

The Effect of Country of Origin Image and Product Knowledge on Purchase Intention: The Role of Gender

Author's Details:

Hossein Vazifehdoost¹, Mahmood ghanbari²

¹ Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Department of Business Management, Tehran, Iran ² Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Department of Business Management, Tehran, Iran - Corresponding author. E-mail: M_ghanbaribnd@yahoo.com

Abstract: *In modern and competitive era which global marketing is growing day by day, consumer perceptions towards product country-of origin has changed from one to other new perspective. The growing use of electronic devices in Iran such as Laptop is among relevant to be studied. Thus, this study aims to investigate the effect of country-of-origin image and product knowledge on purchase intention by considering the role of gender. Data were collected from a questionnaire from students of science and research Azad University. A total of 380 questionnaires were distributed with simple random sampling method Data were analyzed based SPSS and LISREL software were applied for analysis and comparison of data The results indicate that the country-of-origin image, product knowledge all have a significantly positive effect on purchase intention*

Keywords: *Country of origin, product knowledge, purchase intention*

INTRODUCTION

The international product life-cycle model incorporates only supply-side variables such as, product competition, complexity of production, and relative production costs. Demand-side variables-such as, the effect of country sourcing on the demand for that product are not considered. If the latter is important, the usefulness of the international product life-cycle model as a guide for product sourcing would be limited.

The significance of the location of production on demand can be approached as an information cue question. That is, from an information theoretic perspective, products may be conceived as consisting of an array of information cues, both intrinsic (taste, design, fit) and extrinsic (price, brand name, warranties). Each cue provides customers with a basis for evaluating the product (Bilkey and Nes, 1982). So, the importance of country-of-origin as a cue in consumer choice behavior was first highlighted by Schooler (1965). Over the past decade, there has been an effort to better explicate the country-of-origin cue by focusing on the larger, more comprehensive construct of "country-image" (e.g., Roth and Romeo, 1992). Among the earliest definitions of country image is found in Nagashima (1970) and has had wide acceptance in the literature (e.g., Roth and Romeo, 1992): *...the picture, the reputation, the stereotype that businessmen and consumers attach to products of a specific country. This image is created by such variables as representative products, national characteristics, economic and political background, history, and traditions* (Nagashima, 1970). Researchers have followed Nagashima's (1970) lead and taken a similar "summary" perspective of country image (Roth and Romeo, 1992; Parameswaran and Pisharodi, 1994); this perspective stipulates that perceptions of a given country are affected by a customer's cognitive, affective, and conative responses to the people and products of that country. This summary construct, as it relates to the evaluation of products, is what we define as the country-of-origin image (COI).

However, this type of research tends to focus more on the manufacturing industry or consumer products, and research concerning national image tends to focus more on certain types of service industries – see Lehmann's (1986) research on skiing vacation; Harrison-Walker's (1995) exploration of the medical services of the ophthalmology department; Yang's (1994) investigation of banking and catering services; and Tseng's (2001) study of Airline and Western Food Chain catering services. Bilkey and Nes (1982) reviewed papers concerning country-of-origin from 1965 to 1979, and discovered that the country-of-origin does have effects on product appraisal, the manufacturing industry and the consumers' product purchase decision.

Research on the effects of country-of-origin information has proceeded on quite a different path, mainly through survey research. Usually, subjects have been asked to rate the quality of products in general, from different countries or sometimes specific consumer products were queried. In general, surveys have shown country-of-origin information to be important. Consumers tended to hold stereotypes of different countries as producers of goods and reported using country-of-origin information in choosing products. Research in the field has been reviewed by Bilkey and Nes (1982), Han (1989), Han and Terpstra (1988), Hong and Wyer (1989), Hung (1989), Johansson and Nebezahl (1987), Kaynak and Cavusgil (1983), Papadopoulos (1986) and Wall and Heslop (1986, 1988). Survey results have typically been related to subjects' product purchases or purchase intentions, and sometimes to demographic characteristics. 'Frequently country-of-origin survey research has been limited by the use of samples, such as students and businessmen, that cannot be generalized to consumer populations, a criticism voiced by Bilkey and Nes (1982) and Papadopoulos (1986).

Chao and Rajendran (1993) point out that, when customers are making decisions, they search for more information before making their purchase. In relation to products, with the exception of considering national

image of the country-of-origin, consumer product knowledge is an important element when purchasing. However, the effect of product knowledge on the consumer buying intention and information searching intention mostly relies on the manufacturer's products, rather than its service. This is also the motive of this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

COUNTRY-OF-ORIGIN AND ITS IMAGE

Country-of-origin is one of the most important factors that significantly influence the purchasing decision of consumers. It is defined as comprising the subjective perceptions of a consumer about the products that provide an important observation that such belief, ideas and impressions before making buying decisions. Therefore, the country of origin "made in label" has been used as an important function in meeting with today's competitive and global environment in order to increase product sales. In this regard, the country of origin of a product is an important marketing element known to influence consumer perceptions as well as behavior. An improved understanding of how country of origin information influences brand equity is also valuable to marketing practitioners, for whom "quantification of brand equity" are two important issues (Biel, 1993) Saeed (1994) points out that country-of-origin means the country that a manufacturer's product or brand is associated with; traditionally this country is called the home country. For some brands, country-of-origin belongs to a given and definite country, such as IBM belongs to the USA and SONY is a Japanese brand. However, Ahmed et al. (2004) defines country-of-origin as the country that conducts manufacturing or assembling, which follows the definition stated by Saeed (1994). Saeed (1994) indicates that country of manufacture (COM) represents the last location/country of manufacturing or assembling one product. Therefore, Saeed (1994) defines country-of-origin as the COM. In addition, Roger et al. (1994) report there is no distinct difference between location of manufacture and location of assembly, and this causes no significant difference to customers concerning product appraisal.

According to (Kabadayi, Lerman, 2011), the impact of COO on buyers' intention, assessment and perception has been the most studied topic in marketing, business and consumer behavior field for past few decades. A lot of researchers have attempted to find effects of COO on product evaluations, attitudes toward the product, purchase intention and purchase choice. (Lants and Loeb, 1996) demonstrated that impact of COO is similar to brand, price and quality but it can be stronger.

As mentioned, the importance of country-of-origin as a cue in consumer choice behavior was first highlighted by Schooler (1965) over the past decade, there has been an effort to better explicate the country-of-origin cue by focusing on the larger, more comprehensive construct of "country- image" (Roth and Romeo, 1992). One of the first conceptualizations of the country-of-origin phenomenon was that of Nagashima (1970). He defined

the image that consumers associate with a given country-of-origin as:

The picture, the reputation, the stereotype that businessmen and consumer attach to products of a specific country. This image is created by such variables as representative products, national characteristics, economic and political background, history and traditions (Nagashima, 1970).

Roth and Romeo (1992) assert that country-of-origin effect means customers' stereotypes of one specific country. According to the definition stated by Johansson and Thorelli (1985), a country's stereotype means people in a country (or specific people) have stereotypes and preferences for products of another country. However, Saeed (1994) perceives that country-of-origin effect means any influences or preferences caused by country-of-origin and/or COM.

However, a different definition was provided by Roth and Romeo (1992): „country image is the overall perception consumer's form of products from a particular country, based on their prior perceptions of the country's production and marketing strengths and weaknesses“. The term product country image is a broader more accurate descriptor than country of origin or made in . . . and defines the image of the country and the thoughts such images create in the minds of consumers (Papadopoulos and Heslop, 1993). Some other researchers view country image as consumers' general perceptions about the quality of products made in a particular country (Han and Terstra, 1988; Parameswaran and Yaprak, 1987).

Country image first appeared in a research paper written by Nagashima in 1970. He defines the term as:

Consumer holds particular picture, reputation, and stereotype towards products of a specific country. This image is formed by the country's representative product, political and economic background, and historic tradition variables, which meHans overall country image (Nagashima,1970).

In addition, Roth and Romeo (1992) assert that defining country image should clearly reflect its relation with product recognition. Therefore, they redefine country image as:

Consumer forms his/her understanding to specific country based on his/her recognition of advantages and disadvantages of manufactured and marketed products from a specific country in the past (Roth and Romeo, 1992).

In short, country image means the consumer's general conscience for product quality manufactured from a specific country (Bilkey and Nes, 1982; Han, 1989).

Product knowledge and The INFLUENCE ON A CONSUMER

Product knowledge plays an important role in the research of consumer behavior, therefore, it is an essential research subject in related fields. Brucks (1985) states that product knowledge is based on memories or known knowledge from consumers. Lin and Zhen (2005) assert that product knowledge depends on consumer's awareness or understanding about the product, or consumer's confidence about it. Based on a definition of Brucks (1985) about product knowledge, it can be divided into three major categories:

1. subject knowledge or perceived knowledge;
2. objective knowledge; and
3. Experience-based knowledge.

Research of consumer behavior and product knowledge plays a significant role. During his/her purchasing process, the amount of knowledge consumer has about a product would not only affect his/her information search behavior (Brucks, 1985), but also, at the same time, affect his/her information and decision-making processing. Furthermore, it influences the consumer purchasing intention (Lin and Chen, 2006). The relationship between product knowledge and information search has not yet generated any definite conclusion. Some scholars state that consumers' understanding in product knowledge has a positive correlation to information search quantity (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987; Moore and Lehmann, 1980). Some scholars assert that these two variables have a negative correlation Brucks, 1985; Newman and Staelin, 1972). Therefore, when scholars face these two different conclusions, they submit another theory, i.e. that product knowledge and information search quantity has a U-shape correlation rather than simply a linear correlation (Johnson and Russo, 1984).

A different level of product knowledge would determine a consumer's purchase decision and would indirectly affect his/her purchase intention. Moore and Lehmann (1980) discovered that, in their empirical study, consumer product knowledge has a significantly positive impact on his/her effort in information search.

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN IMAGE AND PURCHASE DECISION

Consumer purchase intention refers to the "possibility of consumers' willingness of purchasing some specific products" (Dodds, Monroe & Grewal, 1991). Purchase intention represents the possibility that consumers will plan or be willing to purchase a certain product or service in the future. An increase in purchase intention means an increase in the possibility of purchasing (Dodds et al., 1991; Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007). Researchers can also use purchase intention as an important indicator for estimating consumer behavior. When consumers have a positive purchase intention, this forms a positive brand commitment which propels consumers to take an actual purchase action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007). Kotler et al. (1999) point out that, when a consumer makes a purchase decision behavior, there is a primary "stimulation response" model and the black box concept in behavior science response. Through external stimulation sources, marketing and environment,

it would further affect consumer purchase decisions through the black box (including consumer feature and decision processing).

McQuarrie and son (1992) use Likert's seven-point method to measure information on search intention. Chin (2002) refers to McQuarrie and Muson's (1992) research and uses a Likert's seven point method to measure information search intention. Dodds et al. (1991) use five questions, however, Klein et al. (1998) use six questions and both use Likert's seven-point method to measure it. Hsieh (2004) believed that the customer attitude of the product's origin of has a relationship to purchase intention. This is supported by Zeugner and Diamantopoulos (2010) that the history of the literature about country of origin goes 40 years before until now. It explores whether or not the country-of-origin of a product has an effect or influence on consumer purchase intention.

Based on literature investigation, researchers also found out that country-of-origin image play a significant role in consumer's perceptions towards products and brands from any given country (Hanzaee & Khosrozadeh, 2011). Past study shows that people care about which country the product came from and where they were made (Parkvithee & Miranda 2012). According to Martin and Eroglu (1993), country image is referred to the total of all descriptive, inferential and informational belief about a particular country. The previous study of the country-of origin effect has shown how country image has a direct effect on purchase intention (Rezvani et. al, 2012). Hong and Wyer (1989) report in their research, that the country-of-origin information does influence a consumer to evaluate the country's product quality. Moreover, Han (1990) and Papadopoulos and Heslop 1993) point out that, country image does influence a consumer's purchase decision. COO has significant implications for business (Laroche et al., 2005). The country of origin can be seen as a competitive advantage and it seems to be one factor in the buying decision process (Baker and Ballington 2002). Studies demonstrated that that consumers in whole of the world use COO as a factor in product evaluation (Supanvanij and Amine, 2000). Finding have concluded that COO does influence the purchasing behaviour of the customers and developed countries customers favors the products of developed countries.

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN IMAGE AND GENDER

Although a country-of-origin effect has been frequently demonstrated, conceptual and methodological problems call its interpretation into question. The most controversial area is the effort to identify the demographic profile of those people who make greater use of country-of-origin information in their evaluations of products. For example, Schooler (1971) and Tongberg (1972) found that older people tended to evaluate foreign products more highly than domestic ones. Also, foreign products were typically rated higher by females than by males (Schooler 1971), higher by more educated people than by less educated ones (Anderson and Cunningham 1971; Dornoff et al. 1974; Schooler 1971; Wang 1978), and higher by liberals than by conservatives (Anderson and Cunningham 1972). However, others have found different results. For example, Wang (1978) found no effect of age, Tongberg

(1972) found no effect of educational level, and Dornoff et al. (1974) found no effect of gender on preference for foreign products.

The aim of this research is to explore the effect of the Country-of-origin image, product knowledge and gender towards consumer purchase decision, and mainly to verify the effect of these two variables on consumer purchase decisions, and choose product involvement as the moderate variable between the country-of-origin image and product knowledge on the consumer purchase decision. Based on the reference of the scholastic stated above, the conceptual structure of this paper is developed and so:

H1: The country-of-origin asserts a significantly positive impact on the consumer purchase intention.

H2: Consumer product knowledge has a significantly positive impact on consumer purchase intention.

H3 gender has a significantly positive impact on consumer purchase intention.

METHODOLOGY DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Product and country selection: In relation to stimulus, Laptop were chosen because of their technology-orientation. Unsaturated and profitable market of this commodity in Iran and huge import lead to select this product. Data were collected via questionnaire.

Country-of-Origin Selection: Based on a systematic random sampling, 50 respondents were selected and inquired about their Laptop' brand. 56% of participants were male and 44% were female. On the other hand, 44% of respondents had VAIO and 36% had ASUS. Consequently, the country-of-origin of these two brands (i.e. Japan, and Taiwan) was chosen for setting questionnaire.

Questionnaire design: In order to measure the country image in this study the perspectives of Martin and Eroglu (1993) are adopted, and Chen's (2000) measure method is referred and revised. The questionnaire on product knowledge measurement, which is developed based on referring the studies of Brucks (1985) and Lin and Zhen (2005), mainly measures consumer's understanding and perception level, memory storage level, and after-purchase or after-use experience about product in insurance and catering services. In addition, this study mainly takes reference from Dodds et al. (1991) and Klein et al. (1998) concerning measuring purchase intention and item selection.

Sampling method and sample size: According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table, sample size was defined 379. Proportional Stratified sampling and systematic random sampling were applied. With regard to the size of sample, 400 questionnaires were distributed, that 200 students was given a questionnaire about the Taiwan of Laptop and other group of 200 was given a questionnaire about the Japan of Laptop. In total 380 completed .Questionnaire were obtained from science and research branch Azad Islamic university, that 192 questionnaire for Japan of Laptop and 188 questionnaire for Taiwan.

Data analysis: Data Collection and Data Analysis Method: SPSS and LISREL software were applied for analysis and comparison of data. Cranach α value was used to test the reliability of questionnaire, factor analysis to test construct validity and Pierson's correlation coefficient to investigate the relation between two variables. Ultimately, structural equation modeling was done to test the hypothesis of the research.

Reliability and Validity Analysis: To assess the reliability of questionnaire, Cronbach's α value was applied. To examine that, a pre- test was carried out on sample with 60 respondents and 55 practical questionnaires were collected. The conclusion shows that Cranach's value of each variable was more than 0/7. The least significant reliability for research questionnaires is 0/7; thus, this questionnaire was recognized reliable.

RESULTS

The result of the impact of country-of-origin image on purchase intention indicate that the p value that determinates the good of fitness is $0:000 < 0:01$, which shows it reaches statistical significance. This also means that the country of-origin image does cause a distinct effect on consumer purchase intention, and the regression coefficient is 0.78, which shows that country-of-origin image asserts a significantly positive influence on the consumer purchase intention. Therefore, H1 is strongly supported and the result of the impact of product knowledge on purchase intention show that is 21 percent (24.3 percent-4.3 percent), and the p value that determinates the good of fitness is $0:000 < 0:01$, which shows it reaches statistical significance. This also means that that country of-origin image does cause a distinct effect on consumer purchase intention, and the regression coefficient is 1.44, which shows that product knowledge causes a significantly positive influence on consumer purchase intention. Therefore, H2 is strongly supported. Finally the moderate effect of gender under the influence of product knowledge on information search intention show that 0.2 percent (21.8 percent-21.6 percent)and the p value that determinates the good of fitness is $0:000 < 0:01$, which shows it reaches statistical significance. This also means that, these is an interactive effect between country-of-origin image and consumer purchase intention, and the regression coefficient is 0.0964, which shows that, as type of gender, country-of-origin image would cause a significantly positive influence on consumer purchase intention. Therefore, H3 is strongly supported. This means that men with product knowledge about Laptop in Japan country would cause a significantly positive influence purchase intention Compared with women.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The main objective of this study is to examine the effect of Country of origin image and product knowledge with moderate gender on purchase in intention. The study is the theoretical contributions to research include the better understanding of COO relative importance for the Iranian customers. On the basis of the results of the present study, marketers are able to do a more effective job in formulating the contents of their messages in marketing

communications in Iran. In this regard, the effect of consumer product knowledge on business competitive strategy. When a company uses consumer product knowledge to develop proper competitive strategy, it is similar to a two-sided knife. If used properly, then its marketing strategy is like a sharp knife, which can easily win a share of mind and encourage a consumer to purchase a product. Consumer product knowledge has a distinct positive influence on a consumer's information search intention; therefore, he/ she must first have a certain level of product knowledge then search for a wider range of relevant information. Therefore, a company's developing marketing strategy should be fair to all consumers and expose a proper amount of relevant product information. Only if a company assists consumer to absorb its product information, will it raise the consumer purchase intention. As consumer's product knowledge leaves a positive effect on gender especially in men and gender has also positive effect on purchase intention, we can involve consumers by informing them with product information; therefore indirectly their purchase intention will be increased. This finding shows that marketers should determine the extent of using production origin variable in their marketing communications by identifying the product knowledge in their target market.

On the other hand this study had limitations too among them followings can be mentioned: only one product was considered in the present study and we can not considerate the level of product knowledge. Further, they should consider product involvement as key element in evaluated.

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