

# The Effects of Korean Country-of-Origin on Mongolian Consumer Product Evaluation and Purchase Intention

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## ABSTRACT

The economy of Mongolia has been growing, especially due to imports growing more than exports. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of a Korean country-of-origin on Mongolian consumer product evaluation and purchase intention using a Korean laptop. Specifically, this study tested the independent and moderating roles of human values and socio-psychological variables in the relationships between country-of-origin, product evaluation, and purchase intention. The survey was conducted with 143 young respondents in Mongolia. The results of this study indicate that Korean country-of-origin positively affects Mongolian consumer product evaluation and purchase intention. Second, because the human value of power is tied into consumers' social status and positions, Mongolian consumers with more power had weaker purchase intention for Korean country-of-origin products. However, findings show that the international social network moderates effects of Korean country-of-origin in product evaluation. In other words, Mongolian consumers with connections to international people tend to positively evaluate products imported from developed Asian countries.

JEL classification: M00; M1; M3; F00; F2; F6

Keywords: Country-of-origin, Mongolian consumer, human value, international social network

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The lives of Mongolian consumers are linked to Asian markets and international trade more intensely than ever before. Consumers can choose foreign products ranging from basic necessities, such as water and tea, to advanced technological products, like automobiles and computers.

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Only a select few of these products were available to Mongolian consumers a few decades ago. Now consumers of all social classes can afford to purchase a variety of foreign products. Many multinational corporations draw consumers' attention to products by the product's design, performance, the producer's name, and the country-of-origin (COO). Phrases like "this product is from somewhere" or "it is made in another country" demonstrate the COO can play a significant role in advertising and selling products. For example, typical Mongolian customers think that Chinese products are of bad quality and Russian products are of good quality.

The "made-in" label increases consumers' awareness of sourcing and represents attractive features of products from certain countries (Nebenzahl and Jaffe, 1998). Nagashima (1970) defines "made in" as the image, the picture, the reputation, and the stereotype that businessmen and consumers attach to products of a specific country. This image is created by representative products, national characteristics, economic and political background, history, and traditions. The label has a strong influence on consumer behavior in the international market, as it is associated with personal experience, mass communication, and views of national opinion leaders" (Nagashima, 1970).

This study follows a stream of prior studies on the effects of COO on product evaluation and consumer perceptions of product quality in markets in various stages of development (Pappu, Quester and Cooksey, 2007; Josiassen and Harzing, 2008; Usunier and Centre, 2008; Sharma, 2011). This stream of research suggests specific lines of inquiry into COO. First, the business community needs better understanding of how consumers attach importance to various cues like COO. Second, research needs to investigate the socio-psychological process that underlies consumer perceptions about products imported from developed and emerging markets. Finally, inquiries are needed into consumers' intentions towards imported products from different types of markets (Sharma, 2011). Mongolian consumers provide an opportunity to study these three questions. Mongolia is an emerging market country in Asia and has high imports from all around the world, especially developed Asian countries such as Korea. There is little research exploring the effects of COO on Mongolian consumer product evaluation and purchase intention (hereinafter PE and PI, respectively). Therefore, this study examines the effects of Korean COO on Mongolian consumer PE and Mongolian consumer PI toward a Korean product. In addition, this study investigates if the values of the Mongolian consumer play independent and moderating roles in the Korean COO and Mongolian consumer PE relationship and Mongolian consumer PI toward a Korean product.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

### 2.1. The effect of Country-of-Origin

Schooler (1965) is generally considered the first researcher to empirically study the link between COO and the PE. Other prior research on COO effects discusses diverse theoretical perspectives about COO preferences. Some authors stipulate that consumers in developed countries generally prefer domestic products to imported ones (Samiee, 1994; Elliott and Cameron, 1994; Hulland, et al., 1996). Other findings assert that consumers from developing countries prefer imported products from developed countries (Ahmed and d'Astous, 2008; Sharma, 2011). These theories show that COO effects vary from one country to another because of differences in economic, sociocultural, and political factors. Furthermore, COO effects are influenced by demographics (Shimp and Sharma, 1987; Maheswaran, 1994). Research demonstrates that COO effects are particularly strong among the elderly, less educated and politically conservative groups. In addition, these effects are related to consumer knowledge, familiarity, and experience with a product category or a specific brand (Scheafer, 1997), and involvement.

Consumers use an evaluation-based inference (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987) to reason that a product image correlates with the producer country (Yaprak and Parameswaran, 1986). A halo effect is a phenomenon where consumers make inferences about product quality based on the image they have about a country. Han (1989) found that when judging an unfamiliar product, consumers infer the product quality based on a country's image, which then influences consumers' attitudes toward other attributes.

Consumers use intrinsic and extrinsic cues to evaluate products. Intrinsic cues involve the physical composition of a product (e.g., taste, design, and other tangible features), whereas extrinsic cues are related to a brand name, retailer reputation, products' COO and warranty (Ahmed and d'Astous, 2008). As an extrinsic cue, products' COO can be manipulated without physically changing the products. Although they have no direct impact on the product's performance, extrinsic cues are part of the product's total image and thus can influence consumers' PE and PI.

COO effects depend on product categories (Roth and Romeo, 1992) and product dimensions (Leoniduo et al., 1999). Consumers stereotype countries based on the countries' level of industrialization or development (Iyer and Kalita, 1997), and degree of marketing sophistication and manufacturing infrastructure for the product (Chrysochoidis, Krystallis, and Perreas, 2007). Additionally, consumers tend to use COO stereotypes when product information is ambiguous (Leonidou et al., 1999; Martin, Lee and Lacey, 2011). A handful of research studies confirm the existence of national stereotyping phenomenon in the U.S. and Japan (Nagashima, 1970), Finland (Darling and Kraft, 1977), England (Bannister and Saunders, 1978), France (Baumgartner and Jolibert, 1978) and Canada (Wall and Heslop, 1986).

The effects of COO on PE and PI show that consumers perceive products to be higher quality if made in developed countries in comparison to products from emerging markets (Josiassen and Harzing, 2008; Pappu, Quester, and Cooksey, 2007; Usunier and Cestre, 2008). Buying and possessing imported products may denote higher levels of material achievement for consumers in emerging markets, helping them make a positive impression on their peers (Cleveland, Laroche, and Papadopoulos, 2009). Especially in Asia, consumers in emerging markets perceive imported products from developed markets to be superior quality, and products from other emerging markets to be similar or inferior to their domestic products (Hu et al., 2008; Kinra, 2006; Wang and Yang, 2008).

With regard to products from emerging market, studies of the COO effects on PE show a clear preference for foreign goods (Ettenson, 1993; Wang and Yang, 2008). However, studies did not show the same consensus in COO effects in terms of product attributes, product availability and complexity, perceptions about domestic products, private versus public consumption context, cultural orientation and ethnocentrism (Bandyopadhyay and Banerjee, 2002; Hu, Li, Xie, and Zhou, 2008; Huddleston, Good and Stoel, 2001; Kinra, 2006; Klein, Ettenson, and Krishnan, 2006; Lee, Garbarino, and Lerman, 2007; Reardon, Miller, Vida, and Kim, 2005; Supphellen and Gronhaug, 2003). This study asks: "Does a developed country's (Korea) COO have a positive effect on emerging market (Mongolian) consumers' PE and PI?"

## 1.2. Human Value

Rokeach (1973) suggests that human values guide principles in one's life and these values are tied to self-concept. Thus, a person chooses products that reflect his or her values and opinions. For instance, if a cultural group interprets Gatorade as symbolizing "a sense of achievement," individuals will perceive the product based on their values of achievement. People who value "a sense of achievement" would perceive that Gatorade tastes good and have a favorable attitude and PI toward it, whereas those who reject "a sense of achievement" would experience negative feelings about Gatorade (Allen, 2008).

Allen and Ng (1999) found that among the consumers who consider the symbolic meaning of products important, human values had a significant influence on their final product choice. In addition, Allen (2002) experimented with the human value content using symbolic meaning of a product and found that participants changed their product attitude (i.e., those who endorsed the value became favorable, whereas those who rejected the value became negative).

Thus, to study the specific human values to be associated with a product, this study will use domains outlined by Schwartz (1992) for the selection of individual human values and subsequent analyses.

Two steps were taken to decide which specific values and value domains should be used and associated with a product for Mongolian consumers. The first step was to understand human values. The second step was to select value domains for the manipulation; these domains would include the individual values chosen to test with Mongolian consumers. Four domains were selected from Schwartz (1992). First, Schwartz's universalism domain includes values such as world of peace, social justice, inner harmony, protection of environment, unity with nature, world of beauty, wisdom, equality, broadmindedness, and location in self-transcendence. Second, the power domain is the least similar to universalism, and includes values such as seeking authority, wealth, social recognition, and preserving one's public image. Third, the security domain was chosen because it represents a midway point between the universalism and power domains. The security domain includes values such as national security, family security, social order, reciprocation of favors, sense of belonging, and cleanliness. Finally, international social network was included because it is closely associated with globalization and COO.

Prior research has used human values to explain cross-cultural consumers' attitude, perception, intention, and evaluation. This study conceptualizes COO in terms of human values for investigation. Approaches such as the activities-interests-opinions (Wells and Tigert, 1971) and the observations of values all aim to uncover and leverage the link between product attributes and consumer values. For instance, Allen and colleagues (Allen, 2002; Allen, Gupta, and Monnier, 2008) show that Australian consumers evaluate a product such as meat more favorably because it is associated with the human value of power. Because the power value is connected to social status, the power value could moderate the impact of COO. For instance, social status could lessen Mongolian consumer PE and PI for a high involvement product like a Korean laptop. Similarly, security increases passive attitudes, possibly leading to a negative impact on Mongolian consumer PE and PI. However, international social network could enhance the influence of Korean COO on PE and PI because networks could broaden Mongolian consumers' global point of view and tolerance of others.

Some antecedents demonstrate that security and tradition have negative effects on global products but positive effects on local products. On the contrary, power and universalism have demonstrated positive effects on global products, but negative effects on local products (Steenkamp and de Jong, 2010). Therefore, this study suggests the following hypotheses.

- H1: Korean COO has a positive influence on Mongolian consumer PE and PI toward a Korean product.
- H2: Mongolian consumers with high universalism and international social network values have more favorable PE and PI toward a Korean product than consumers with low universalism and international social network values.
- H3: Mongolian consumers with low security and power values have more favorable PE and PI toward a Korean product than consumers with high universalism and international social network values.

- H4: In the relationship between Korean COO and PE and PI, universalism and international social network increase the influence of Korean COO on Mongolian consumer PE and PI.
- H5: In the relationship between Korean COO and PE and PI, security and power decrease the influence of Korean COO on Mongolian consumer PE and PI.

### 3. METHOD

#### 3.1. Research design and sample

This study used a survey method to investigate the effects of COO on Mongolian consumer PE and PI toward a Korean product. A total of 143 Mongolian consumers were contacted using convenience sampling. A laptop was chosen as a durable product due to its familiarity and universal use by both genders. In addition to its universality in these two categories, Korea has a dominant market share with a positive perception in the Mongolian laptop market. The method chosen for this study sought to answer the research questions in such a manner that would test the effects of COO on consumers' responses under the circumstance that only COO information was available. The questionnaire was firstly prepared in the English language and translated into the Mongolian language. It was pretested with ten Mongolian students and reworded.

A total of 143 usable questionnaires were included in the data analysis. Of the total of 143 respondents, 67 (53.20%) were male, 76 (46.80%) were female. 107 (74.80%) were 18–29 years old, 31 (21.70%) were 30–49 years old, and 5 (3.50%) were 50–64 years old. The most common level of education was college graduate at 101 (70.60%). Other educational levels represented were 21 respondents with post-graduate degrees (15.00%), 12 with trade/technical/vocational training (8.40%), six with some college (4.20%), and three were high school graduates (2.10%). There were no respondents with only 'Some high school'.

#### 3.2. Measurement

All the items of this study are listed in Table 1. Overall, this study measured two types of constructs as discussed above. The first type is general values and the second type is consumer-domain specific values. General values such as universalism, security, and power used by Steenkamp and de Jong (2010) were modified for this study. This study modified the measures used by Nijssen and Douglas (2008) to measure international social network. For this study, PI and PE measures used by Sharma (2011) were modified. COO measures were developed and tested in terms of reliability and validity.

## 4. RESULTS

**Table 1**

Constructs and reliability test results

| Items                        | Scale   | Cronbach's Alpha |
|------------------------------|---|------------------|
| Purchase intention           | Would you buy this laptop if you happen to see it in the store? (PI)<br>1, 2, 3, 4  | 0.846            |
|                              | If you were planning to buy a product of this type, would you choose this product? (P2)   |                  |
|                              | Would you purchase this product?  |                  |
|                              | If a friend were looking for a product of this type, would you advise him or her to purchase this product? (P3)                                     |                  |
| Product evaluation           | Products made in (country) – overall quality (PE1)  | 0.804            |
|                              | Products made in (country) – performance (PE2)  |                  |
|                              | Products made in (country) – value for money (PE3)  |                  |
| Country of Origin            | I have a positive attitude toward this country (COO 1)  | 0.891            |
|                              | I evaluate this country positively (COO 2)  |                  |
|                              | I have a good impression of this country (COO 3)  |                  |
| Universalism                 | Equality (similar social positions for different groups) (UNI1)   | 0.765            |
|                              | A world at peace (free of war and conflict)   |                  |
|                              | Intelligence (a mature understanding of life)   |                  |
|                              | A world of beauty (beauty of nature and the arts)   |                  |
| Power                        | Open-minded (tolerant of different ideas and beliefs)   | 0.821            |
|                              | Wealth (material possessions, money)  |                  |
|                              | Social milieu (respect, approval by others)   |                  |
|                              | Authority (the right to lead or command)  |                  |
|                              | Healthy (not being sick physically or mentally)   |                  |
| Security                     | Preserving my public image  | 0.7              |
|                              | Sense of belonging (feeling that others care about me)  |                  |
|                              | Social order (stability of a caste system)  |                  |
|                              | National security (protection of my nation from enemies)  |                  |
|                              | Return of favors (to give, take or feel equally)  |                  |
|                              | Family security (safety for loved ones)   |                  |
| International social network | Even if I do not know how well a specific foreign brand will perform beforehand, I try it   | 0.753            |
|                              | When a foreign friend recommends a product from his/her own culture that is unknown to me, I am prepared to try it without any prejudice            |                  |
|                              | Even though I (for example) would like French wine very much, I like to drink wines from other traditional wine countries like Spain, Italy as well |                  |
| International social network | I like to be in touch and interact with people of other cultures on the internet  | 0.753            |
|                              | I have many international friends in the place where I live   |                  |
|                              | I like to meet people from other countries  |                  |
|                              | About more than 3 of my friends live abroad   |                  |

#### 4.1. Reliability and validity

This study applied Cronbach's alpha coefficient to test the reliability of all the measures. Additionally, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted to check convergent and discriminant validity. Tables 1 and 2 show Cronbach's alpha coefficients and factor loadings of the measures, respectively. All of the constructs had Cronbach's alpha coefficients of over 0.7, the threshold of acceptable reliability. In addition, the exploratory factor analysis results confirmed good convergent validity and discriminant validity.

**Table 2**

Exploratory factor analysis results

| Items                        | Component |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
|------------------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|                              | 1         | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     | 6     | 7     | 8     |       |
| Purchase intention           | PI1       | .759  | .012  | .011  | .317  | .225  | .132  | .162  | -.009 |
|                              | PI2       | .814  | .107  | .053  | .288  | .157  | .083  | .052  | .116  |
|                              | PI3       | .830  | -.002 | .048  | .047  | .151  | .117  | -.074 | -.001 |
|                              | PI4       | .805  | .106  | -.063 | .095  | .185  | .091  | .004  | .048  |
| Product Evaluation           | PE1       | .261  | .004  | .012  | .725  | .294  | .000  | .163  | -.073 |
|                              | PE2       | .227  | -.014 | -.086 | .788  | .272  | .053  | .095  | -.020 |
|                              | PE3       | .126  | .084  | -.044 | .790  | .140  | .107  | -.153 | .021  |
| Country-of-Origin            | COO2      | .252  | -.014 | -.002 | .313  | .764  | -.023 | .001  | .029  |
|                              | COO3      | .317  | .016  | .016  | .354  | .711  | -.022 | .068  | .031  |
|                              | COO4      | .268  | .097  | .001  | .217  | .696  | .021  | -.132 | -.132 |
| Universalism                 | UN1       | .049  | .739  | .113  | -.008 | .185  | .089  | .027  | .006  |
|                              | UN2       | -.067 | .703  | -.080 | .018  | .251  | .099  | .354  | .100  |
|                              | UN3       | -.046 | .641  | -.017 | -.037 | -.032 | .088  | .192  | .280  |
|                              | UN4       | .036  | .644  | .000  | .221  | -.306 | -.086 | -.107 | .217  |
|                              | UN5       | .213  | .718  | .051  | -.008 | -.058 | .008  | .160  | -.035 |
| Power                        | PW1       | .096  | .202  | .067  | -.024 | -.087 | .098  | .218  | .772  |
|                              | PW3       | .022  | .129  | .014  | -.010 | .023  | -.005 | -.020 | .805  |
| Security                     | SC3       | .105  | .267  | .021  | .064  | -.062 | .033  | .818  | .044  |
|                              | SC5       | -.021 | .186  | -.054 | -.009 | .003  | .109  | .854  | .106  |
| International social network | ISN1      | .081  | .004  | .795  | -.060 | -.074 | .078  | .071  | .178  |
|                              | ISN2      | .027  | .032  | .811  | .039  | .092  | .103  | -.052 | -.100 |
|                              | ISN3      | .121  | .017  | .760  | -.101 | -.020 | -.065 | -.159 | .204  |
|                              | ISN4      | -.281 | .059  | .658  | .011  | .009  | .036  | .120  | -.231 |

### 4.3. Hypotheses testing

Hierarchical moderating regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses. The results appear in Table 3. In sum, Korean COO has a positive impact on Mongolian consumer PE and PI toward Korean laptops.

This study hypothesizes Korean COO has a positive impact on Mongolian consumer PE and PI toward a Korean product. The result shows that Korean COO significantly increases PE and PI (Hypothesis 1). This empirical result is similar to prior research such as Ettenson (1993), Wang and Yang (2008) and Sharma (2011). In terms of effects of Mongolian values on PE and PI toward a Korean product and the moderating roles of values in the relationships between COO and PE and PI, only international social network and power are significant. The impact of Korean COO on PI has become weaker for Mongolian consumers with high power value than those with lower power value. Further, Mongolian consumers with international connections are more strongly affected by Korean COO as regards the PE.

**Table 3**  
Hypothesis testing results

|         | Independent Variables        | Product evaluation |         |      |                | Purchase intention |         |      |                |
|---------|------------------------------|--------------------|---------|------|----------------|--------------------|---------|------|----------------|
|         |                              | Std. beta          | t-value | Sig. | r <sup>2</sup> | Std. beta          | t-value | Sig. | r <sup>2</sup> |
| 1       | COO                          | .577**             | 8.378   | 0    | .261           | .515**             | 7.143   | 0    | .328           |
|         | COO                          | .561**             | 8.097   | 0    |                | .491**             | 6.949   | 0    |                |
|         | Universalism                 | .062               | .794    | .428 |                | .059               | .743    | .459 |                |
| 2       | Security                     | .037               | .484    | .629 | .302           | .014               | .175    | .861 | .329           |
|         | Power                        | -.064              | -.874   | .384 |                | .068               | .914    | .363 |                |
|         | International social network | -.089              | -1.285  | .201 |                | -.04               | -.568   | .571 |                |
| 3       | COO                          | .494**             | 7.154   | 0    |                | .445**             | 6.223   | 0    |                |
|         | Universalism                 | .119               | 1.534   | .127 |                | .099               | 1.233   | .22  |                |
|         | Security                     | .013               | .169    | .866 |                | .006               | .073    | .942 |                |
|         | Power                        | -.152              | -1.959  | .052 | .332           | -.026              | -.323   | .747 | .379           |
|         | ISNC                         | -.059              | -.854   | .395 |                | -.018              | -.25    | .803 |                |
|         | COO*Uni                      | .118               | 1.543   | .125 |                | .09                | 1.138   | .257 |                |
|         | COO*Sec                      | -.047              | -.598   | .551 |                | -.064              | -.778   | .438 |                |
|         | COO*Pow                      | -.117              | -1.528  | .129 |                | -.175**            | -2.2    | .03  |                |
| COO*ISN | .208**                       | 2.925              | .004    |      | .138           | 1.872              | .063    |      |                |

\*\* p < .05.

### 4.4. Discussion

This study hypothesized and examined the impacts of Korean COO on Mongolian consumer PE and PI using a Korean laptop and the moderating roles of human values and consumer domain specific values. First, the findings show significant main effects of Korean COO on Mongolian



consumer PE and PI. Therefore, this study provides evidence that Mongolian consumers could have a favorable attitude and PI toward products imported from developed Asian countries (Ahmed and d'Astous, 2008; Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999). Second, the study examines the direct and moderating impacts of international social network on the PE and PI of a Korean product. Interestingly, an international social network has a significant influence on PE. Mongolian consumers who have international social networks are willing to purchase a Korean laptop. This study did not demonstrate that Mongolian consumers have developed broadmindedness. Mongolia has a monoculture and nationalism for keeping pure Mongolian tradition, which would mean an introverted consumer view and denial of world-mindedness (Ahmed and d'Astous, 2008; Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999). Therefore, international social network could play a significant role in accepting developed countries' products in Asia. Another significant result was the power value, indicating that highly respected and powerful Mongolian consumers tend to be hesitating to purchase a Korean laptop because they would be conscious of other Mongolians' evaluation and their inner social motive.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

There are some limitations of this study including the product choice, types of goods, and sample. The product choice was not perfect because a laptop is a durable product and respondents had existing preferences due to previous exposure to famous brands. In reality, when consumers buy a laptop, they consider performance, size, cost-benefit ratio, price, and other consumer-specific specifications. Intangible services were not used in the study, which could limit the generalizability of the conclusion. Future research could use multiple products and services, a variety of durable goods, and an assortment of "Made In" labels. This can help negate respondent's prior memories and knowledge of brands. In addition to simulating a real purchase environment, using intangible goods enables researchers to investigate and compare the impact of country-of-origin cues on consumer judgments in multiple situations. Consumers may obtain information about quality and performance by experiences and feelings. Using intangible services and multiple cues can facilitate the researchers' examinations of consumers' information processing regarding both PE and PI. In addition, the respondents of the survey were mostly young collegiate students. Therefore, in future research, diverse respondents should be included in the sample.

This study has some important business implications. For marketing, it is important to understand other countries' consumers and cultures. When Western companies want to enter the Mongolian market, they could take advantage of developed Asian countries COO by using Asian brands and distributing products through developed Asian countries. Especially in developing Asian countries such as Mongolia, marketers need to appeal to international social connections with creative advertisements to reduce the negative influence of power value among consumers.

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