Identifying Interesting Themes Regarding Country of Origin Effect: A Preliminary Study

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Abstract

The preliminary study was designed to identify interesting research themes, which will be qualitatively explored further at a later date. The use of a qualitative approach was deemed necessary in order to enrich the literature on the country of origin effect. The study obtained preliminary data through a survey of young domestic consumers in Mataram, Indonesia.The respondents were university students attending a number of different universities in the city. They were chosen because they will determine domestic consumer behaviour and be decision-makers for the wealth of their country. The data mainly described the young consumers' awareness of domestic brands, their domestic buying behaviour and their understanding of domestically produced products in comparison to those from China. Product categories included fashion, toiletries, mobile phones and laptops. In light of the preliminary findings, there were six interesting themes involved in studying the country of origin effect in relation to domestic brands, ethnocentrism and product image. The themes emerged as still little understanding exists in the literature. Further research on the themes can shed additional light on the country of origin effect on young consumers' behaviour and attitudes in a developing country and thus contribute to the related body of knowledge.

Keywords: research themes, country of origin, domestic brands, product image

Introduction

The country of origin effect has consistently been one of the main research areas in international marketing literature. In particular, attention has been focused on the association between country of origin and consumers' evaluation of products and brands from particular countries. However, Orth and Firbasova (2003) have criticised previous studies, which mainly explored less realistic conditions and research contexts. This suggests that it is necessary to study the country of origin phenomenon in a real-world context. Accordingly, it is disappointing that the qualitative approach has not yet been broadly utilised to investigate the country of origin effect. Based on an extensive literature review, Dinnie (2004) points out that the qualitative approach has been under-utilised in comparison to quantitative methodology. This may contribute to the weaknesses in the country of origin literature. The

limited use of qualitative methodology inhibits the exploration of the dynamic and multi dimensional nature of country of origin constructs. Dinnie (2004) thus believes that the application of qualitative methodology will enrich the literature. This means that future research should aim at theory generation emerging from natural settings to support the development of the literature. It seems that future studies should employ a different approach to that used predominantly in the literature and to generate theory in order to enrich our understanding of country of origin effect, especially in the context of young consumers, which the existing literature cannot adequately explain. This calls for qualitative researchs by mean theory generation to enrich our understanding regarding country of origin (COO) effect. Theory development may mean adopting inductive logic allowing a greater insight into the complex building block of young consumers behaviour by highlighting the perception of the consumers.

Previous studies have been dominated by the use of quantitative and deductive approaches, and so by means of theory testing might encounter difficulties since the literature has not been well-developed and explored. Further studies regarding COO effect have to contribute to the development of the literature through theory generation. This however requires identifying research themes based on a sound preliminary study. Therefore, this paper will provide an example of how to identify interesting themes to explore further. The themes were identified based on a preliminary study using a survey method among university students who were young consumers in Mataram, Indonesia. They were chosen since, as a group, they represent a highly educated generation who can, in the future, determine domestic consumer behaviour and be decision-makers concerning the wealth of their country (Phau, 2010).

Literature Review

The country of origin effect refers to the impact of all factors regarding a country on the process of evaluation of products and brands from that country (Lu and Heslop, 2008; Barbu, 2011). It is viewed as the impact of consumers' perceptions about the source country on their evaluation of products and brands (Loo and Davies, 2006). It is associated with information about the country where a product is actually made or manufactured i.e. the "made in" concept (Barbu, 2011). The effect will depend on how favourable the consumers' image of the country is (Ayyildiz and Cengiz, 2007). Therefore, consumers' evaluations depend on consumer knowledge concerning the country in which the particular product is made/manufactured (Hong and Wyer, 1989).

Previous studies on the COO effect have confused country image with product image (Shirin and Kambiz, 2011), showing how consumers perceive products originating from a particular country (Roth and Romeo, 1992). It is generally thought that consumers often associate the product image of a country with a given product category. Images of products can vary from one country to another and this can lead to differences in quality perception. COO can thus be a quality cue, with the COO of a particular product influencing perception on the general quality of products manufactured there (Hong and Wyer, 1989).

Nonetheless, the COO effect is strongly argued by Diamantopoulos et al. (2009) to be the perception of a country's capability in producing not only products but also popular brands. Diamantopoulos et al. (2009) further argue that a country with a positive reputation for certain product categories may also have some reputable and highly familiar brands in the global market. This is due to consumers often associating 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 strong brands. Brand image is closely associated with country image (Diamantopoulos et al., 2009), so a strong positive image of a country in a particular product category creates an advantage for brands from that country (Wang and Yang, 2008). This means that a country with a positive image generates advantages for its brands in that product category. A positive country image supports brands from that country in becoming global brands. Then, the brand strategy includes the image of the source country. Simply put, COO and brand image relate to product category (Wang and Yang, 2008). Therefore, brand familiarity and product knowledge can be viewed as the dimensions of the COO effect (Phau and Suntornnond, 2006). It seems that there is a declining magnitude in "made in" information in consumers' evaluations (Phau, 2010). This is due to products in today's global market often being designed, manufactured, assembled and offered in different countries, leading to a greater role of information regarding brand origin in the process of consumer evaluation. It is reasonable to assume that COO image refers to brand origin or country of brand origin. Indeed, the COO image is part of the brand image, meaning that the more favourable the image of brand origin, the more positive the brand image, and vice versa (Speece and Nguyen, 2005).

Today's consumers in the global market associate a brand name with the country where the brand comes from and sothe concept of brand origin is increasingly gaining attention from scholars.The concept is defined as the place/country to which a brand is perceived to belong

by its target customers (Kesie et al.,2003). This concept means that a brand refers implicitly to the country of brand origin, regardless of where the products are actually manufactured. As a result, brand origin will not change with a change in the country of manufacture and thus brand image may not be influenced by the place where the products are actually produced. Consumers heavily rely on information regarding the country where the brand comes from. Consequently, consumers'perception of the country of brand origin will play a greater role in their evaluation and purchase decisions. The concept of country of origin is then redefined as the country that consumers ascribe the origin of the brand to, regardless of where the product was actually produced (Shirin and Kambiz, 2011). This means that country of origin refers to the home country of the brand and its image in consumers' minds (Karami et al., 2011). It is thus clear that a brand implicitly refers to its country of origin. Generally, brands are viewed to be a signal of quality and the dimensions of brand image affect consumer behaviour (Essoussi and Merunka, 2007).

The literature on COO indicates a debate on the concept of the place of manufacture (i.e. the "made in" concept) and brand origin. The later concept is increasingly adopted in the current literature. Consumers tend to rely on information regarding the origin of a product as a cue when they are unfamiliar with the brand name (Phau and Suntornnond, 2006; Biswas et al., 2011) or the product (Karami et al., 2011). This indicates that what consumers know about a particular country can influence their reactions to that country's products. Phau and Suntornnond (2006), however, noted that consumers who are familiar with a brand name still rely on the country of origin cue too. The preliminary study therefore relied on these two concepts, namely understanding of local brand knowledge and the product images originating from Indonesia and China. The reasons to choose this later country were first that the country has been the major source of imported products especially after the implementation of ASEAN-China free trade zone since 2010. Second, the quality of products from the country has been studied in various developing countries (Powers et al., 2008; Karami et al., 2011; Barbu, 2011).

Methodology

This preliminary study aimed at data generation in order to raise interesting questions/ research themes. Valuable data was obtained from a questionnaire, whereby the authors obtained information on domestic brand origin, domestic purchasing behaviour and the product image of several product categories. Those topics were selected as they were relevant

to the focus of the study. From this, a number of issues were carefully identified and, in turn, they will become the main themes for further studies. While the aim of the study was not to draw a final conclusion and make a statistical generalisation, the preliminary data was obtained from a rather large number of samples and so enabled a deeper understanding of the country of origin image among young Indonesian consumers.

The preliminary study was carried out on September 2014 and obtained data from 229 respondents. They were students at the University of Mataram, UNTB and UNW. The authors distributed 300 questionnaires, which were hand-delivered with the help of local colleagues at those universities utilising accidental sampling method. They were aged between 18 – 20 years (38%) and 21 - 23 years (62%); female (67%) and male (33%). However, at this stage, a conclusion on the results of the survey could not be formulated. This stage merely aimed at identifying as many issues to be pursued as possible. Therefore, this paper contributes to the literature on country of origin effect by addressing numerous calls for qualitative investigations.

Discussion

Local brand knowledge

Domestic consumers in a developing country are often exposed to local and foreign brands from various countries as a result of fast development in technology as well as the globalisation of the world market. They exhibit more positive behaviour towards foreign brands originating from more developed countries (Okechuku and Onyemah, 1999; Biswas et al., 2011; Kattak et al., 2011). Thus, country image influences the image of brands from that country (Koschate-Fischer et al., 2012). This is due to consumers'perception that foreign brands and products are of high quality and a sign of high social status (Kattak et al., 2011). Consequently, they tend to buy, even at a higher price, a branded product that originates from a country with a favourable image rather than a branded product from a country with a less favourable image, even if it is their own country. The brand owners usually emphasise not only the brand name, but also the brand's origin in their promotional campaigns. However, regarding local/domestic brands, it is very rare that the owner of those brands states their origin. This can indeed cause difficulties in identifying them. We therefore searched for information from various sources on the internet, including the brand owners' websites. As a result of this process, a number of brands were identified and are listed here in Tables 1 and 2.

For the purpose of the study, a local brand refers to a brand with an Indonesian/domestic origin. The questionnaire provided a list of Indonesian brands in various product categories such as fashion, toiletries, laptops, and mobile phones. Respondents were asked to identify brands that they knew from Indonesia.

Tables 1 and 2 display the awareness of young consumers in terms of local brands. Unfortunately, such consumers seem to be unaware of those brands that are actually local brands. This can be evidenced by the fact that only six brands in the toiletries product category were known by more than 50% of the respondents. Meanwhile, local brands in the other product categories were known by less than 50%. This suggests that young consumers do not really know local brands, or they may simply think the brands are actually foreign brands. Powers et al. (2008) and Balabanis and Diamatopoulos (2011) pointed out that consumers often do not know the true origin of many well-known brands and they therefore categorise a brand to the wrong COO.

Similar to country of origin, brand names have been associated with product quality and so are important precursors to consumers' buying decisions. Strong brands showed faster quality assessment, which may not change with a change in the country of manufacture (Jo, 2005). A brand name can more powerfully communicate image and quality regardless of the country of manufacture. Therefore, information on the COO may not be relevant in the process of product quality evaluation (Phau, 2010). Also, consumers often have limited knowlegde of brand origin and regard the information as unimportant (Diamantopoulos et al., 2009). This may mean that a brand name has a greater effect than the image of the country where the brand comes from in brand evaluation and subsequent buying decisions.

As seen in Tables 1 and 2, most of the brands use foreign sounding brand names or foreign branding. The owners may tend to use foreign sounding brands to induce domestic consumers to perceive that they are foreign brands. This causes a misleading perception. Consumers in a developing nation tend to behave positively towards foreign brands. The owners therefore deliberately associate their brand with a foreign country or countries that have a favourable image (Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2011). Electronic products made in Japan and brands of Japanese origin have enjoyed favourable images even in western countries. Meanwhile, brands from other countries face negative perceptions relative to Japan (Speece and Nguyen, 2005). This encourages western manufacturers to adopt brands with Japanese sounding

names. This creates an illusion that the brands and the products are from Japan and thus offer the high quality of Japanese electronic products. This approach is clearly adopted by "Matsui", a Japanese sounding brand that is actually of British brand origin (Chinen and Sun, 2011). A similar strategy seems to be adopted by Indonesian manufacturers, who may believe that domestic consumers behave more favourably towards foreign brands.

Table 1. Local Brands in the Mobile Phone and Laptop Product Categories.

Product Category	Domestic Origin Brands	Frequency	Percentage
Mobile Phone	1. Polytron	106	46.3
	2. Advan	82	35.8
	3. Axioo	79	34.5
	4. Evercoss	68	29.7
	5. Nexian	50	21.8
	6. Venera	45	19.7
	7. Spirit	28	12.2
	8. Vitell	24	10.5
	9. Startech	22	9.6
Laptop	1. Axioo	98	42.8
	2. Advan	79	34.5
	3. Zyrex	68	29.7
	4. Byon	34	14.8
	5. Altronik	27	11.8
	6. Forsa	20	8.7
	7. Elevo	18	7.9
	8. A Note	17	7.4
	9. C3Cube	17	7.4

Domestic Buying Behaviour

Ethnocentric consumers will show positive attitudes towards domestic products and brands. Previous studies on the COO effect provided the common result that domestic consumers in developed countries have a preference for local products. On the contrary, consumers in developing countries tend to be less ethnocentric (Abedniya and Zaem, 2011). However,

Bawa (2004) suggests that strong ethnocentrism may actually exist among the young consumers in a developing country.

Table 2. Local Brands in the Fashion and Toiletries Product Categories.

Product Category	Domestic Origin Brands	Frequency	Percentage
Fashion	1. Peter Says Denim	102	44.5
	2. Sophie	75	32.8
	3. H n R	54	23.6
	4. Sagara	45	19.7
	5. Skater	40	17.5
	6. Crooz	25	10.9
	7. Buccheri	19	8.3
	8. Sober	15	6.6
	9. Skinny Thing	9	3.6
	10. Argyle and Oxford	7	3.1
	11. Edward Forrer	7	3.1
	12. Elhaus	3	1.3
Toiletries	1. Daia	157	68.8
	2. Mama Lemon	144	62.9
	3. Kodomo	141	61.6
	4. GIV	118	51.5
	5. Ciptadent	117	51.1
	6. Emeron	117	51.1
	7. Viva	105	45.9
	8. So Klin	102	44.5
	9. Nuvo	92	40.2
	10. Zinc	44	19.4
	11. Hers Protect	24	10.4
	12. Smile Up	10	4.4

Ethnocentrism may have an impact on consumer behaviour depending on consumers' characteristics, product categories, product quality, availability of alternatives, competitive environment, as well as the general economic and political development within the country (Rybina et al., 2010). Furthermore, consumers' age, gender, level of education, awareness of

COO, and lifestyle may exert a great influence on the tendency towards ethnocentrism (Bawa, 2004; Biswas et al., 2011). Accordingly, Balabanis et al.(2001) explained that patriotism and nationalism have a significant effect on ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism will also vary as females, elders, those with less income and less educated people tend to be more conservative and patriotic, and thus more ethnocentric.

Ethnocentrism is a concept that used to be examined and linked to the COO effect. In order to reach a preliminary understanding of young consumers' ethnocentrism, it is necessary to identify the behaviour of young consumers when buying domestic products. This is achieved by adapting two items from the study of Rybina et al. (2010). The result is demonstrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Domestic Buying Behaviour of Young Consumers.

	Fashion			**Toiletries**			**Mobile Phone**			**Laptop**		
	Mean	Std dev	Std error	Mean	Std dev	Std error	Mean	Std dev	Std error	Mean	Std dev	Std error
I always buy domesticbrands of this product	3.72	1.01	.067	3.75	.935	.062	2.22	1.08	.071	2.29	1.14	.075
I try to buy mostly domestic brands ofthis product	3.55	.988	.065	3.60	.976	.064	2.19	1.03	.068	2.25	1.10	.073
Total	**3.635**	**1.00**	**.047**	**3.68**	**.957**	**.044**	**2.21**	**1.06**	**.049**	**2.27**	**1.12**	**.052**

Table 3 shows that the mean values of fashion and toiletries are almost the same. Similarly, the mean values of mobile phones and laptops are similar. However, the mean values of the fashion and toiletries product categories are higher than those of the mobile phone and laptop categories. The young domestic consumers thus tend to behave more favourably towards domestic brands and products in the fashion and toiletries product categories. However, as seen in Table 1, the majority of the respondents do not really know brands with Indonesian origins, including fashion and toiletries. A lack of strong domestic brand names as a guide to quality will only lead to consumer confusion. This may be combined with a strong desire to use or wear foreign brand names, leading to a greater intention to buy imported products (Okechuku and Onyemah, 1999). This suggests that an absence of strong local brands will

lead to a lack of ethnocentrism. Nevertheless, it can be observed from Table 3 that, at least for fashion and toiletries, young consumers tend to be ethnocentric. An interesting question emerges concerning how they buy domestic brands when they do not have information on brand origins. Additionally, how brand knowledge may underline ethnocentrism in a developing country with no global brands is also questionable.

It can also be observed that the mean values of the fashion and toiletries product categories were higher than the mean values of the mobile phone and laptop categories. The former categories reached over half on a scale of 1 to 5, while the latter categories achieved under half. This means that the respondents tended to be more ethnocentric towards the former product categories than the latter. It has been widely found that consumers in a given country may behave differently toward imported products depending on product categories (Roth and Romeo, 1992). Furthermore, for youngsters, brand preferences may depend on product category, meaning that their preference may vary across product categories. Consumers' preferences for branded cars will depend on status and prestige, while fashion and modernity will be the main dimensions when choosing branded fashion (Wang and Yang, 2008). Table 4 illustrates that, for domestic mobile phone and laptop products, young domestic consumers tend to show less favourable behaviour, indicating that they behave differently depending on product categories. Unfortunately, the literature on ethnocentrism provides only limited explanations for why domestic consumers behave differently with domestic products. To be more specific, why do domestic consumers show different ethnocentric tendencies towards various domestic product categories?

Ang et al. (2004) found that the more severely a country had been affected by the Asian financial crisis ofthe 1990s, the more ethnocentric the consumers were in that country. This suggests that when there is a perceived threat to the economic well-being of a nation, there will be stronger ethnocentrism among domestic consumers (Lantz and Loeb, 1996). The Indonesian market has been increasingly free, especially after the country's inclusion in the ASEAN–China Free Trade Area in 2010. Imported products are increasingly flooding the market and thus it would be interesting to question whether this trend is perceived as a threat to the national economy and so increases patriotism, nationalism and thus ethnocentrism? Alternatively, does it instead increase the internationalism/global-mindedness of young consumers?

Product Image

Product image refers to consumers' overall perceptions towards products from a particular country (Biswas et al., 2011), In order to obtain data on how young consumers perceive products made in their own country and in China, the preliminary study adopted multi items of product image based on the study of Diamantopoulos et al. (2009). The fashion and toiletries product categories utilised nine items, while the mobile phone and laptop categories used twelve items. This is due to the latter product categories being regarded as products of technology and thus three relevant items were added. Tables 4 and 5 display the results.

Table 4. Mean Value of the Fashion and Toiletries Product Images.

Product Image Dimensions	Fashion		Toiletries	
	Indonesia	China	Indonesia	China
Product design	**3.79**	**2.89**	**3.48**	**3.07**
Innovativeness	**3.66**	**3.29**	**3.52**	**3.29**
Model variety	**3.95**	**3.55**	**3.63**	**3.65**
Product quality	**3.53**	**2.78**	**3.36**	**2.80**
Durability	**3.35**	**2.60**	**3.38**	**2.69**
Product value	**3.49**	**3.41**	**3.59**	**3.24**
Price attractiveness	**3.45**	**3.64**	**3.47**	**3.41**
Prestige	**4.34**	**2.25**	**4.04**	**2.46**
Total	**3.698**	**3.054**	**3.560**	**3.079**
Standard dev.	**.507**	**.584**	**.501**	**.557**
F (Sig.)	**158.771 (.000)**		**94.705 (.000)**	

Table 4 suggests that fashion and toiletries products made in Indonesia enjoy stronger and significant appreciation from the respondents compared to those made in China. This means that the respondents favour domestic products over those made in China. In contrast, as seen in Table 5, mobile phones and laptops do not receive similar perceptions.

The respondents view that there is no significant difference between the two countries in terms of those categories. In general, on an item-to-item basis, mobile phones and laptops made in China are perceived more positively than those made domestically. In comparison to Chinese products, domestic products are more positively perceived by consumers in Iran (Karami et al., 2011) and Romania (Barbu, 2011). This was due to Chinese products imported into those countries being of low quality and so consumers in those countries developed the view that their home country has a better ability to produce higher quality products. The

products are both technologically advanced outputs, and the respondents may view that there is no big difference between Indonesia and China regarding technological capabilities. Powers et al. (2008) explained that consumers consider that a country's technological capabilities will influence the ability to produce a better quality of electronic products. Nonetheless, they also found that domestic consumers may have a more positive attitude towards imported products as they under value their own country's development and capability while overvaluing the source country. This raises the question of why domestic consumers have a rather negative view of their own country's development and capability compared to foreign countries.

Table 5. Mean Values of the Mobile Phone and Laptop Product Images

Product Image Dimensions	Mobile Phone		Laptop	
	Indonesia	**China**	**Indonesia**	**China**
Product design	**2.92**	**3.04**	**2.92**	**2.99**
Innovativeness	**3.05**	**3.34**	**3.05**	**3.28**
Technology	**2.94**	**3.41**	**2.94**	**3.38**
Product performance	**3.05**	**2.88**	**3.05**	**3.22**
Model variety	**2.97**	**3.83**	**2.97**	**3.67**
Product quality	**2.90**	**2.57**	**2.90**	**2.72**
Durability	**2.97**	**2.13**	**2.97**	**2.27**
Product value	**3.37**	**3.37**	**3.37**	**3.43**
Price attractiveness	**3.26**	**3.63**	**3.26**	**3.47**
Distribution	**2.93**	**3.59**	**2.93**	**3.54**
Service	**3.17**	**2.16**	**3.17**	**2.47**
Prestige	**3.48**	**2.17**	**3.48**	**2.41**
Total	**3.084**	**3.014**	**3.130**	**3.072**
Standard dev.	**.563**	**.630**	**.518**	**.587**
F (Sig.)	**1.591 (.208)**		**1.229 (.268)**	

Conclusion

The above discussion raises the following interesting questions/themes:

- How do young domestic consumers in a developing country buy domestic brands when they do not have information about brand origin?
- How does brand knowledge underline ethnocentrism in a developing country with no global brands?

- Why do domestic consumers show different ethnocentric tendencies towards various domestic product categories?
- How is a more open domestic market perceived as a threat to the national economy and so generates patriotism, nationalism and ethnocentrism?
- How does a more open domestic market underline the internationalism/global-mindedness of young consumers in a developing country?
- Why do domestic consumers havea rather negative view oftheir own country's development and capability compared to foreign countries?

Those are all open questions for which little empirical evidence exists. The answers to these questions can shed additional light on how the country of origin effect underlines young consumers' behaviour and attitudes towards domestic vs imported products and so contribute to the related body of knowledge.

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