 = very high) was used on the questionnaire and statistical analysis of the data was performed using the SPSS 20.0 Suite. The levels of product dimensions and brand image were categorised as seen on Table 1 as follows:

#### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Data analysis was done as follows: firstly, interpreting the results i.e. score of each product and brand image dimension based on which average score of mobile phone and laptop could be identified. Secondly, the same step was performed in order to find average score of brand image of each brand. As a result, it was feasible to map all the brands from both countries as discussed below. The levels of product dimensions and brand image were categorised as seen on Table 1 below:

**Table 1. Category of Product and Brand Image dimensions**

Range of Value/score	Category
4,2 - 5,0	Very High
3,4 - < 4,2	High
2,6 - < 3,4	Fair
1,8 - < 2,6	Low
1,0 - < 1,8	Very Low

Source: processed primary data

##### 4.1. Mapping mobile phone

Table 2 indicates image of mobile phones from Japan and South Korea were categorised as high in term of all dimensions. Those countries were perceived to have a high capability in producing mobile phone. However, the score of South Korean mobile phones (average score 3.634) was higher than of Japan (average score 3.540). Although Japan began its industry earlier than South Korea but the later country could go beyond the first in mobile phone industry and this result eschewed the finding of Speece and Nguyen (2005).

**Table 2. Score and Category of Mobile Phone Product**

Product dimensions	Japanese		South Korean	
	Mobile Phone Score	category	Mobile Phone Score	category
<i>Design</i>	3,47	High	3,63	High
<i>Product Style</i>	3,56	High	3,83	High
<i>Innovativeness</i>	3,70	High	3,77	High
<i>Model variety</i>	3,64	High	3,73	High
<i>Operating performance</i>	3,53	High	3,47	High
<i>Technologically advanced</i>	3,90	High	3,83	High
<i>Durability</i>	3,51	High	3,52	High
<i>Reliability</i>	3,59	High	3,52	High
<i>Product consistency</i>	3,49	High	3,53	High
<i>Price attractiveness</i>	3,62	High	3,71	High
<i>Value for money</i>	3,71	High	3,69	High
<i>Product Availability</i>	3,53	High	3,57	High
<i>Product serviceability</i>	3,37	High	3,4	High
<i>Advertising intensity</i>	3,32	High	3,69	High
<i>Widely-known products</i>	3,38	High	3,73	High
<i>Prestige</i>	3,32	High	3,52	High

Source: processed primary data

The results suggested that South Korea, in a comparison to the other country, was perceived to have a higher level capability or reputation in producing mobile phone. This reputation suggested that the respondents perceived mobile phones from the country were more favourable. This was mainly seen on following dimensions: design, product styles, model variety, price attractiveness, advertising intensity, product knowledge and prestige. Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch, and Palihawadana (2009) argued that country image is often associated by consumers with the capability in generating global brands and positive image of the country strengthen image of the brands in the global market (Wang & Yang, 2008). This seemed to be true for Samsung as the brand had the highest level image (average score 4.015) while LG was on the lowest level (3,25) and Sony was in between (3,86). Looking at Table 3, LG reached fair category for all

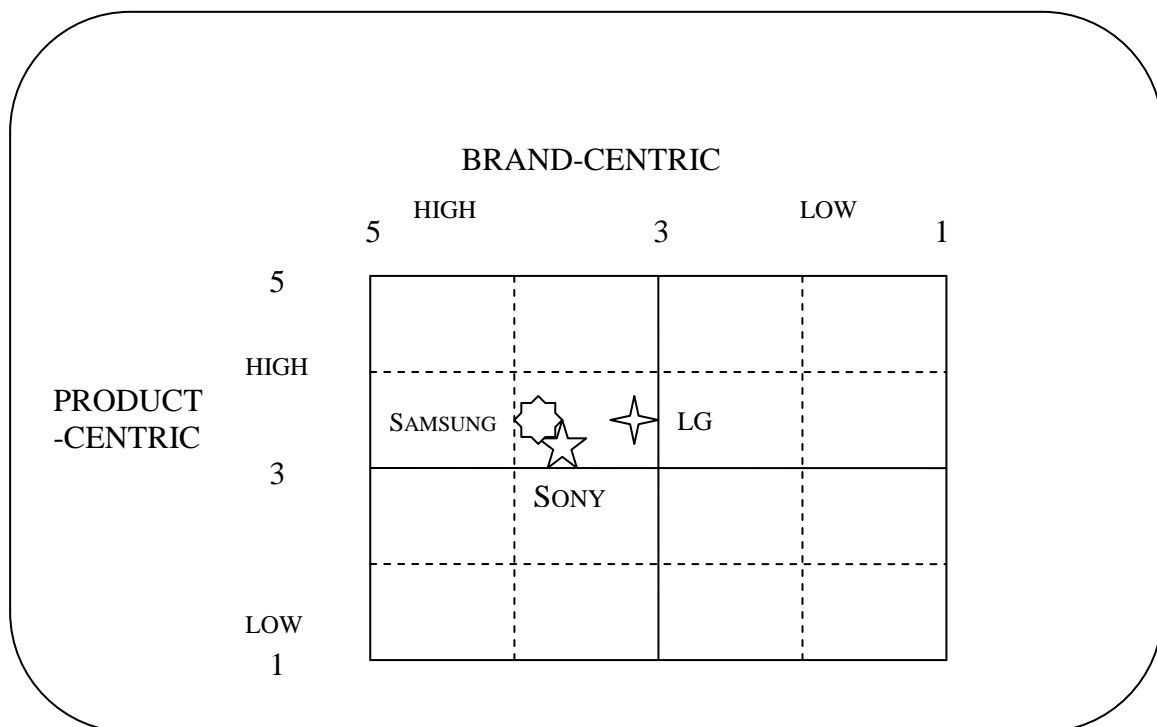
dimensions. On the contrary, Samsung and Sony were the ideal cases (high product image/high brand image). In these cases, high positive image of product of those countries had a positive impact on image of both brands.

**Tabel 3. Score and Category of Brand Image of Sony, Samsung and LG**

Brand Image Dimensions	Brands and Categories					
	Sony	Category	Samsung	Category	LG	Category
Value	3,86	High	4,05	High	3,3	Fair
Reliability	3,74	High	3,81	High	3,16	Fair
Performance	3,91	High	4,08	High	3,26	Fair
Quality	3,93	High	4,12	High	3,28	Fair

Source: processed primary data

Kesie, Rajh, and Kraljevic (2003) explained that consumers tend to have a consistent perception toward brands from a particular country in the same product category. This means that consumers perception towards Samsung and LG should be similar or the level of brand image of LG should be consistent with that of Samsung. This is on the contrary to the finding of the current study as on Figure 2. Samsung took advantages of South Korea’s product related capability, while LG could not. The country had a strong reputation for mobile phone in general and produced a strong brand. The country was success in developing its product-related capability on mobile phone industry and building the strong brand worldwide, but this was not true for LG. This finding supports the study of Balabanis and Diamantopoulos (2011) in the United Kingdom that Samsung was strong brand while LG was on the oposite level. Strong positive image of South Korea should be utilised as LG’s strengthness, for example, by emphasising the image in its advertising strategy. Future research that provides a deeper understanding of the barriers preventing a brand from cultivating its home country’s product-related advantages to grow stronger in the global market would be highly appreciated as it may contribute to the literature and the practice of global brand management.



Source: Excerpt and Developed from Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch, & Palihawadana (2009)

**Figure 2. Product-Brand Centrics of Mobile Phone**

#### 4.2. Mapping Laptop

The results on product dimensions of laptop indicated a slightly different story. Table 4 shows Japan enjoyed a higher score on the product image (average score 3.722) than South Korea (average score 3.633) but both of the countries were in category high level product image of laptop. This means that both countries were highly reputable and had advantages in producing laptop but Japan was perceived to have a higher capability. In term of laptop, it seems that Japan enjoyed the ideal situation where a high level of product image was matched with a high level of brand image as seen in Table 5.

**Table 4. Score and Category of Laptop**

Product Dimensions	Score of Japanese Laptop	Category	Score South Korean Laptop	Category
<i>Design</i>	3,79	High	3,63	High
<i>Product Style</i>	3,68	High	3,83	High
<i>Innovativeness</i>	3,85	High	3,77	High
<i>Model variety</i>	3,69	High	3,73	High
<i>Operating performance</i>	3,86	High	3,47	High
<i>Technologically advanced</i>	3,92	High	3,83	High
<i>Durability</i>	3,74	High	3,51	High
<i>Reliability</i>	3,79	High	3,52	High
<i>Product consistency</i>	3,61	High	3,53	High
<i>Price attractiveness</i>	3,69	High	3,71	High
<i>Value for money</i>	3,79	High	3,69	High
<i>Product Availability</i>	3,66	High	3,57	High
<i>Product serviceability</i>	3,66	High	3,4	High
<i>Advertising intensity</i>	3,49	High	3,69	High
<i>Widely-known products</i>	3,82	High	3,73	High
<i>Prestige</i>	3,51	High	3,52	High

Source: processed primary data

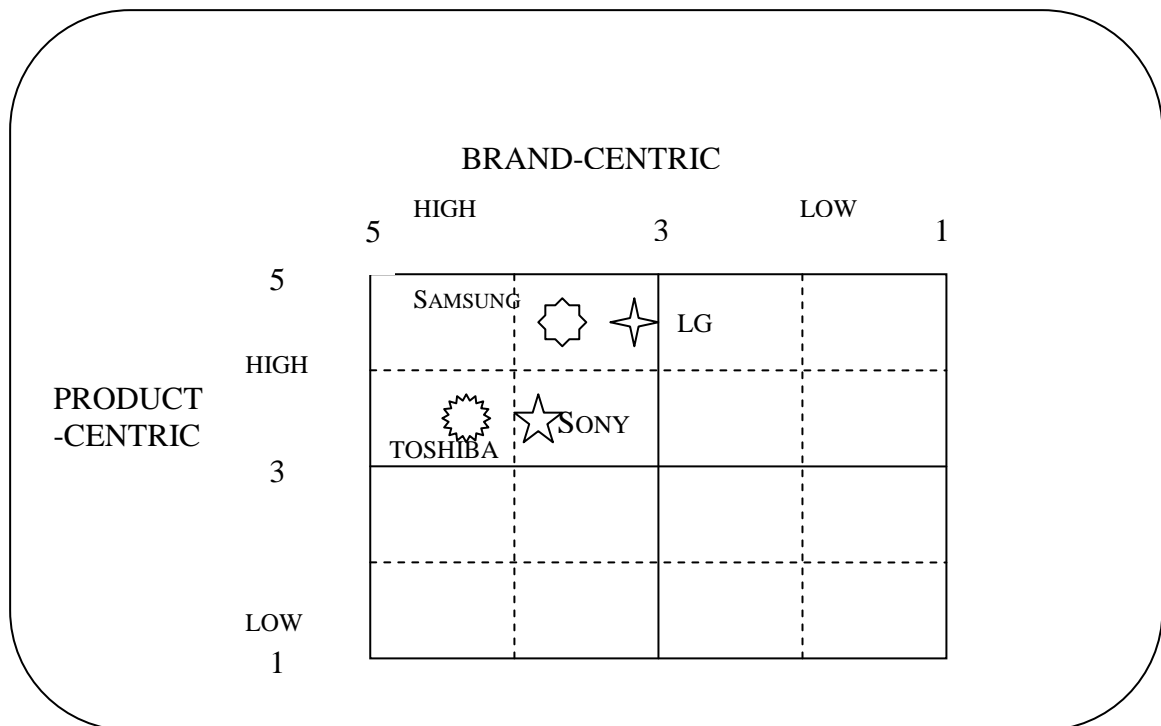
Japan enjoyed stronger reputation on the following product dimensions: design, innovativeness, operating performance, technologically advanced, durability, reliability, product consistency, value for money, product availability and serviceability as well as widely known product. This shows that Japan was still ahead of South Korea in producing laptop. Nonetheless, looking at table 2 and 4, it seemed that South Korea was consistently perceived to be more intensive in advertising for both products. This suggests that South Korean strategy in the market to aggressively promote its products and build its image in producing those products.

**Table 5. Score and Category of Brand Image of Toshiba, Sony, Samsung and LG**

Indicators	Toshiba	Category	Sony	Category	Samsung	Category	LG	Category
<b>Value</b>	4,14	High	3,94	High	3,84	High	3,34	Fair
<b>Reliability</b>	3,84	High	3,82	High	3,63	High	3,26	Fair
<b>Performance</b>	4,14	High	3,95	High	3,88	High	3,28	Fair
<b>Quality</b>	4,22	Very high	4,07	High	3,93	High	3,4	High

Source: processed primary data

Among the brands, Toshiba had the highest level of brand image in comparison to Sony which came second (average score 4.085) where most of the respondents viewed the brand offers a very high quality laptop (average score 4.22). The position of Toshiba and Sony closed to each other and enjoyed strong image of Japan in producing laptop. They were followed by Samsung and LG of South Korea, in which Samsung was categorised as high brand image while again LG was fair. The South Korean brands seemed to have different story as only one brand could benefit from the country's image. The position of those competing brands can be seen on Figure 3.



Source: Excerpt and Developed from Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch, & Palihawadana (2009)

**Figure 3. Country of Origin Influence of Laptop**

**5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMENDATION**

The study found that South Korea was perceived to have a better ability in producing mobile phone compared to Japan. Samsung indicated the ideal case in mobile phone category as this brand matched a high level of product image and a high level of brand image. The success story of Samsung was not followed by LG as its image was the lowest for both product categories. Therefore, the study confirmed that favourable image of a country may not be consistently enjoyed by all global brands from the country. South Korea has been successful in improving its image in producing both products, however, it has a limited capability in developing strong image of all global brands from the country. In term of laptop, Japan was perceived to have a higher capability in making the product compare to South Korea. Toshiba and Sony enjoyed a high level of product and brand image. LG could not, however, exploit its home country high reputation in producing both products to create strong brand image in the market place. LG should enhance its brand image while enjoying high level of product image and turn it up to create a stronger brand worldwide. Its advertising campaign may put a greater emphasise on South Koreaan’ ability and technological capability in producing those products to boost its brand image.

This study examined country image of Japan and South Korea, which were the origin of Sony, Toshiba, Samsung and LG. Nonetheless, the study did not examine whether the respondents associated the brands with the wrong COO or were unable to identify the brands to a COO. These may affect respondents perception on the brands. Therefore, future research should explore the issue. The study provided evidences from a small city, then it is highly recommended that future research replicates the study in larger cities focusing on a wider range of product category, high or low involvement products and brands.

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