Branding China? The Congruity between Country-of-Origin and Brand Origin

Sadiya Siddiqui, M. K. Agarwal

Abstract: Every nation is a brand in itself. The nation brand could be developed either by default or deliberately through advertising, trade relations, history, word-of-mouth, mass, media.travel or dealing with its people. The strong image of a nation enhances the goodwill of the brands. The "Go Global" strategy introduced by Chinese Government has shaped the image of viewing its brand for Electronic products in the international arena. China has always been criticized for its poor quality and low cost products in the recent past. This paper discusses how China has transformed its negative image into a positive one and the way China has progressed from "Country of Manufacturing" to "Country of Branding". This paper also pinpoints the importance of "Country-of-Origin" (COO) which helps in shaping the consumer purchase decision making process. This paper addresses the relationship between Country-of-Origin and the Brand Origin and its impact on the purchase intention of the Indian consumers. To study in depth five product categories are taken that are 'Made in China'. It also discusses the strategy adopted by various Chinese firms to lead the market

Keywords: Brand Image, Country-of-Origin, China, Strategy, Consumer Behaviour.

I. INTRODUCTION

"Made in China" has given a huge competition to various marketers and firms globally. The products labelled as 'made in China' affected the worldwide products (Blecken, 2007). After the toy recall crisis in the year 2007countries like Honkong and Taiwan decline their purchase of Chinese made toys. US consumers also become reluctant and reduced the Chinese made products. (Blecken, 2007). China the world largest toy industry hit hard by the crisis (Smith, 2007) due to the design flaws and dangerous lead levels creating a impact on both sales and profits of the Chinese company [11][12]. Because of its major effect the parents and the grandparents of the children started asking about whether the products are 'made in China'.

This was one of the incidents that affected China's image a s a country creating negative impact in the minds of the people. There has been extensive research on the Country-of-Origin effect (Schooler, 1974), because of its importance as per many researcher and scholars COO effect act as a important indicator for the quality of the product. The other external cues can be brand name, store reputation (Ettenson, 1993, Nebenzahl and Jaffe, 1996) [3] and consumer awareness or expertise towards a product (Eroglu and Machleitt, 1987) [10].

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However, recently researcher started debating towards the little importance towards COO effect. Many believe that consumers pay less importance to where the products are manufactured. In fact it is been stated that due to products being bi-national and global branding and decline of labelling as per WTO rules very little importance(2010), is attached to the products main origin. But according to some researchers like Heslop et al, Papadopoulos (1992) [4][5] argues that due to the increasing globalization the importance of product country image is also increasing. According to Josiassen et al (2008) [7], there is very evidence that consumers pays less attention to COO [17]. As a result COO remains highly significant for marketing practise [8][9].

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Country of Origin (COO)

The literature review on COO suggest that consumers evaluate the quality of the product based on its nation (Han and Terpstra, 1988) especially when consumers are unaware of the product their buying intention is highly based on the "made in…." label. There is positive relation between product brands and nation brand (Roth and Romeo, 1992). For instance France as a nation has a positive image in the minds of the people with respect to its language, cuisine, Eiffel tower, French perfumes. The main challenge for any nation is how its country image is perceived by individuals. The stronger the image of the nation the better it is perceived by people. The image of a nation to a great extent also depends on its political stability, trade relations with the other nations, historical events, traditions, technology advancement, industrialization etc.

According to Papadopoulos and Heslop, 1993 and Nebenzahl, 2001 Consumers tends to evaluate the quality of the product based on the product nation and they are willing to pay more or a product of a country that is having strong image in the minds of the consumers such as German cars, French perfumes, American tourister and Swiss timepieces. People perception towards a particular nation based on stereotype image (Kotler et al, 1993). Stereotype images are based on the information they received through education, media, business dealings etc [39]. Study shows that Canadian goods are perceived as of superior quality worldwide even when the people have very low or less knowledge about the product (Papadopoulos and Heslop's (2000).

When it comes to the country like China different people have different image towards that country. China is able to maintain its reputation of low cost manufacturer globally due to its low cost production [28].

It is one of the fast developing nations with immense population and huge market. It has now started to move beyond low cost producer into higher value-added products and is able to attract large amount of FDI from various nations. Most importantly Chinese brands are dominating the international market and giving tough competition to brands from developed countries.

Country of Origin and Perceived product quality: Consumers use the country of origin to access the quality of products that affect the mindset of a consumer (Bilkey and Nes, 1982: Shimp and Samiee, 1933) [21]. According to Wall et al. (1991) stated that COO information is important that influence product quality assessment than brand value or perceived price of a product. Consumers tend to use the image of a country when they are unable to detect the quality of a product in product evaluation [14]. Country image act as an important extrinsic cue to give information about the product's quality when consumer's are unfamiliar with the brand that referred to a 'halo effect',(Eliott and Cameron,1994: Maheswaran,1994).

Hypothesis 1: Country-of-Origin effect has a positive influence on Purchase intention of consumers.

Brand Image

Brand equity is "the value consumer's associates with brand, as reflected in the dimension of brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality and brand loyalty" as defined by (Aaker, 1991). For instance global brands like Toyota and Sony which are Japanese brand highly influences brand equity in a positive way as, Japan is acknowledge as high technology nation having a positive image of electronics and automobiles among consumers. Aaker (1991) define brand awareness to be the important factor for brand equity. Keller (1993) [20] stated that buying intention of consumers is highly influenced by brand awareness. The statement was further supported by Macdonald and Sharp (2000) by stating that when the customers are aware of the product, the buying intention is more like to be triggered. Timothy R. (1996) [1] studies the relation between the brand's image and consumer's self image that have a positive impact on the brand evaluation and consumer purchase intentions. The impact of this study can effect the self image and brand evaluation of consumers. The promotional strategies can be used to increase the brand image and stimulate the consumers to think on self image while evaluating a brand. Hsieh, Pan and Sentiono (2004)

[19] stated that "Goodwill of a brand enables the consumers to identify the needs and wants of the people, differentiate from those of its competitors and raises the likelihood that consumers will purchase the brand". Durmaz Yakup and Zengin Sevil (2011) [29] claims that the brand image can impact the consumers emotionally, who select products and services based on emotional sentiments and pragmatic judgments informing the buyers the different attribute of the products and services. This helps in increasing consumer's confidence and search efficiency [30].

Hypothesis 2: Brand Image exerts positive influence on Purchase intention of consumers.

Nation Branding and National Image

National branding is a wider concept of country-of-origin that is basically deals with the country's whole image including economic, cultural and political dimensions (Fan, 2010). It has a competitive edge in the marketplace to enhance competitiveness [18]. Its main purpose is to maintain and build country's strategic advantage for the economic growth. In other words it is a synonym of product-country-image. A nation branding represents wide variety of factors for instance: Place (geography, tourists attractions), natural resources; People (race, ethnic groups); history; language; Culture; Infrastructure 'famous persons; Picture or image.

According to (Ying Fan, 2005) [26][27] a national image of a country has a little or no impact on the product to offer. Consumers may like or dislike a country based on various reasons like history, trade relations, cultural concerns advertisements, mass media etc, but that may or may not affect their purchase decisions. It has multiple images For instance- China, across the globe has succeeded in forming its image as a low cost producer, known as the Asian giants with i.3 billion population, the Chinese food, Made in China, Great Wall, Kung fu make up the China national image.

A national image is so powerful that it has a strong impact on the product brand, where its manufactured, designed and on its final value of the products in the minds of the people. A Sony TV being assembled in Russia with negative country image the is being able to erode its weak image due to its strong brand image of Japan.

When it comes to China the Chinese firms have been able to established their brands across the globe like Haier, Xiaomi, TCL, and Lenovo.

Table 1.1

Illustrations	What is being branded	Example
COO effect	Being part of the product brand	Rover cars use the Union Jack as part of its logo
Country	A quality mark to promote exports	The New Zealand Way
Nation	Destination-Place Marketing	100% pure New Zealand Cool Britannia
State	People, Culture-nation branding?	'Axis of Evil'
Region	Regime-Political Marketing	Four Dragons in Asia

Source: Ying Fan, March 2005

Hypothesis 3: COO exerts positive influence on Purchase intention of consumers than Brand Image

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

Data Collection

The data has been collected from two sources Primary sources and Secondary sources. Primary data is gathered using questionnaires survey while, online database, journals and articles served as a source of secondary data. The study is conducted among the residents of Bangalore and Hyderabad. To make the sample representative various steps have been taken into this consideration. Sample size with an amount in range of 30 to 500 is appropriate for most researchers (Roscoe, 1975). Finally it was decided to take 500 samples among the respondents to represents the two cities.

We used a balanced design for five product categories using the data collection approach used by (Batra *et al*,2000). The products that are selected for the study are- Mobile phones, and Television.

Sampling Procedure

Stratified Random Sampling technique has been used to collect the data from the respondents of Lucknow and Delhi .Data for the research work has been collected from the Universities through a self administered questionnaire, whereas in Lucknow data were collected from the Universities and the shopping malls. A total of 350 respondents from Delhi were asked to participate in the survey and a total of 220 usable questionnaires were finally obtained. However, in Lucknow a total of 280 completed questionnaires were obtained. 5 point Likert scale ranged between strongly agree (1) and strongly agree (5) were used [42][43].

Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire is consisting of 2 sections, containing the demographic information of the respondents and the evaluation of variables in terms of country of origin, brand awareness, price, quality, features and purchase intention. Questions are formed and modified by referring to the past studies of other researchers. The questionnaires are formed by using simple English to ensure the understanding of the respondents towards the questions. Close ended/structured questions were adopted to form the questions where the respondents have to answer according to a set of limited choice of answer. The close- ended questions are chosen since it convenient the parties that took part in the research and it is a time saving method also.

Data Analysis

The data is collected through well-designed questionnaire after proper analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 20. The SPSS software helps to derive the raw data into useful and meaningful information. This software is used to find out descriptive analysis, scale measurements and also inferential analysis.

Scale Measurement

For Section of the questionnaire which is the demographic part, nominal scale is used to represent different category of the people.

For section B of the questionnaire that is related to the attributes of the variable, ordinal scale is adopted to represent different degree of response. 5 points likert scale is used as rating scale to know the level of agreement and

disagreement. Its purpose is to led the respondent understand the direction and strength of the question.

The reliability is also carried (Cronbach's alpha value) The overall reliability is tested. The reliability of the research which is measured by the Cronbach's alpha value which states that its value should be more than 0.6 to be considered as reliable.

Scale Measurement

Reliability Test

Table- 1.2   Summary of reliability test

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha
Country Image	0.841
Perceived Quality	0.822
Purchase Intention	0.762
Brand Value	0.743
Perceived Price	0.656

Source: Research Developed

According to Nunnaly (1978), the alpha value has to be more than 0.6 as to be considered significance. The table shows that each of the dependent and independent variable scored more than 0.6 and thus all the variables are significance. In short, respondents are able to understand and evaluate the measurements of the variables.

Inferential Statics

Pearson Correlation scores

The coefficient value determines the significance of the relationship of the variables being tested. The rules of thumb of the Pearson Correlation Coefficient will be showed in the table below.

Table:1.8

Coefficient Range	Strength of Association
± 0.91 to ± 1.00	Very Strong
± 0.71 to ± 0.90	High
± 0.41 to ± 0.70	Moderate
± 0.21 to ± 0.40	Small but definite relationship
± 0.00 to ± 0.20	Slight almost negligible

Source: Adapted from Haier et al. (2007)

Data Analysis

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Table 1.3

Factors	Demographic profile	Number of responders	Percentage
Age	18-24	114	22.8%
	25-30	133	26.6%
	31-40	139	27.8%
	41-50	74	14.8%
	Above 50	40	8.0%
Educational Qualification	School level	51	10.2%
	Graduate	183	36.6%
	Postgraduate	220	44%
	Professional	46	9.2%
Gender	Male	271	54.2%
	Female	229	45.8%
Marital Status	Single	297	59.4%
	Married	293	40.6%
Monthly Household Income	Less than 15,000	10	2.0%
	15,000-30,000	84	16.8%
	30,000-45,000	88	17.6%
	45,000-60,000	110	22.0%
	Above 60,000	208	41.6%
Nature of Family	Nuclear	321	64.2%
	Joint	179	35.8%

Occupation	Homemaker	83	16.6%
	Govt. Employee	64	12.8%
	Self Employed	76	15.2%
	Private Employees	170	34.0%
	Students	107	21.4%

Source: Research Developed

As per the Table 1.1, male respondents occupied 54.2% of the 100 respondents, while there are 42 female respondents, where is the 45.8% of the total respondents.

For Age, 22.8 % of the respondents are from the age group of 18-24, while 26.6% of the respondents are from the age group of 25-30, 27.8% of them are aged between 31-40, 14.8% are aged between 41-50 and 8% are above 50.

In Monthly Household Income, there are only 2 respondents whose monthly household income is less than 10,000, 16.8% of the respondents income lie between 15,000-30,000, 17.6% of the respondent income lie between 30,0000-40,000, 22% of the respondent income lie between 45,000-60,000, and 41.6% of the respondent income is above 60,000.

For, Occupation 16.6% are homemaker, 12.8% are government employees, 34% are private employees, followed by 21.4% are students

In Educational Qualification, 10.2% of the respondent is Intermediate, 36.6% of the respondents are holding UG degree, 44% of the respondent are post graduated and lastly, 9.2% of the respondent are holding PhD degree.

**Reason Behind Buying Electronics Products**
Figure 1.4
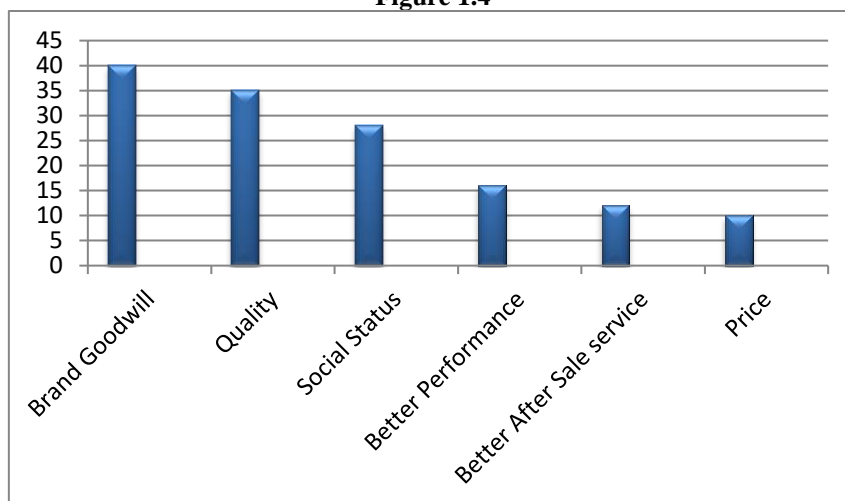
Source: Primary data

Interpretation

Figure 1.4 explains the reason that leads to the purchase of branded products among respondents in Hyderabad. Majority of the respondents rated Brand goodwill as the main factor responsible for buying branded products, followed by Quality, Social status, better performance, After sale service and the least responsible factor is Price.

Need For Brand
Figure 1.5
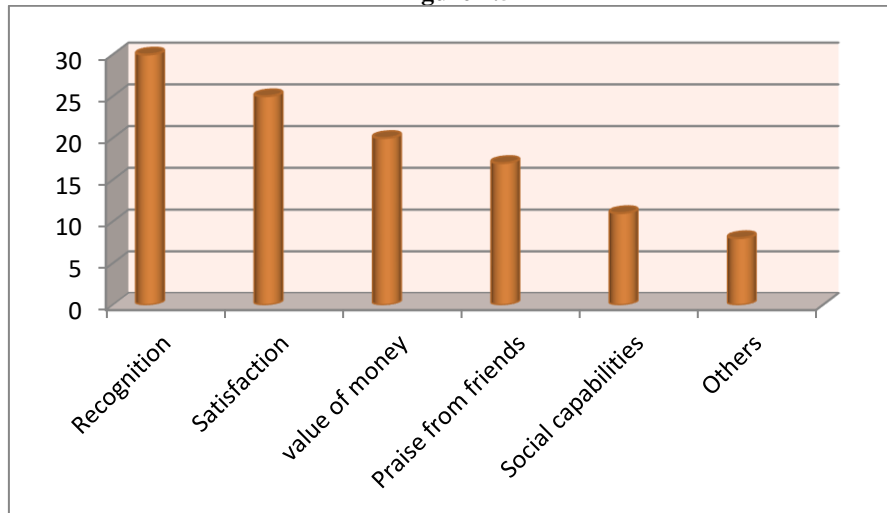
Source: Primary Data

Interpretation

The study shows that Brand recognition is the most important factor that arise the need for brand among the consumers, followed by satisfaction at a second level. Respondents in Bangalore prefer brand as it provides value for money followed by praise from friends, social capabilities and others.

Assessment of China's Brand Product
Figure 1.8

How would you rate the Quality of electronic products Of China's brand?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Poor	154	15.4	15.4	15.4
	Fair	345	34.5	34.5	49.9
	Good	345	34.5	34.5	84.4
	Very Good	134	13.4	13.4	97.8
	Excellent	22	2.2	2.2	100.0
	Total	1000	100.0	100.0	

Interpretation:- Table 1.4 shows that 15.4% of the respondents rated the quality of China's brand electronics products as poor, followed by 34.5% rated it as fair, 34.5% of the respondents rated the quality as good, 13.4% of the respondents rated it as Very good While remaining 2.2% of them rated the quality of China's brand product as Excellent.

China which is been regarded as the world's factory has a large manufacturing base, it has a competitive advantage in producing the products in mass at cheap price due to its huge amount of labour force and great government policies supporting the industries. China is one of the fastest growing country that has move from agricultural economy to the leading manufacturing country. According, to the 'Economic Times, 2017' China produces 70% of mobile phones, 80% of air conditioners and 60% of its shoes [38][40][41]. According to Nation Brands Index China, rank as the second most valuable and fourth nation brand across the globe. China is able to move from Country of Manufacturing (COM) to the Country of Branding (COB) launching its products under its own brand name. The results shows that 34.5% of the respondents rated the products under Chinese brands as "Good", followed by 13.4% of them rated as "Very good" the findings prove that people prefer to buy products from brand based in China origin. The Chinese firms are focussing on product's quality and promote its brand across the world and heavily investing in advertising, marketing campaign to outperform their competitors.

The top most brands of China are Xiaomi, Oppo, Vivo, are some of the Smartphone brands, followed by Lenovo a Laptop brand, TCL TV brand, Haier and Huwaei are brands of home appliances.

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H1: There is no significant relationship between Country-Of-Origin and purchase intention

ANOVA						
Country Image of China		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Is China is able to overcome its negative quality image by introducing the product in its own brand?	Between Groups	2.325	4	.581	.838	.401
	Within Groups	341.932	493	.694		
	Total	344.257	497			
The image of Chinese brands is associated with the "Made in China" label.	Between Groups	14.646	4	3.662	6.249	.000
	Within Groups	287.708	491	.586		
	Total	302.355	495			
You avoid using 'Made in China' electronic products.	Between Groups	2.922	4	.730	1.075	.368
	Within Groups	334.386	492	.680		
	Total	337.308	496			

Interpretation-The ANOVA result for Country Image reveals that there is a significant difference between the Country Image of China and purchase intention of respondent, where it can be seen the p-value in all the three cases is less than 0.05 which means that the consumer purchase intention depends on the country image of China. Hence it can be concluded that the null hypothesis is rejected. It can be stated that respondents do give importance to 'made in….' label

The findings clearly shows that the country-of-origin affect the purchase decision of a consumer. People perception about another nation totally based on its stereotype image (Kotler et al, 1993) [16] through various sources like mass media, advertisement, public relations, trade that relations etc. Majority of the respondents (47%) who are aged above 40 avoid using products that are made in China. 53% of the respondents are on the opinion that the brands of China are associated with the 'made in China' label that shows people have positive perception of brands that belong from developed countries as compared to the countries having negative perception in the minds of the consumer. Respondents do infer the quality of products based on its country-of-origin (Papadopoulous and Heslop ; 1993 and Nebenzahal; 2001) [25]. On the other hand only (26.8%) of the respondents believe that China managed to overcome its negative quality country image by introducing the products in its own brand. China made products has always been critized due to its security and health issues [24].

Computation of One-Way Anova To Ascertain The Level Of Significance Between Variables

Table 1.2
H2: There is no significant relationship between Brand Image and purchase intention

ANOVA						
Brand Image of China		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
China's brand comes to my mind quickly.	Between Groups	1.211	4	.303	.406	.804
	Within Groups	366.781	492	.745		
	Total	367.992	496			
The Chinese brand of electronic products are affordable.(Price)	Between Groups	.185	4	.046	.097	.983
	Within Groups	233.694	492	.475		
	Total	233.879	496			
China's brand electronic products are more fashionable.	Between Groups	2.145	4	.536	.810	.519
	Within Groups	326.371	493	.662		
	Total	328.516	497			
Do you trust Chinese Brands?	Between Groups	4.901	4	1.225	2.028	.689
	Within Groups	297.203	492	.604		
	Total	302.105	496			
The products under Chinese brands are durable(Quality)	Between Groups	1.494	4	.374	.470	.758
	Within Groups	278.354	350	.795		
	Total	279.848	354			

Interpretation-The ANOVA result for Chinese Brand Image reveals that there is no significant difference between the Brand Image of China and purchase intention of respondent, where it can be seen the p-value in all the cases is greater than 0.05 which means that the consumer purchase intention does not depends on the Brand Image of China. Hence it can be concluded that the null hypothesis is accepted.53.4% of the respondents that the products under Chinese brands are affordable while 45% of them agreed that they are more fashionable, 23% of therespondents believe that these brands offer better functions and services. When it comes to trust which is the most important factor in building relationship between producers and customers in case of China's brand only 34% of the respondents trust their brands followed by quality factor only 45.2% of the respondents believe that the products by these brands are durable. Price is one of the important factor that consumer uses to compare the different products of the firm (Winer, 1986).Price exerts positive effect on the perceived quality of the product. India being price sensitive market provides large platform to the Chinese marketers to dump their products in bulk at cheap prices in India. China has a competitive advantage in lowering their aggregate cost they focused on mass productions that leads to economies of scale. No doubt China has succeeded in forming its image as a low cost manufacturer. Majority of the respondents buy made in China products due to its affordable price.

The findings clearly show that China is trying its best to change its image from country of manufacturing to country of branding. Nation image plays a significant role in building the brand image of a country as both are interrelated for instance Japan is rated highly in producing electronic components and automobiles, Italy is favourably known for its global brands all this is due to their positive images that reflect the strength of the country. In case of China it has a long way to go to convince the world that they are brands with price premium

H3: COO exerts positive influence on Purchase intention of consumers than Brand Image.

Table 1.3

Independent Samples Test									
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
FACTORS		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
									Lower
Brand Image	Equal variances assumed	.597	.440	-.096	494	.923	-.007	.069	-.142	.128
	Equal variances not assumed			-.096	486.397	.923	-.007	.069	-.141	.128
COO	Equal variances assumed	.030	.862	.544	496	.587	.041	.075	-.106	.188
	Equal variances not assumed			.543	480.017	.587	.041	.075	-.107	.188

The independent t-test were performed to ascertain that both COO and Brand image have a differential effect on product evaluation [35]. In the above table it can be seen that the p value of brand is smaller than the confidence level 5%, (p=0.44), therefore there is no significant difference between brand image and purchase intention and for the Brand image the *t value*=0.96. While in the case of COO the (p=0.862), that is greater than the level of significance it states that there is significant difference between COO and purchase intention of consumers and for the COO the t *valve*=.544. The findings state that when it comes product evaluation the brand image plays a significant role than the COO. A strong brand image can mitigate the negative COO.

mindset of the consumers when buying products. Consumers use COO as a quality indicator especially in case where product origin is from developing country. This could be due to "stereotype" image that consumers hold with respect to that country. This same applies in case of China where people have weak national image towards it. Previous research proved that weak/unfavourable country images act a market barriers for those products related to less developed nations (Schooler et al, 1987) [22]. Moreover, product quality plays a significant role in building COO image of a nation. Brand image has a strong influence on the mindset of the consumers if the brand is highly marketed [23].

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper studies the relationship between Country-of-Origin and Brand Value and tries to know and which is the most important factor that effects the consumer purchase decision. The data provided by the 500 respondents clearly proves that COO effect have a strong influence on the

However when consumers were asked to name top Global brand of China only 31% of the respondents could name them. This shows that China is making all possible efforts not to link its brand with its origin. Maximum respondents were not aware the COO of the well-known brands. China is adopting various strategies, alliances and marketing campaigns to promote its brand and making efforts to move beyond a negative COO image.

The opening of the Chinese economy in the year 1978 allowed various Chinese firms to access natural resources and various strategic assets including R&D, Brand names and worldwide reputation through outward foreign direct investment (OFDI) [34]. The 'Go Global' strategy initiated by the Chinese government in 1999 [2] and the China joining WTO in 2001 accelerated their internalisation paces. This strategy led most of the Chinese MNEs to globalised in the world market [15]. For instance Lenovo after acquiring IBM becomes world largest PCs manufacturer; Haier finds its huge market in US for consumer electronics; Geely acquired Volvo in 2010 and becomes one of the major exporters of car in 19 countries outside China [13]. Chinese MNEs developing international brands in the competing environment has not been straightforward. Competing with well established brands from the developed countries posed lot of difficulty for them. Chinese products have always been criticized for its low and cheap quality [36]. Chinese multinational companies (for example Huwaei, Geely, Lenovo, Haier) laid emphasis and focused on lower price, advanced features, good quality, better customer service, innovation, heavy promotion and product diversification.

The various strategies adopted by Chinese firms to enter into the international market are strategic alliances, Joint ventures, acquisition etc. For instance, Lenovo after acquiring IBM launched its first Chinese computer brand in 2005. Similarly the acquisition of Volvo by Geely in 2010 and recently London Taxi in 2013 [31][37], has made the Chinese automobile manufacturer as one of the toughest competitor in the automobile market [32][33]. Huwaei is regarded as the China's most innovative and global companies in the world (McGregor, 2012) [6]. In addition, the success of South Korea and Japan suggests that the country image changes over time. No doubt, that China's brand development is truly remarkable, the major role is played by the Chinese government in supporting the development of these Chinese international brands. With strategies that include innovation via public speeches, frequent visits to market spacers and factories, creating preferential economic policies for the growth of domestic companies , providing large amount of funding R&D, innovative initiatives etc. There are various brands which are backed by the Central Government that will bring high value jobs and build the China Inc.

V.   LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE INTERESTS

Certain limitations of the studies provide opportunities for future research. Only two items under electronics goods were studied. More items (Electrical, mechanical, food, drugs) could be taken to study in depth to ascertain the consumer perception with respect to China. Post COVID-19 the study becomes more important not only for researchers but also for marketer and even for Government. Lastly, this longitudinal study will provide great wealth of information.

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