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IMPACT OF COUNTRY OF ORIGIN EFFECT (COE) ON CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTIONS: A CASE STUDY OF COSMETIC PROD-UCTS IN LAMPANG, Thailand.

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ABSTRACT

Country-of – origin plays an important role in international marketing by creating access to new and bigger markets for organizations globally. Various companies are investing and venturing in overseas market as they would be able to attract and benefit from a larger market share and advantage from economies of scales. This research studies the Country of Origin Effect (COE) and its impact on Consumer Purchase Intentions in Lampang Province, Thailand.

For this study, mixed method approach was used combining quantitative and qualitative analysis and both primary and secondary data were analyzed to understand the country of origin effect. This study is done by employing mixed method concept, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods. Data were obtained by two mediums: (a) Quantitative data collection through questionnaires distributed to 120 consumers, (b) qualitative data by conducting face-to-face interview with 20 respondents ranging from different sectors through snowball technique. Result reveal that halo effect, materialism, and value consciousness influences consumer purchase intention to buying foreign made cosmetic product. It was found that consumer animosity and consumer ethnocentrism does not influence consumer purchase intetion to buying foreign made cosmetic product.

This research will enable entrepreneurs and business organization to have a better understanding about the country-of-origin effects and its perception on end consumers of cosmetic products. The study further gives an insight on the effect of a country's image on the consumers' purchase intentions. With influx of ecommerce websites and changing global scenario, it has been become even more important to investigate the above topic so as to be able understand and provide details about country-of-origin effect on consumer purchasing intentions.

Keywords: Country-of-origin, Origin Effect, Purchase Intentions

INTRODUCTION

According to International Trade Association (2019), Thailand's beauty and personal care products market was valued at approximately \$6.2 billion in 2018 and is expected to reach \$8.0 billion in 2022. Thailand's beauty industry has grown by 7.2-7.9% annually over the last six years. The beauty care and personal care market in Thailand is projected to have a healthy growth of 7.3% per year from 2019 to 2022. Beauty and personal care segments are among the fastest growing of consumer goods areas. With the advancement of technology and globalization which has allowed easy movement of goods from one country to another, Thai consumer have easy access to foreign and local goods. More and more people have access to imported goods being sold through online platforms and other channels.

Thai manufacturers and service providers are facing tough competition from foreign goods and services in domestic market. In the prevailing conditions, it has become essential to understand the perception of Thai consumers towards foreign made good and their purchase intention towards cosmetic products. Such an understanding will help the Thai manufacturers to be able to assess the competition from foreign made goods and find ways to overcome the threat.

There are various studies which confirm that the consumer of developing or emerging countries tend to favor products from developed and advance countries. Various researchers have mentioned Country of Origin effect as a multi-dimensional construct and claims that future studies on COE should be done and their impact on consumer purchase intention (Maheswaran, Chen, & He, 2013). Kesic and Prii-Rajh (2003) have associated lifestyle with the way people live and spend their time and money.

Thailand is a lucrative market for cosmetic good but there lie some threats which is a common phenomenon in all markets. Local and international firms looking to tap into Thai market can assess the opportunities or threats arising and find out the characteristics of local consumers along with their perception and buying intentions to foreign made goods.

Research Objectives

Cosmetic industry is a big market in Thailand and there are many domestic and international players involved providing products for different types of customers in the society. Thailand is also known as a land of smile and the local population are very conscious on looking clean and beautiful. Large number of products can be seen on the shelves of major outlets, shopping malls and kiosks. This research paper investigates at the role played by country of origin of cosmetic products, and the underlying reasons for their choices made which triggers or effects their buying behavior. This paper would help the businesses and the marketers to understand the changing demographic changes and the relevant effect of COE on consumers buying intentions.

Research Question

Researchers want to understand and know the country of origin effect towards buying cosmetic products in regards to the country of origin and what are the factors which influences their behavior and choice making ability. The following research questions which the researchers would like to know.

- 1. Do the local population prefer Thai or foreign made cosmetic products?
- 2. What makes consumers to decide to buy a cosmetic product from a certain country and what are the factors which influences their decision making?
- 3. Do the lifestyle of the consumers and their income level affect their decision-making process?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Country-of-origin (COO) Effects

COO refers to the country in which the product was manufactured or produced (Maheswaran & Chen, 2013). From an information processing perspective, it is argued that consumers evaluate a product based on intrinsic (e.g., taste, design, and other product features) as well as extrinsic (price, brand, and warranty) cues (Ahmed & d'Astous, 2008).

Country of origin can also be termed as "made in image" and it has been found that various companies use it as a marketing strategy to create a favorable brand image based on Country of Origin,

Consumer Ethnocentrism (CET)

Unal S (2017) explained that the consumer ethnocentrism refers consumers' beliefs in the superiority of their own country's products in consumer behavior differently from sociology.

Consumer ethnocentrism is defined as the beliefs held by consumers about the appropriateness and morality of purchasing foreign-made products (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). High ethnocentric groups will tend to buy imported products and will discourage fellow consumers from buying forging made goods. These group of consumers favour and want to buy local made products due to various reasons.

A consumer may find it inappropriate, immoral and unjust to own products from a particular country due to cultural, geographical and historical differences. Older customers tend to be more ethnocentric when compared to younger ones. It is also possible that owning and purchasing foreign goods can be seen as unpatriotic as it hurts domestic jobs and economy as a whole. During the current covid-19 crisis more and more countries are encouraging the local population to use locally made products.

Value Consciousness (VC)

Value consciousness can be explained as a concern for being price conscious and paying low prices, subject to some quality constraints (Ailawadi et al., 2001). Value conscious customers tend to be price conscious looking for low prices as well as concerned for product quality. People who are value conscious tend to be more price conscious and focus on getting the best value for their money by comparing the price of the product from different manufacturers.

Various research has shown that consumers in developing economies found to be more value conscious compared to developed economies which can be attributed to the fact that they have lower income, low purchasing power and moreover would focus on savings.

Materialism (MAT)

Materialism is defined as a tendency to consider material possessions and physical comfort as more important than spiritual values. Materialism can be defined relative importance attached to possessions with three subtraits – envy, non-generosity and possessiveness (Belk, 1985). MAT heavily influences consumer perceptions their behaviors, preferences and their purchase intentions. Materialistic consumers are found to be proud and display their status and possessions. Buying and using imported goods provides a sense of satisfaction, achievement helping to make a positive impression in the society.

Consumer Animosity (ANI)

Unal (2017), "Consumer animosity relates to individuals' negative feelings toward a specific foreign country product, so it implies the antipathy toward a country and its people". Numerous research show a significant negative effect of animosity on the preference and purchase of products imported from countries with which the home country has a history of political or economic conflicts (Nijssen & Douglas, 2004; Shoham et al., 2006).

Halo Effect

The word "halo effect" was first coined by an American Psychologist Edward L. Thorndike, an American psychologist in 1920. The halo effect can be described a tendency one has for a brand, product, country which can influence his decision making, it can be called as cognitive bias. It is a common phenomenon in business and widely used by marketers and big corporations. Anthony Crupi (2019) Advertising often makes use of television shows, movies and those who star in them, to promote products via halo effect. One of the most famous halo effects is physical attractiveness which enable the celebrities to be perceived as brand value by the big firms. Celebrity endorsements has become a very common way of promoting a brand and products.

Conceptual Framework

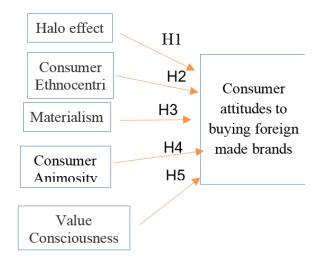
Various models and theories were studied related to the concept of consumer attitudes towards the products from another country and their buying behaviour related towards it. One of the most common used concepts is CETSCALE, along with the relationship of demography, value consciousness. Research variables were derived from the above model along with other relevant literatures focusing on Country of Origin Effect.

CETSCALE is also called consumer ethnocentric tendencies scale was developed by Shimp and Sharma (1987), as a measurable construct of consumer ethnocentrism.

Hypothesis

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

H1: Halo effect influences the consumer at-



titudes which buying a foreign made product

H2: Consumer Ethnocentrism has no influence on consumer purchase intention to buying foreign made cosmetic product

H3: Materialism has a positive effect on consumer purchase intention to buying foreign made cosmetic product

H4: Consumer Animosity has no effect on consumer purchase intention to buying foreign made cosmetic product

H5: Value Consciousness influences consumer purchase intention to buying foreign made cosmetic product

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Type

This research study employs mix method approach mixing both quantitative and qualitative methods for the research. The quantitative method consists of getting data and information through the assistance of mathematics and statistics. Whereas qualitative method aims to explore reasons, phenomena with depth, detail and context.

Population and study sample

Sample size for the qualitative research interviews from students, sellers, and marketers of cosmetic products at major stores in Lampang were chosen by snowball technique to find variable framework with different groups of interviewees ranging from teenagers and adults.

Sample sizes for the quantitative analysis will be vocational students from well-known colleges from Lampang. Questionnaires was distributed to around 120 respondents to understand the Country of origin effect on the local population in Lampang. Out of 120 chosen respondents only 105 response were received, 3 of them were found to have some missing data. Hence, 102 respondents questionnaire were chosen for data analysis and further research.

Data Collection

Qualitative Method

For qualitative analysis 20 respondents were chosen by Snowball technique. To understand consumer intentions and effect of country of origin in-depth interviews were conducted.

Qualitative analysis claims that a better understanding of underlying problems through casual processes can be obtained from intimate acquaintance with people and their problems resulting from observations. Hence, researcher uses this method to get various opinions of the respondents.

 Table 1:
 Summary of qualitative stage participants

| Occupation | Number |
|---|--------|
| Students studying in a vocational college | 10 |
| Entrepreneur and senior officials | 3 |
| Sales staff at Cosmetic shops | 7 |

Quantitative Method

Data found from the in-depth interviews needs to be confirmed and cross checked; hence

quantitative methods will be used. Quantitative confirms and reconfirms the response as well outcome of qualitative analysis and how different variables recognized through qualitative research are affects the consumer perception.

Research Tool

All the received data were input into statistical analysis software, PSPP which is an open source software.

Followings are the statistical tools utilized in analyzing and interpreting the data collected:

- a. Percentage :Percentage is the ratio of a part of the whole multiplied by a hundred. The respondents' answers were analyzed and interpreted using percentage. It gives a clear view as how much percentage of respondents agreed or disagreed on a questionnaire.
- b. Frequency Distribution: Frequency shows the number of respondents' who agreed or disagreed to ta given variables, it shows the quantity part which gives a view about the respondents' behavior.
- c. Correlation: The correlation procedure is used to find the relationships between the variables.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Qualitative Analysis

This research has sought to provide answers to the research questions which was mentioned earlier, with the findings from quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Research question 1: Do the local population prefer Thai or foreign made cosmetic products?

Global marketing is growing day by day resulting in influx of foreign goods and services within the local economy. Consumers have more knowledge and access to foreign made goods which can be attributed to the rise of ecommerce sites. Consumers knowledge and understanding of foreign made goods have changed with the possibilities either of in favorable or unfavorable dimensions. Most of the respondents informed that they prefer cosmetic products originally from Western countries due to the trust and perceived quality. Although there was a common census that those products are when compared to local brands but the brand image of cosmetic products from advanced western countries were better.

Research question 2: What makes them to decide to buy a cosmetic product and what are the factors which influences their decision making?

Celebrity endorsement and promotion plays a huge role in attracting people to buy cosmetic products. Some stars have huge following, and they are icons to the young generation who look upon them as being beautiful and emulate them. Cosmetic business relates to looking good and celebrities who are beautiful do assist the brands to be followed more and bought by local people.

Research question 3: Do the lifestyle of the consumers and their income level affect their decision-making process?

Many of the respondents informed that they prefer to buy foreign made cosmetic brands to impress their friends, colleagues, peers, coworkers, and other related people. Some of them informed that having a wellknown brand makes them confident and create a good image of themselves which will improve their lifestyle. Those who could not afford or pay for owning such products felt that their life would be better if they could afford to own them.

DATA FINDINGS USING

RESEARCH TOOLS

Most of the respondents of the questionnaire were between the age of 18-25 years amounting to around 75% of the total respondents.

Most of the respondents found to be female around 71% of them and moreover it has been found that the female population tend to have more likeness and understanding of cosmetic products when compared to their male counterparts. Around 30% of the population had income distribution between 18000-25000 baht per month.

Regression Analysis

Table 2: Relationship halo effect, consumer ethnocentrism, consumer aniomosity, materialism and value consciousness with consumer attitudes to buying foreign made products.

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standard ized Coeffici ents | t | Sig. |
|--------------|--------------------------------|-------|--------------------------------------|--------|------|
| | P | Std. | D (| | |
| | В | Error | Beta | | |
| | | | | | |
| 1 (Constant) | 2.654 | .218 | | 12.162 | .000 |
| HE | .232 | .069 | .260 | 3.369 | .001 |
| MT | .170 | .063 | .207 | 2.682 | .002 |
| CE | .116 | .107 | 131 | -1.082 | .281 |
| VC | .228 | .076 | .255 | 2.984 | .003 |
| CA | 027 | .064 | .036 | .415 | .679 |

Coefficients^a

a. Dependent Variable: Country of origin

* Statistically significant at d level 0.05.

Model Summary

| | | | | Std. Er- | | |
|--|-------|----------|------------|------------|--|--|
| Mod- | | | Adjusted R | ror of the | | |
| el | R | R Square | Square | Estimate | | |
| 1 | .337ª | .114 | .108 | .73541 | | |
| a Dradictory (Constant) HE MT CE VC CA | | | | | | |

a. Predictors: (Constant), HE, MT, CE, VC, CA

From the above talbes and its relevant anylysis we can conclude that it was found that the coefficient (Adjusted R Square) was 10.80%, which means the independent variables (halo effect, consumer ethnocentrism, consumer aniomosity, materialism, value consciousness) can explain the dependent variable (consumer attitudes to buying foreign made products.) by 10.8 percent.

Therefore Halo Effect (B=.232), Materialsim (B=.170) and Value consciousness (B=.228) found a significant correlation with country of origin at the level of significance of 0.05. Whereas Consumer Ethnocentrism (B=.116) and Consumer animosity (B= -.027) was found to have no statistically significant relationship having significance value more than .005 when related to country of origin at the at the level of significance of 0.05.

Most of the respondents did agree and strongly agree that they would not like to buy cosmetic

products made or manufactured from certain countries which can be related to the social stigma or goodwill of those countries or perception of the local population towards certain countries. During the research it was found that the respondents carried some bias to the underdeveloped nations, they had an image in their mind whereby products from developing and underdeveloped nations are of poor quality when compared to developed nations. Moreover, respondents were not positive on trying or testing cosmetic products from underdeveloped and developing nations as they were scared of having long term problems. This can be confirmed by the fact that almost 90% of the respondent has negative view and did not like cosmetic products from certain countries even though those countries have grown leaps and bounds during the last decade.

During the research it was found that there were many respondents who cared about getting the worth for their money and would go for the best available option, generally the ones with lower income or in middle class income group. Whereas, the one with good income prefer to buy brand names and had no problem paying a premium price for the same. As they were found to be loyal customers of big brand names and did not like to change cosmetic brands due to certain social stigma attached. The same was confirmed by 65% of the respondents in total.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Besides its conceptual contribution, this research also has some important business implications for international marketers because a better understanding of consumer characteristics and motivations would help them understand the individual differences among their consumers. Specifically, this study shows that the young consumers in small towns and regions in Thailand tend to prefer products imported from the developed compared to emerging markets, and consumers are aware of the different brands available in the market along with their advantages and disadvantages.

These are important findings because they show that it may be relatively easier for companies from the emerging as well as developed markets to sell their products in Thailand while targeting a certain section of population. On the one hand, this may be due to the burgeoning middle-class consumers with growing purchase power in Thailand, and on the other it may be because consumers in the small towns may be becoming more discerning and demanding. In either case, companies from the emerging markets need to invest in improving their product quality as well as brand image, whereas those from the developed market probably need to invest in product development and differentiation in their existing markets.

Finally, the findings also show that both MAT and VC have a stronger positive influence on the evaluations as well as purchase intentions for products imported from developed compared to emerging markets. Hence, international marketers may benefit from the increasing materialistic tendencies of the consumers in Thailand, but they also need to ensure that their products offer good value-for-money.

However possibly need to look for other important factors besides materialism and value-consciousness, which may influence the customers such as product differentiation, customization, superior service, religious animosity etc. Religious animosity is a rising phenomenon and is considered as an additional type which may have more stable and longer-term impacts than other animosities on behaviour (Abrham, Patro 2015). According to Yang & Wang (2008), word-of-mouth might also exert influence in the buying process. Word of mouth should have strong influence on consumer purchase intention towards cosmetic products should be studied in relation to COO.

To conclude, all these insights may help international marketers' better segment their markets based on the differences in the ethnocentric, materialistic, and value-conscious tendencies of their target consumers and direct their marketing activities and promotional inputs accordingly.

This study provides significant contributions to domestic businesses by informing them regarding changing consumer perception and behaviour, Most timportanly the new generation with Access wto more information and internet, they are becoming more aware of products from other countries.

A more thorough understanding of the consumer perceptions and preferences would not only help them retain their existing consumers, but also gain market shares by attracting conversions from their local as well as foreign competitors. Multinational Marketers may be well advised to incorporate these insights into their global marketing plans and strategies covering both developed as well as emerging markets.

CONCLUSION

While early research on the COE effects focused on the developed markets, recent studies examine these effects on the consumers in emerging markets as well (Klein et al., 2006; Wang & Yang, 2008). However, most of these studies seem to assume that the COE effects are similar for the consumers in both developed and emerging markets despite growing evidence of the divergence in their attitudes and perceptions (Sharma et al., 2006). This paper hypothesizes and examines the COE effects on consumers in Lampang, Thailand.

Table 2: Research Hypothesis

| Hypoth- | Hypothesis Statement | Test |
|---------|---|----------|
| esis | | Result |
| H1 | Halo effect influences the consumer attitudes whiile buying a foreign made product | Accepted |
| H2 | Consumer ethnocen- trism has no influence on consumer attitudes to buying foreign made cosmetic product | Accepted |
| Н3 | Materialism has a pos- itive effect on consum- er attitudes to buying foreign made cosmetic product | Accepted |
| H4 | Consumer Animosity has a no effect on con- sumer attitudes to buy- ing foreign made cos- metic product | Accepted |
| H5 | Value Consciousness influences on consum- er attitudes to buying foreign made cosmetic product | Accepted |

First, the findings from the study with consumers in Lampang Province shows there is an effect of country of origin effect on the product and relevant purchase intentions. During the research it was found that consumers prefer to buy foreign made which will enable them to impress near and dear ones. As the research was done targeting vocational students, it was found that young consumers are less ethnocentric. According to (Bawa 2004) older consumers tend to be more consumer ethnocentric than younger consumers. Imbert et al. (2003) found an association between age and ethnocentricity in reporting stronger ethnocentric tendencies among consumers.

Moreover, consumers informed owning a well-known brand make them confident and create a good image of themselves. Those who could not afford or pay for owning such products felt that their life would be far better if they can afford and owned them. Specifically, it shows consumers have favorable purchase intention for products imported from developed and advanced markets. Thus, consumers in Lampang province seem to have preferable intention to goods imported from the developed compared). This study also found that the consumers have tendency to prefer and adhere to goods that are imported and originated from a developed nation with good image and the same is relevant for Lampang.

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APPENDIX

Impact of Country of Origin Effect (COE) on Consumer Purchase Intentions: A case study on cosmetic products in Lampang, Thailand.

| Questions | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|----------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| Cosmetic products which are made in foreign countries are more desirable than Thailand brands. | | | | | |
| Only those products that are unavailable in Thailand should be imported | | | | | |
| Thai people should not buy foreign products, because this hurts local businesses and caus- es unemployment. | | | | | |
| A real Thai people should al- ways buy Thai made products. | | | | | |
| I am very concerned about low prices, but I am equally con- cerned about product quality. | | | | | |
| When shopping, I compare the prices of different cosmetic brands to be sure I get the best value for the money. | | | | | |
| When I buy cosmetic products, I like to be sure that I am get- ting my money's worth | | | | | |
| I like a lot of luxury in my life and want to buy expensive for- eign made cosmetic products | | | | | |
| My life would be better if I owned certain things that I do not have. | | | | | |
| I like to own things that im- press people. | | | | | |
| I do not like cosmetic products from certain countries | | | | | |
| I can never trust cosmetic prod- ucts from certain countries | | | | | |

| Do you buy cosmetics products being influenced by certain international celebrity endorse- ments? | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| Perceptions about the country origin of product affect the attitude towards the cosmetic product. | | | |

Age:

Sex:

Occupation:

Family income:

[]18000-25000

[]25001-35000

[] 35001-45000

[]45001-55000

[] 55001-more