

COUNTRY-OF-ORIGIN MISCLASSIFICATION: YOUNG CONSUMERS' PERSPECTIVE

What young consumers feel about COO misclassification & foreign branding

Erkka Werner Jussila

International Business
Bachelor's Thesis
Supervisor: Dr. Maria Elo
Date of approval: 9 April 2018

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Author: Erkka Werner Jussila Title of thesis: Country-or-origin misclassification: a young consumer perspective
Date: 13 April 2018
Degree: Bachelor of Science in Economics and Business Administration
Supervisor: Dr. Maria Elo
Objectives The main objective of this study was to find out what feelings young consumers experience after misclassifying goods' countries-of-origin, and what they think about the practice of foreign branding, to identify marketing practices to promote or avoid in regards to COO recognition and misclassification.
Summary Consumer interviews were conducted, the data from the interviews coded and cross-analyzed in reference to the existing body of research on the topics of COO effects and COO misclassification.
Conclusions As young consumers approach the issues of COO misclassification and foreign branding with either critique or indifference, promotion of accurate COO recognition amongst consumers makes for a sustainable marketing and branding strategy for the COO responsive segments, and foreign branding for segments indifferent to COO misclassification effects.
Key words: <i>Country-of-origin, consumer behavior, branding, marketing</i>
Language: English
Grade:

Table of Contents

Cover Page

Title Page

Abstract

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.2. Research problem, question and objective	1
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	2
2.1. Introduction	2
2.2. Country-of-origin effects	2
2.3. Development of COO research	3
2.4. COO effects categorization	4
2.4.1. Country image as a factor of consumer value	6
2.4.2. Consumer ethnocentrism.....	7
2.4.3. Consumer expertise	7
2.4.4. High-involvement vs. Low-involvement decisions.....	8
2.4.5. Hedonic vs. utilitarian products.....	9
2.5. COO misclassification	10
2.6. Foreign branding as a form of misclassification	11
2.7. Relevance gap	12
2.8. Discussion on COO framings	13
2. METHODOLOGY	15
2.1. Data collection.....	15

2.2. Participants & interviews	16
2.3. Questionnaire design	16
2.3.1. Demographics & general COO perceptions	17
2.3.2. Questions of COO misclassification & foreign branding practises	17
2.3.3. Piloting the interview	18
Example 1: Dolmio	19
Example 2: Napapijri	19
Example 3: Haier.....	20
2.4. Sample profile	20
3. FINDINGS	21
3.1. Demographics	21
3.2. General COO misclassification questions	23
3.2.1. Notes on COO misclassification questions	26
Relevance of COO	26
Amount of COO elaboration	27
Variables affecting COO elaboration	27
Situational differences promoting COO elaboration	27
Personal meaning	28
Ability to recognize goods' COOs accurately	28
Good and bad reputation COOs.....	28

3.3.	Product examples	29
3.3.1.	Notes on product examples	30
3.4.	Feelings associated with finding out about misclassification	31
3.5.	General questions of foreign branding	34
4.	DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS	39
4.1.1.	Country image as a factor of consumer value.....	40
4.1.2.	Consumer ethnocentrism.....	42
4.1.3.	Consumer expertise.....	43
4.1.4.	High-involvement vs. Low-involvement decisions	43
4.1.5.	Hedonic vs. utilitarian products	43
4.2.	Thoughts on foreign branding & strategies	44
4.2.1.	Localization.....	44
4.2.2.	Not interfering with COO misclassification.....	45
4.2.3.	Foreign branding	45
4.3.	Limitations of the study	46
5.	CONCLUSIONS.....	47
5.1.	Main findings	47
5.2.	Implications for international business and marketing.....	47
5.3.	Implications for policy making	48
5.4.	Implications for further research.....	48

1. INTRODUCTION

The area of country-of-origin (COO) effects is one of the most researched subjects in the field of marketing. Decades of research have indicated that the COO of goods has a significant influence on consumers' evaluations and behavior. During more recent years however, it has been noted that consumers' ability to accurately recognize COOs tends to be low. The effect of COO misclassification has been noted as being negative, for misclassifications of both favorable and adverse COOs.

Quantitative COO research is extensive but understanding consumers' emotions and thoughts about the phenomenon of COO misclassification is important for its implications to brand management, branding in general, understanding consumer behavior and, in an indirect way, policy making due to the relatively high regulatability of various COO marketing methods.

1.2. Research problem, question and objective

This Bachelor's thesis will investigate the emotions and thoughts consumers have about the phenomenon of COO misclassification in an attempt to better understand why consumers' product evaluations tend to be affected negatively by the disclosure of misclassification. This paper will provide information about why the effect is often negative, how consumers feel about misclassifying COOs, and what consumers think about COO misclassification and foreign branding in the contexts of different variables and methods used.

Research question: What does COO misclassification make young consumers feel? What do young consumers think about foreign branding and its future?

Research objective: To explore consumers' thoughts and emotions about COO misclassification and foreign branding to indicate both marketing strategies to promote and avoid.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This literature review is structured to first introduce the concept of country-of-origin (COO) effects on product evaluations. Themes and concepts are discussed, and COO effects are categorized based on variables such as country images, consumer expertise, product type and consumer ethnocentrism. Recurrent themes, findings and critique of COO research so far are briefly reviewed in an effort to explain implications for the changing nature of future COO effects.

Second, the review will go further into the concepts of foreign branding and COO misclassification.

Third, the relationship between foreign branding and COO misclassification are discussed to better understand avenues for future research.

2.2. Country-of-origin effects

Country-of-origin (COO) effects are the influence that the perceived foreignness of a good has on consumers' behavior (Samiee et al, 2016). Consumers tend to associate goods with certain COOs and use COO information as an extrinsic cue for evaluating goods. As a practical example, consumers might prefer Swiss watches to Chinese watches and German cars to Indian cars. In recent years, the traditional way of thinking that a good's COO is the same as its country-of-manufacture (COM), country-of-design (COD) or necessarily any actual, arguably correct COO has made way to the notion that what actually matters is merely the COO consumers tend to associate a good with. This is often the same and highlights the importance of country-of-brand (COB), the country with which a brand is associated, effects and consumers' ability to identify correctly goods' COOs. (Usunier, 2011).

2.3. Development of COO research

COO effects are some of the most researched aspects of consumer behavior and marketing (Pharr, 2011). Acknowledged as potentially having a significant impact on consumers' product evaluations in the 1960s (Schooler, 1965), research on the topic has been conducted extensively. Recently, there has been plenty of back-and-forth debate over the relevance of typically conducted COO research as increased globalization of production and consumption, low COO recognition accuracy within consumers and increasing availability of product information for consumers are changing the basis on which consumers make decisions (i.e. Magnusson et al, 2011; Samiee, 2011). The face of COO research might indeed be changing, and a shift in focus on brand origin recognition accuracy (BORA) has been studied more extensively in the recent years (Martín Martín & Cerviño, 2011).

COO effects have been found to be some of the most prevalent extrinsic cues consumers and businesses alike tend to base their product evaluations on (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). Traditionally, companies have communicated their products' COO through the "Made in X"-label (Bilkey, Nes, 1982). However, in research that is more recent it has been noted that the focus ought to expand from the "made in X"-label (Phau & Prendergast, 2000; Usunier, 2006). A great deal of products have a number of COOs when manufacturing, designing, company headquarters, branding etc. are taken into account. The actual country of manufacture (COM) or design (COD) doesn't have as much of an impact on consumers' evaluations than the country of brand (COB) or the mere association consumers make between a product and a certain country. Often the COB is the actual focal point of consumers when using COO cues in their evaluations of products (eg. Usunier, 2011, Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1998). Additionally, brands with a strong enough image may incur less COO effects than less known brands due to consumers' strong perceptions of the brand and less need for elaborating on extrinsic cues.

At times, COO research has been subject to critique for not being very generalizable (Peterson & Jolibert, 1995; Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1998) and providing little to no practical guidelines for marketers (Usunier, 2006). Due to restrictions of study designs, many

surveys and experiments must focus on narrow product categories, use student-only samples not representative of entire populations, or operationalize the surveys in a way that overly highlights goods' COO information.

2.4. COO effects categorization

Han (1989) suggests a generally accepted customer-oriented view is that COO can either act as a stereotype measure or have a proxy halo effect on evaluations. The mechanisms that COO effects work through are cognitive, affective and normative. In a cognitive process, consumers fit a COOs attributes to the good. An affective process is focused more on the emotions that a COO can evoke, for example, consumer animosity toward a COO can overpower positive COO attributes. The normative process stems from cultural norms (ibid): for example, in certain national or microcultures buying domestic goods is viewed as beneficial for the local economy or preferable for other reasons, and therefore more socially acceptable (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2004, Russell & Russell, 2006). Han's theory of the mechanisms of using COO information have been further developed and are visualized in a proposed COO elaboration likelihood model (see figure 1.) by Bloemer et al (2009). As we can see from the model, depending on the consumer's initial level of knowledge about goods from a country, COO elaboration is a complex structure and research of individual effects often represent only a certain, fixed situation (Samiee et al, 2016).

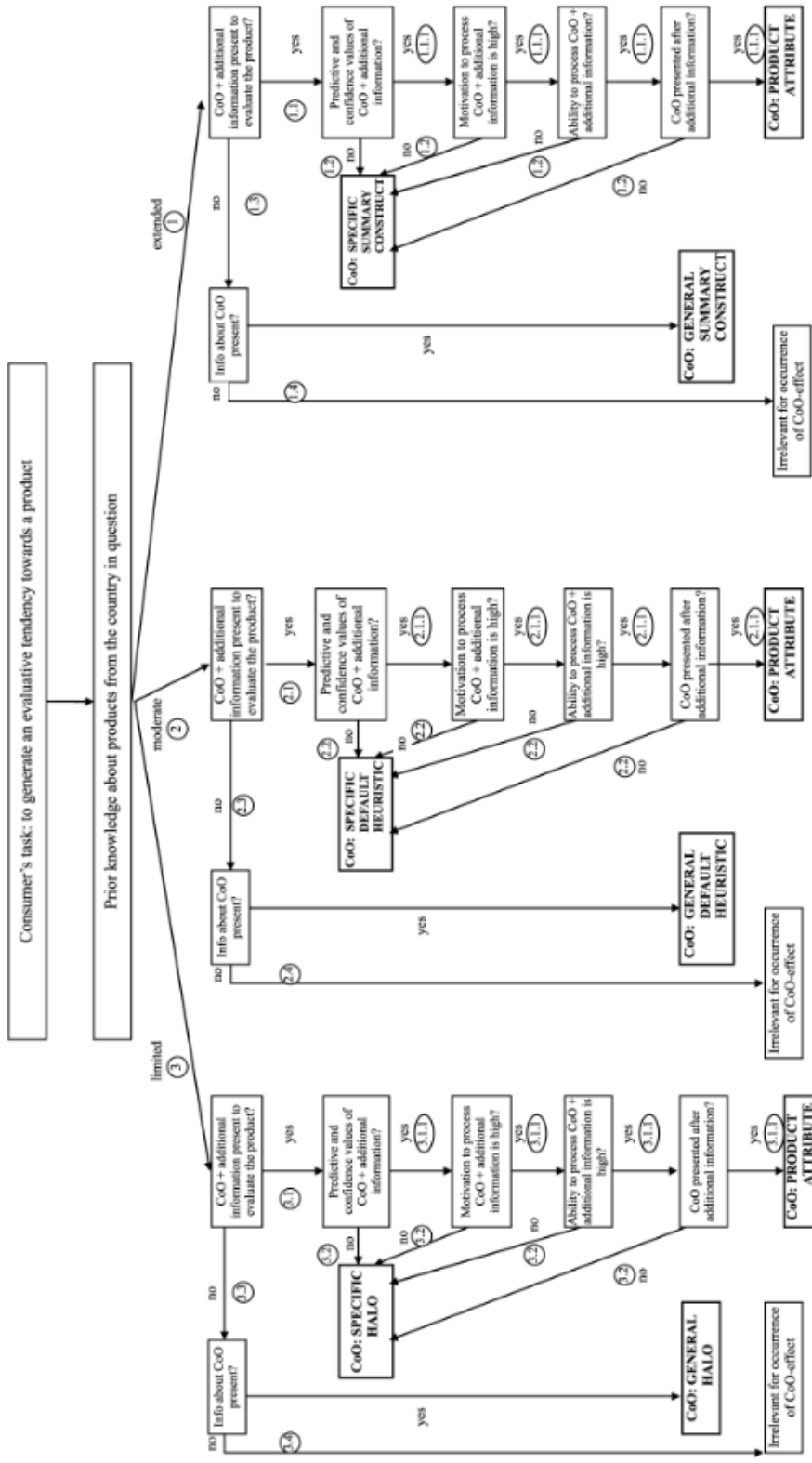


Figure 1. COO-ELM (Bloemer et al, 2009 p. 75)

Even though the phenomenon is complex, this review attempts to identify the most commonly named and noted variables that affect COO elaboration and effects. As in all consumer decisions, much depends on a consumer's individual preferences but generally applicable variables do exist.

2.4.1. Country image as a factor of consumer value

We can intuitively understand that COO effects on consumers' evaluations of goods stem from the perceptions and stereotypes associated with different countries. A paper examining country brand management (Kotler & Gertner, 2002) states "A country's image results from its geography, history, proclamations, art and music, famous citizens and other features". Hence, it is a perception marketers cannot directly change. A country such as France has a reputation of producing high-end luxury fashion goods, but on the other hand, French car brands have a quality perception disadvantage when compared to German car brands. Country image and reputation, however, are evolving. For instance, South Korea has been gaining ground on Japan when it comes to reputation as a producer of electronics and technology (Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002). Dynamic and changing country images mean changes in consumer preferences, different implications for brand managers and international business altogether.

Roth and Romeo (1992) suggested a framework for managing COO effects using country image dimensions of innovativeness, design, prestige and workmanship. The authors propose that when consumers give a country a high rank in the dimensions deemed necessary for the production of certain goods, i.e. design for luxury fashion goods, the COO effect is beneficial (ibid). The normative process stems from cultural norms: in certain national or microcultures buying domestic goods is viewed as beneficial for the local economy or preferable for other reasons, and therefore more socially acceptable (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2004, Russell & Russell, 2006).

Differences can also be found between groups of consumers with different demographic characteristics: gender, age, education and income were identified as variables based on

which COO elaboration and effects vary for consumers in an analysis of COO research during the past decades (Samiee et al, 2016). Not only are country images and reputations changing, they are very different depending on the consumer, the good and the situation.

2.4.2. Consumer ethnocentrism

Consumer ethnocentrism is defined as encompassing “the beliefs held by the consumers about appropriateness, indeed morality, of purchasing foreign-made products” (Shimp & Sharma, 1987 p. 280). The more ethnocentric consumers tend to be, the more they exhibit home-country bias in their consumption (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). This makes intuitive sense, since consumers placing a higher value on buying domestic are more prone to looking for domestic alternatives in consumption.

Drawing from Hofstede’s cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1984), where a distinction is made between individualistic and collectivistic cultures, it has been found that COO cues tend to have more impact on consumers from collectivistic cultures than consumers from individualistic cultures. Collectivist cultures place more of an emphasis on collective responsibility and are therefore likely to always evaluate domestic goods higher than foreign ones (Gürhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 2000). With some variation between countries studies, the notion of collectivism correlating with a negative bias towards foreign goods and individualism correlating with significantly less bias is supported by a study of human value’s lenses on COO images (Balabanis et al, 2002).

2.4.3. Consumer expertise

The level of knowledge consumers have about the product category they are evaluating also plays a part. Expert or very knowledgeable consumers are more likely to disregard COO information and base their product evaluations more on attribute information rather than the COO. (Maheswaran, 1994; Pecotich & Ward, 2007). Novice consumers, on the

other hand, tend to use COO information to a larger extent, and the COO often has a halo effect on the perceived quality of a good for novices (ibid).

The study by Maheswaran additionally suggests that product experts' use of COO cues happens mostly when other product information is ambiguous or not sufficient (Maheswaran, 1994). For novice consumers, the effect took place earlier in the evaluation process, as it was found that the COO acts a frame of reference for other attribute information. For novices, negative COO associations had more of an impact: negative attribute information had more of an impact and positive attribute information was viewed more cautiously. From a marketing perspective, it can be interpreted that negative COO associations are to be well considered especially when the target market is not as knowledgeable of the product category (ibid). Maheswaran's findings are supported by a study conducted on beer brands: it was found that the more familiar consumers are with a brand of beer, and the more knowledgeable they are of the product category, the less COO information was used as an evaluative cue (Schaefer, 1997).

2.4.4. High-involvement vs. Low-involvement decisions

Research on the topic has found contradicting evidence regarding whether COO information has a stronger impact on high-involvement or low-involvement decisions (e.g. Lin & Chen, 2006; Prendergast et al, 2010). Both perspectives have empirical support but in general, there does not seem to be a concise rule-of-thumb. In both high-involvement and low-involvement decisions the likeliness of a consumer elaborating on COO information depends on cultural and individual factors, such as possible affinity or animosity towards a COO and personal preference (Gürhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 2000).

Gürhan-Canli and Maheswaran (2000) suggest that COO effects have a larger impact in low-involvement decisions. Since the need for cognitive elaboration is less, extrinsic cues such as the COO would affect consumers' evaluations more. In low-involvement decisions, the monetary risk is smaller and the time used to make a decision is less, so

the association between a COO and a certain product category could prove to be enough for a consumer to prefer one good to another.

Ahmed et al (2004) and Josiassen et al (2008) challenge this perspective, and bring forth the notion that as in high-involvement decisions consumers are more likely to look actively for information, the COO might have a larger impact. In the context of conspicuous consumption, for example, a good's COO might also be an important factor when evaluating alternatives, since consumers continuously exhibit preference towards, for example, French fashion products (Kotler & Gertner, 2002).

2.4.5. Hedonic vs. utilitarian products

It is widely suggested that consumers evaluate products on two different dimensions: hedonic and utilitarian. Hedonic value refers to the pleasure received from consumption due to the affect value toward a type of consumption, and utilitarian value refers to the instrumental value of a type of consumption. Hedonic value is received when consumption happens for the pleasure of it, as with luxury goods. Utilitarian value is received when consumption happens to directly fulfill a need or to fix a problem, as with convenience goods (Babin et al, 1994, Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982).

Research suggests that the impact of COO effects is larger on luxury than convenience goods (Piron, 2000; Aiello et al, 2010). For example, Italian and French fashion items were found to be preferred by consumers. Another study found that the mere use of a French name on a product has also been found to increase the perceived hedonic value of a product (Leclerc et al, 1994). COO effects were also found to be significant in cars, where both hedonic and utilitarian value can arguably be found. German automobiles were perceived to be of high quality and lead to evaluations that are more favorable (ibid).

2.5. COO misclassification

Drawing on the discussion of the importance of COO and especially COB, it's notable that consumers' often misclassify COBs. (Samiee et al, 2005).

The effects of COO misclassification disclosure on consumer's evaluations of goods, meaning what happens after a good's actual COO is disclosed to the consumer after an initial misclassification, hasn't been studied extensively. A 2011 study implies mostly undesirable effects for misclassifications in both cases of the actual COO having a more favorable or a less favorable image than the originally perceived COO (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2011). Another 2011 study found that a brand such as Philips, widely misclassified as a US rather than a Dutch brand, can have either advantages or disadvantages from being misclassified; the result varies based on a customer's perception of the actual COO image in relation to the initially misclassified COO image (Magnusson et al, 2011). The results seem to contradict.

A recent paper examined the results of expert and novice consumers being informed about their misclassifications and its effects on their product evaluations and purchase intentions in with high-affinity COOs and low-affinity COOs. The study found that in the context of luxury goods, becoming aware of misclassification has a negative impact on behavioral intentions towards the goods when they have high affinity with the misclassified COO (Shukla & Cakici, 2017). This notion is complemented by another study that found consumers' willingness to buy or pay for products to significantly decrease after a COO-misclassified, foreign branded good's actual COO was disclosed (Aichner et al, 2017).

In general, the relatively small amount of research conducted regarding the effects of COO misclassification and the consequences of becoming aware of such misclassifications seem to have the managerial implications of the importance of informing consumers about a good's actual COO (Shukla & Cakici, 2017; Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2011). Foreign branding is suggested to be a viable strategy only in the case that a brand can successfully maintain its foreign image (Aichner et al, 2017).

2.6. Foreign branding as a form of misclassification

Foreign branding has been defined as “the strategy of pronouncing or spelling a brand name in a foreign language” Leclerc, Schmitt & Dubé (1994 p. 263). It’s a practice most often utilized to take advantage of a country’s positive image and therefore create favorable associations or halo-effects on consumers’ evaluations of said products. For this marketing method to work, the country that the product will be associated with in the mind of the consumer must be congruent with the consumer’s perception of the country. Incongruence often lead to less favorable evaluations of the products.

Foreign branding, along with ignoring COO information in marketing or non-country branding have all been suggested as strategic alternatives when the match consumers make between the COO and a good could prove to be unfavorable (Roth & Romeo, 1992). A case study of the consumer response and transfer of meaning of Disney characters in the Japanese and French markets argues that in the cultural contexts of the US, Mickey Mouse signifies the “All-American boy” and in the Japanese, he’s “Safe and Reliable”. Japanese consumers classify the multi-media mouse more as a *cute* instead of a *foreign* character. (Brannen, 2004). It makes sense for Disney to promote the image of a safe and reliable Mickey in Japan, and emphasizing the character’s COO, the USA, could in fact lead to less favorable evaluations.

A paper studying foreign branding as a strategy for companies from emerging countries found that for luxury goods, foreign branding can result in significantly lower evaluations due to increased likelihood of actual COO elaboration, but in the case of utilitarian goods, the impact was insignificant (Melnyk et al, 2012).

In conclusion, foreign branding is increasingly prevalent in branding today (Melnyk et al, 2012). The Chinese Haier group in electronics and house appliances, a number of food products such as the American Häagen-Dazs ice cream or the orginally Australian (nowadays owned by Mars) Dolmio sauce are all examples of naming brands to appear to originate from other COOs.

The study by Aichner et al (2017) discussed in the earlier chapter of COO misclassification brought forward the notion that the disclosure of a foreign branded good's actual COO to consumers reduced both willingness to pay and willingness to buy the good. From a managerial viewpoint, this is interesting since the results imply a trade-off between the benefits of foreign branding vs. the risk of consumers finding out the actual COO.

2.7. Relevance gap

Usunier (2006) suggests that COO research has suffered from a relevance gap between the academic study of the subject and real-life applicability. The author proposes a number of issues to address based on content analysis from 40 years of COO research, and points out five major problems for the applicability of theoretical knowledge into real-life management and marketing practices:

- 1) Consumers' shift of interest from COO of manufacture to other cues
- 2) The gap between perception and behavior
- 3) The availability of COO information
- 4) The effect of brand image
- 5) Firms' willingness to promote COO.

Additionally, the author discusses the overall "pitfalls of highly specialized research topics" as narrowing the researchable subject perhaps too thin. Usunier notes that most studies have been conducted in the US, have used samples of students and therefore are not representative of all demographic groups, and that the products used for the studies have been too reliant on certain product categories.

To address the critique, Josiassen and Harzing (2008) instead argue that Usunier's conclusions of interpreting COO research so far as "ivory tower research" are hastily made.

Countering Usunier first three point, the authors firstly indicate studies suggesting little to no decrease in the relevance of COO effects on consumers (Papadopoulos, 1993; Winter, 2004). Secondly, they point out from cognitive psychology that perceptions and attitudes precede intentions, and imply that consumers' product evaluations still provide relevant information since consumers' self-reported intentions tend to somewhat vary from actual behavior (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1998). Thirdly, it is noted that the possible lack of COO information availability does not diminish COO relevance since "the relevant COO facet is the country of *association*", rather than the COO of manufacture or brand (Li et al, 2000). This is supported by Josiassen and Harzing (2008). Even if consumers don't have COO information available, they associate a product with a COO and use it as an extrinsic cue.

When it comes to brand image blurring origin labelling and firms' willingness to promote COO, the two papers' authors seem to take different perspectives, which seem not to more complement than contradict one another. Brand image might at times blur and dismiss the labelling information, but lesser known brands, brands with an emphasis on COO promotion and foreign branding are examples in which the brand might have less of an effect. Companies might utilize COO as an integral part of a brand or attempt to direct consumers' attention away from the COO, which is also suggested in earlier research (Maheswaran, 1994).

2.8. Discussion on COO framings

COO literature conducted in the last 50 decades or so is expansive, yet the focal point of what COO effects actually are is, and has been ever changing. Variables such as differing country images, consumers' demographic characteristics, expertise and levels of involvement all influence the level of COO effects on product evaluations. The traditional idea of the good, the brand, design and manufacture all originating from the same COO as communicated in the COO has been dated for some time now, and newer research has focused on more alternative perspectives to the subject.

Consumers have been found to associate goods often with wrong COOs. Misclassification of COOs might be favorable, if the country that a good is associated with has a better image than the actual COO. Vice versa, a good from a country with a better image than the associated COO suffers from adverse effects on evaluations. Informing consumers of the misclassification, or disclosing the actual COO of a good after misclassification, has been found to have unfavorable effects on product evaluations, with the biggest impact on luxury goods. This is in congruence with the findings that COO effects in general are more apparent in the evaluations of luxury goods more than utilitarian goods.

Aichner (2014) suggests that firms can utilize COO information in a number of ways and COO strategies can be unregulated or regulated. Regulated strategies are “Made in”-labels and quality and origin-labels. Unregulated strategies are: including the COO in the company’s or the good’s name, such as with Air America; including typical COO words in the company’s or the good’s name, such as with Novo Nordisk; using typical COO language, such as with Volkswagen and “Das Auto”; using famous endorsers from the COO, such as with Rolex and the tennis player Roger Federer; using COO flags and/or national symbols; and using COO landscapes or famous buildings (ibid).

The unregulated strategies are not just for communicating a good’s actual COO; they can all be utilized with foreign branding as well. The study by Aichner et al (2017) suggests foreign branding to be a viable strategy but questions its sustainability as consumers can potentially find out a good’s actual COO, leading to decreased purchasing intentions. The study is, however, limited to the use of ice cream and tea as the goods under study.

COO misclassification due to foreign branding, and disclosing a good’s actual COO seems to have an adverse effect on the evaluation of goods. What remains, to the author’s knowledge, perspectives not studied in the topic are levels of involvement in the evaluation, in-depth study of differences due to demographical variables, the use of more countries with varying images and more contrasting between product types. The study by Cakici & Shukla (2017) takes consumer expertise, levels of affinity and luxury products under evaluation and the study by Aichner et al (2017) studies ice cream and tea, both

labeled as hedonic products. Due to the conflicting information on low-involvement vs. high-involvement decisions and limited access to large international samples, the most fruitful avenues for research appear to be experimenting with different types of products than before and perhaps conducting consumer interviews to understand consumers' thoughts on misclassification due to foreign branding better. Better understanding may be of aid in brand management due to the relationships consumers form with brands, differentiating between various methods of utilizing foreign branding or avoiding COO misclassification, and policymaking concerning what consumers perceive as acceptable or unacceptable business practices.

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology chosen for conducting this research was semi-constructed consumer interviews using a convenience sample of young, international business students. The sample used. As a substantial body of research does not exist in the effects and feelings associated with COO misclassification, and this study focuses on the exploratory aspect of "what" as in what are the feelings consumers feel, an exploratory and qualitative study is justified (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005).

2.1. Data collection

As there the current body of research regarding consumers' own thoughts and emotions about COO misclassification is not extensive, the data collection was conducted through a series of consumer interviews. Interviews were chosen as the best suited method of research instead of a survey or experiment, since "The purpose of the research interview is to explore the views, beliefs and/or motivations of individuals on specific matters" (Gill et al, 2008 pp. 292). Interviews are thought to promote "deeper" insights into individual consumers' behaviour, as they explore not only the effect of X on Y, but the driving factors behind effects (ibid). In the case of answering the question "why do consumers' evaluations of goods decrease when made aware of COO misclassification", the goal was

to understand and interpret the ideas behind the change in evaluations so the interview form chosen for the study was a semi-structured interview. A semi-structured interview allows for all respondents to answer the same set of questions, but also allows for the interviewer to ask for more detailed descriptions based on the answers, and to come up with follow-up questions on the spot (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). In addition to being a convenience sample, younger-than-the-general-population consumer segments might bring more relevant insight into the future of COO effects and their thoughts on foreign branding can very much affect not only general attitudes, but policymaking towards varying business practices. In this sense, interviewing consumers between the ages of 20 and 30 seemed to be the most justified demographic.

2.2. Participants & interviews

The interviewees were recruited within the student community of business students studying in the Aalto University School of Business, Mikkeli Campus with the recruitment happening by asking for volunteers on the student community's social media channels and by asking for interview volunteers face-to-face. In order to also promote ideas from outside the Finnish cultural lens and to avoid possible gender biases, an effort was made to have the interviewee distribution be 50% females and 50% non-Finnish citizens.

Since a convenience sample of students was used, and all the respondents are business students, the results may not be representative of larger populations. Additionally, all the interviewees were between the ages of 20-26, so the results may not be representative of people of all ages.

On average, the interviews lasted for 27 minutes, with the longest interview lasting for 40 minutes and the shortest for 20 minutes.

2.3. Questionnaire design

Following the suggestions of a number of qualitative research handbooks and guidelines, the questionnaire design was constructed to begin with introductions and explaining the

purpose of the interview, followed by explaining the issues of confidentiality and anonymity, and then moving into the main body of the interview after a round of warm-up questions (e.g. Cooper & Schindler, 2014 & Kananen, 2014). As a substantial body of research does not exist in the area of COO misclassification, most of the questionnaire had to be developed specifically for this study.

2.3.1. Demographics & general COO perceptions

The first questions to be asked (see appendix 1.) were about demographic variables. The interviewees were asked about age, gender, occupation and nationality. Even though the study is qualitative, demographic variables were important to take into account since they have been found to influence the impact of COO effects (Bilkey & Nes, 1982). Questions about time possible time spent living abroad and basic knowledge of different language were added since earlier exposure to the brands used as examples has been identified as potentially affecting the results (Maheswaran, 1994) and knowledge of languages may affect the interviewees' associations of the example brand names, which will be introduced later. After an introduction to COO effects, the warm-up questions focused on the interviewee's own perception of the relevance of elaborating on goods' COOs, a subject of academic debate (e.g. Usunier, 2006), their own perception of variables affecting COO elaboration and perceptions of COO recognition accuracy (e.g. Samiee et al, 2005), an inspiration for this study.

2.3.2. Questions of COO misclassification & foreign branding practises

A set of 6 (see appendix 2.) questions was structured to inquire about the interviewees' general feelings they would perceive to have after a case of COO misclassification. Second, added into the discussion were the common variables affecting COO elaboration identified in the literary review part of this paper; familiarity of the country, ethnocentrism, product expertise, involvement and the aspect of the good being either a hedonic or a luxury good.

Another series of questions (see appendix 4.) was structured as a closure, a follow-up, to find out about consumers' feelings about product localization, companies not interfering with consumers' misclassifying their COO and intentional foreign branding, and views on different methods for COO marketing as a tool of foreign branding, identified in Aichner's (2014) paper of typical strategies. The examples used were the following: McDonald's for product localization (Kelly, 2014), and Nokia for being often misclassified as Japanese (Silberman, 1999).

2.3.3. Piloting the interview

To test the interview and the degree to which participants are able to grasp the topic and provide their own insights, a pilot interview was conducted on a volunteer student, recruited from the campus. The pilot interview, along with all the actual interviews, were conducted in a study room of the campus, with only a participant and the interviewer present. All interviews were recorded on a recording device. After conducting the pilot interview, and discussing areas for improvement, the student expressed concern over the subject matter being too abstract to grasp merely based on a description of COO effects. The student suggested approaching the issue using practical examples of foreign branding to bring the subject matter closer to the interviewee and therefore make imagining a purchase situation more natural.

To address the need for practical examples, a set of real products (see appendices 5, 6, & 7) were selected for use as example figures to go through (see appendix 3) the previously mentioned common variables through with. These products include the Dolmio sauce for Bolognese Original, the Napapijri Rainforest Winter jacket, and the Haier 60cm freestanding dishwasher. All the product examples, as shown in the appendices, were printed out and the participants given approximately 30 seconds to freely examine the information provided.

To test the renewed interview, a second pilot interview was conducted on another student than the first pilot interview. After conducting the second pilot interview, and discussing

areas for improvement, the student gave favourable feedback on approaching the issue of COO misclassification in the main body of the interview through practical examples and reported that the use of examples made it easier to express thoughts of changes in evaluations. Based on the feedback by the pilot interviewees and the author's supervisor, this method was chosen for the actual interviews.

Example 1: Dolmio

The Dolmio brand has featured in earlier COO research due to being originally an Australian, nowadays an American-owned brand marketed as being Italian (Aichner et al, 2017 & Usunier, 2011). In addition to pasta being generally associated with Italy, Dolmio's marketing includes using the colours of the Italian national flag in its packaging, having a pseudo-Italian name, using the fictional, English-Italian bilingual Dolmio family with heavy Italian accents in their commercials and Italian dish names (ibid). Additionally, a Swedish study (Anselmsson et al, 2008) classifies Dolmio as a brand that is most often bought due to habit, or because it's perceived as the least bad alternative. So while the brand can be identified by many, the interviewees are not likely to have strong initial feelings about the brand itself. The price of the good in the interview is 2€.

Example 2: Napapijri

Napapijri, an Italian luxury fashion/ sportswear company is identified as an often misclassified-as-Norwegian brand (Steinlein, 2016 & Mæhre, 2010). For this study, the brand was selected due to their prevalent use of the flag of Norway in both their products and the logo, as well as the name of the company being a misspelled version of the Finnish word "Napapiiri", the arctic circle. The use of flags is a strategy of foreign branding (Aichner, 2014), and may cause different responses in the interviewees than the previous example of Dolmio using only a country's national colors. The price of the good in the interview is 300€.

Example 3: Haier

The Chinese Haier Group with its German-sounding name has also featured in earlier COO research (Magnusson et al, 2011 & Diamantopoulos et al, 2011). With an interview price of 700€, the 60cm freestanding dishwasher is the most expensive product example used. The only foreign branding cue available to the interviewee is the brand name, Haier, which is derived from the Chinese pronunciation of the last two syllables of “Liebherr”, a German surname.

The variety of different COO cues in the interview are the use of COO language (Dolmio), the use of pseudo-COO language (Dolmio & Haier & Napapijri), national symbols as the coloring of a product (Dolmio), the use of a national flag (Napapijri). The goods represent different categories of luxury (Napapijri jacket) goods, utilitarian (Haier dishwasher) goods, and an in-between good (Dolmio sauce), all differently priced. This method also allowed for the interviewees to answer all the questions in the context of an example, bringing out more insight about the effect of variables for instance ethnocentrism and expertise in the context of different product types and prices.

2.4. Sample profile

The interviewees were recruited within the student community of business students studying in the Aalto University School of Business, Mikkeli Campus with the recruitment happening by asking for volunteers on the student community’s social media channels and by asking for interview volunteers face-to-face. In order to also promote ideas from outside the Finnish cultural lens and to avoid possible gender biases, an effort was made to have the interviewee distribution be 50% females and 50% non-Finnish citizens.

Since a convenience sample of students was used, and all the respondents are business students, the results may not be representative of larger populations. Additionally, all the

interviewees were between the ages of 20-26, so the results may not be representative of people of all ages.

3. FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings from the conducted consumer interviews. After the demographic section, first presented will be the data from the general COO misclassification questions, followed by the data from the 3 product examples and data from the questions regarding foreign branding.

3.1. Demographics

This section (see figure 1.) presents data from the demographic questions (see appendix 1.)

Figure 1.

Participant #	Age	Gender (M/F/Other)	Occupation	Nationality	Language skills (Native language bolded)
1	20	F	Student	Finnish	Finnish Swedish

					English Spanish
2	21	F	Student, tennis coach	Finnish	Finnish English Swedish Spanish
3	26	M	Student	Somalian	Arabic Somali English Finnish
4	21	F	Student, salesperson	French	Finnish English French German Swedish
5	21	M	Student, marketer & web designer	Finnish	Finnish English Swedish German
6	21	M	Student	British	English Finnish Swedish
7	20	F	Student	French	French English Spanish
8	23	M	Student	Vietnamese	Vietnamese English French
Averages & percentages	21.63	50% F	8/8 Student, 3/8 with part-time jobs	3/8 Finnish, 2/8 French, 1/8 Somalian,	

				British, Vietnamese	
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3.2. General COO misclassification questions

This section (see figure 2.) presents data from the questions about the general feelings and tendencies the participants perceive in themselves about the phenomenon of COO effects and COO misclassification (see appendix 2.)

Figure 2.

Question	Answer	Amount	Participants #
1. Is the COO of goods relevant for you?	Yes	6	#2 #5 #6 #7 #8
	Depends on good in question	2	#1 #3 #4
	No	0	-
2. How much do you tend to elaborate on goods' COOs?	Depends on good in question	3	#2 #5 #7
	Not much	3	#1 #3 #4
	Unconsciously a lot	2	#6 #8
3. Variables likely to affect amount of elaboration	Product type	7	#1 #2 #3 #4 #6 #7 #8

	Own expertise in product category	5	#3 #4 #5 #7 #8
	Price	3	#2 #5 #8
	Product-country associations	3	#3 #6 #8
	Potential harm	1	#1
	Prevalence of counterfeits	1	#3
4. Circumstances for increased COO elaboration	Buying something expensive	5	#2 #3 #6 #7 #8
	Buying expert area goods	4	#3 #4 #5 #6
	Looking for WOM information	1	#1
	Time limitations in decision making	1	#2
	When purchase has environmental effects	1	#1
5. Personal meaning of COO	Where a good is manufactured (COM)	3	#3 #5 #7

	Where the brand comes from (COB)	2	#6 #8
	Reflection of quality of good	2	#1 #3
	Reflection of trustworthiness of good	1	#2
	Tool to prefer domestic goods more	1	#2
	Not much meaning, merely information on the made-in label	1	#5
6. Are you able to recognize goods' COOs accurately?	No	6	#1 #3 #5 #6 #7 #8
	Yes	1	#2
	Maybe	1	#4
7. Naming 3 good reputation COOs	Germany	5	#2 #3 #5 #7 #8
	Finland	4	#1 #2 #5 #6
	USA	4	#2 #3 #6
	Italy	3	#3 #4 #6
	Japan	2	#4 #5

	UK	2	#7 #8
	France	2	#4 #7
	Denmark	1	#1
	Sweden	1	#1
8. Naming 3 bad reputation COOs	China	7	#1 #2 #3 #5 #6 #7 #8
	Vietnam	3	#2 #6 #8
	Taiwan	2	#1 #3
	Bangladesh	2	#1 #4
	Thailand	2	#2 #4
	India	2	#3 #5
	Russia	2	#4 #8
	All African countries	2	#5 #7
	Philippines	1	#6
	All Latin American countries	1	#7

3.2.1. Notes on COO misclassification questions

Relevance of COO

Six out of eight participants reported COO as relevant for themselves. Participant #1 identified food and clothing as areas in which COO is relevant, and that in other areas it is not. Participant #3 brought forward his cultural background, and noted that he's been

raised in an environment where all western products are seen as being of higher quality than domestic, Somalian products.

Amount of COO elaboration

The amount of elaboration was reported (#2, #5, #7) to be dependent on the good in question, with #2 and #5 mentioning technology and electronics as categories in which COO has especial importance. Participant #7 noted that price of a good determines the amount of COO elaboration in each purchasing decision she makes. Participant #3 noted that as most manufacturing nowadays is done internationally, the relevance of COO is altogether on the fall.

Variables affecting COO elaboration

All but one participant mentioned product type as a variable affecting COO elaboration. For participant #1, differences in foreign vs. domestic food products are more significant and important than differences in other product categories, due to nutrition's direct effect on a consumer's health. Participant #3, in addition to pointing out the prevalence of fakes in certain product categories noted that some product types and categories are more closely associated with certain COOs than others are, agreeing with the thoughts of participants #6 and 8.

Situational differences promoting COO elaboration

Even though not identified in their previous answers, five participant felt that when purchasing especially expensive goods, or making a big investment increases their COO elaboration. Half of the participants also felt that when purchasing goods from a category they are knowledgeable or experts in increases COO elaboration. Participant #2 noted that as COO is a reflection of a good's quality, you want to purchase durable, long-term

goods from good reputation COOs, and #8 had similar thoughts: “For stuff I’d use daily or almost every day, for long-term investments, yes where the product comes from is more important”. On the note of expertise, participant #4 mentioned coffee and food products as things of high value for her, leading to increased COO elaboration when purchasing and shopping.

Personal meaning

The responses varied from participant #6 noting the low personal relevance of COO altogether, to some participants (#3, #5, and #7) explicitly stating differing perceptions of what COO means for them than others (#6 and #8). The former ones placed a higher importance on the COM, and the latter ones on the COB.

Ability to recognize goods’ COOs accurately

The strength of marketing efforts to cover goods’ actual COO (#7 and #8), the prevalence of outsourcing all types of manufacturing to China (#3, #5 and #8) were reported as factors lowering the participants’ ability to recognize COOs accurately.

Good and bad reputation COOs

The participants were asked to name three good reputation COOs and three bad reputation COOs in order to analyze the following product example questions based on potential COO preferences. Overall, the participants demonstrated preference to European COOs along with USA and Japan, with Asian countries, Russia and the continent of Africa and Latin America being named as having bad COO reputations.

3.3. Product examples

This section (see figure 3.) presents the data from the 3 product examples used in the interviews (see appendix 3.)

Figure 3.

Question	Product example		Responses	Participant
Do you know this brand?	Dolmio	Yes	8	
		No	0	
	Napapijri	Yes	4	#2 #4 #5 #7
		No	4	#1 #3 #6 #8
	Haier	Yes	4	#2 #3 #7 #8
		No	4	#1 #4 #5 #6
COO associated with brand	Dolmio	Italy	8	
	Napapijri	Norway	6	
		Other	2	#2 #4
	Haier	Germany	6	
		General European	1	#1
		China	1	#3
	Dolmio	Yes	0	
		No	8	

Do you usually check the COOs for the product type?	Napapijri	Yes	4	#1 #2 #7 #8
		No	4	#3 #4 #5 #6
	Haier	Yes	6	#1 #2 #3 #5 #7 #8
		No	2	#4 #6
On a 7-point scale (7 highest, 1 lowest), rate your degree of preferring local goods for this product type	Dolmio AVG=4.5	High (>3.5)	5	#1 #2 #4 #5 #7
		Low (<3.5)	3	#3 #6 #8
	Napapijri AVG=3.5	High	4	#1 #4 #5 #7
		Low	4	#2 #3 #6 #8
	Haier AVG=2.75	High	3	#1 #2 #7
		Low	5	#3 #4 #5 #6 #8

3.3.1. Notes on product examples

All participants knew the Dolmio brand, and the split between participants knowing and not knowing the brands Napapijri or Haier was 50-50. One participant identified himself as actively using Dolmio products (#6) and another noted that she in fact owns the Napapijri Rainforest Witner Jacket, the second of the product examples (#2). In the context of this study, she interestingly mentioned that she had indeed misclassified the COO of the jacket and only learned about the actual COO post-purchase.

In addition to participant #2, the other participant associating Napapijri's COO as other (#4) explained that since the flag used is Norwegian, but the brand name is a misspelled Finnish word, neither of these associations are likely to be correct and the brand is probably engaging in foreign branding. Other thought about probable foreign branding being used came from participants #6 and #7, as they both noted that their COO association is almost always drawn from the perception given by the branding of products instead of checking the COO for themselves.

For differences in checking the COO of the goods, for others (#7 and #8) the price of the jacket was a reason to check the COO, and other thought that only the quality of the jacket matters, and that quality isn't derived from the COO of the product (#3 and #4). For household appliances, such as the dishwasher, the price was again a reason to check the COO for two participants (#7 and #8), and became one for a third (#2).

Reasons for favoring domestic products in food products were the perceived higher quality, and for favoring foreign products, most often the price or lack of interest in the COO. Regarding clothing, some participants pointed out that the utilitarian function of Norwegian or other Nordic winter jackets may be of very high quality (#2, #3, #4, #5), but points were also made regarding the low level of associating Nordic clothing as being notably fashionable (#2, #4, #6). Participants from Somalia and Vietnam (#3 and #8) were not accustomed to purchasing winter clothing and expressed strong preference for foreign, especially European products in this category. The same applies to household appliances: participants noted their lack of knowledge of domestic, as in Finnish, French, British, Somalian or Vietnamese household appliance brands and expressed preference towards brands they are already familiar with.

3.4. Feelings associated with finding out about misclassification

This section (see figure 4.) presents the feelings the participants named to likely be caused by disclosing a good's actual COO, after COO misclassification. The questions were presented to the participants in a way attempting to frame the hypothetical situation

as a post-purchase elaboration. Participants were asked to imagine first buying the product with the given information and most often a wrongful COO association, then finding out about the actual COO, and describing the feelings they would experience from such a situation (see appendix 4.)

Figure 4.

Question	Dolmio	Napapijri	Haier
Feelings from misclassification	Negative Betrayed (#7. #8) Stupid (#4) (Sense of lower quality for good #2)	Negative Really weird, betrayed (#1) Disappointed (#2, #7,#8) Being lied to (#8)	Negative Wrongfully misled, uncertain (#2) Disappointed (#3, #8) Betrayed (#5, #8) Super disappointed (#7)
	Neutral Indifferent (#1, #3. #5. #6)	Neutral Indifferent (#3, #4, #5) Surprised (#4, #6) Confused (#7)	Neutral Indifferent (#3, #4, #6) Not necessarily bad if the quality's good (#1)
	Positive -	Positive -	Positive -
Feelings is product was from your initially perceived COO	Negative -	Negative -	Negative -
	Neutral Indifferent (#2, #4)	Neutral Indifferent (#4, #5)	Neutral

			Indifferent (#1, #3, #6)
	<p>Positive</p> <p>Really cool, fun (#1) Good (#3, #5) More inclined to buy in the future (#6, #8) Happy (#7)</p>	<p>Positive</p> <p>Good, "I would be like yay!" (#1) Even better (#2, #6) Good (#3) Happy that marketing didn't lie (#7, #8)</p>	<p>Positive</p> <p>Good, satisfied (#2, #8) Proud that instincts were right (#4, #5) Happy, trusting (#7)</p>
<p>Based on own knowledge, describe the effect of expertise in the product category on finding out about misclassification</p>	<p>Negative (High expertise)</p> <p>More adverse, because "Not really Italian" (#3) Adverse, but "Only in an interview situation" (#5) Even more disappointed because "Should have known better" (#7)</p> <p>(Low expertise)</p> <p>Much more adverse (#8)</p>	<p>Negative (High expertise)</p> <p>Wouldn't choose product again (#1) Adverse, "Should have known" (#4) Very negative (#7)</p> <p>(Low expertise)</p> <p>Very negative (#8)</p>	<p>Negative (High expertise)</p> <p>Price causes more adverse feelings (#7) Would resent brand (#8)</p> <p>(Low expertise)</p> <p>Doubtful of brand in the future (#1) Would look at the COO a lot, misclassification has more adverse effects (#5)</p>
	<p>Neutral (High expertise)</p> <p>No effect (#2, #4)</p> <p>(Low expertise)</p> <p>No effect (#1, #6)</p>	<p>Neutral (High expertise)</p> <p>Altogether prefers familiar brands (#2) No effect (#6)</p>	<p>Neutral (High expertise)</p> <p>Usually trusts large, international</p>

		(Low expertise) No idea (#3) No effect (#5)	corporations so hard to say (#3) (Low expertise) No effect (#2) “I don’t know anything about these, and I wouldn’t care (#6)
	Positive -	Positive -	Positive -

3.5. General questions of foreign branding

This section (see figure 5.) presents the answers from the participants’ responses to the questions about foreign branding, the different applications of it and their thoughts on varying methods of foreign branding (see appendix 5).

Figure 5.

Question	Answers
Localization of product offerings	Good business practice (#1, #2, #3, #4, #5, #6, #7, #8) Increases value for both firm and customer (#7) Not sure about successfulness (#4)
	Negative

Firms not interfering with prevalent COO misclassification among consumers	<p>Unfair, not cool, betrayed, “Be proud of who you are” (#1)</p> <p>Intentionally misleading but understandable, as a consumer would prefer to know the truth (#2)</p> <p>“Nokia should have told consumers what’s the originality of the company... ..even if it is not your fault, they should have informed people” (#3)</p> <p>Misleading, unethical, would prefer complete honesty (#6)</p> <p>Feelings of being lied to, even if not company’s fault. Company should take initiative to inform (#7)</p>
	Neutral
	<p>Not the company’s fault, wouldn’t expect them to take active measures (#5)</p> <p>Consumers’ own fault if the information of the actual COO is available (#8)</p>
	Positive

	<p>As long as the association is a positive one, there's no need for a company to correct consumers (#4)</p>
<p>Foreign branding, defined as “making products seem as if originating from another country”</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Negative</p> <p>Wrong and misleading if consumers associate with a wrong COO (#2)</p> <p>Intentional misleading, shouldn't be done (#3)</p> <p>Unethical, makes feel negative towards firms and brands utilizing foreign branding (#6)</p> <p>Deceiving, would feel negative (#7)</p> <p>Feelings of being lied to, promotion of products not on attributes but inherently wrongful associations, feelings of being cheated (#8)</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Neutral</p> <p>Some methods are unacceptable, like the use of national flags. Very method dependent (#1)</p>

	<p>“As a consumer I’m not too happy that they want to deceive me, as a business student, that’s genius” (#5)</p>
	<p>Positive</p> <p>Smart business practice if people don’t notice (#4)</p>
<p>Acceptable vs. non-acceptable methods</p>	<p>Non-acceptable</p> <p>Use of national flags of other countries (#1, #2, #3, #4, #6, #7, #8)</p> <p>Mentioning another country’s name (#1, #8)</p> <p>National symbols (#4, #8)</p> <p>Another country’s language if grammar is bad (#4)</p> <p>All of the aforementioned practices are unacceptable (#8)</p>
	<p>Acceptable</p> <p>Use of landscapes (#2, #7)</p> <p>Use of another country’s language (#2, #6, #7)</p> <p>Mind associations other than national flag (#4)</p>

	<p>Regulatory perspective, if one method is acceptable, then all should be (#5)</p>
<p>Thoughts on the future of foreign branding</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Increase</p> <p>Worse, less original COOs and more cheating (#1)</p> <p>Firms from low-reputation countries utilizing foreign branding more (#2)</p> <p>Increasing but companies should never mislead customers (#3)</p> <p>More difficult but attempted more (#5)</p> <p>Increase as long as accepted by general population and lawmakers (#6)</p> <p>Increasing, hopeful that consumers increase knowledge as many people are affected negatively, doesn't work well for educated consumers (#7)</p> <p>Increase, hopefully misleading will be put to a stop (#8)</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Decrease</p> <p>Less effective, will not work as well due to more information availability (#4)</p>

Amount of COO elaboration in day-to-day life	More
	<p>Nowadays a lot, before was naïve (#7)</p> <p>A lot, don't want to be cheated anymore (#8)</p>
Additional notes	Less
	<p>Not enough (#1)</p> <p>Not much (#2, #3, #4, #5, #6)</p>
Additional notes	<p>Hopes for more authentic COO branding as it is cool to promote your country's image (#1)</p> <p>Foreign branding is seen as more acceptable for high-image countries (#2)</p> <p>Hurts reputation of the COO a product is branded as originating from (#7)</p> <p>Have to work in order to not be cheated, foreign branding has made COO become prevalent (#8)</p>

4. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

When asked to describe their feelings in the hypothetical situation of misclassifying a good's COO, with all the examples the responses were either explicitly negative or neutral towards the situation. Encompassing all of the three product examples used, the most

commonly named feeling was indifference, with three or more participants reporting not to feel any differently towards the given product examples if they'd find out about the actual good's actual COO. However, the spectrum is wider for the negative feelings associated with COO misclassification, as would be in congruence with implications of previous COO misclassification literature (Cakici & Shukla, 2017 & Aichner et al, 2017), as the consumer response to finding out about misclassification has been found to be negative. The most prevalent negative feelings associated with COO misclassifying are those of betrayal and disappointment.

4.1.1. Country image as a factor of consumer value

Brand		Misclassified COO reputation	Actual COO reputation
Dolmio		Italy	USA
		High (3)	High (4)
Napapijri		Norway	Italy
		-	High (3)
Haier		Germany	China
		High (5)	Low (7)

Brand	Checking COO for product type	Feelings from misclassification	Feelings if good was actually from misclassified COO
Dolmio	No (8)	Negative Betrayal (2) Stupidity (1) Lower sense of quality for good (1)	Positive Feeling good (2) Fun (1) Coolness (1) Happy (1)

			Incline to buy more (1)
		Neutral Indifference (4)	Neutral Indifference (2)
Napapijri	No (4) Yes (4)	Negative Disappointment (3) Weirdness (1) Betrayal (1) Being lied to (1)	Positive Feeling even better (2) Feeling good (2) Happiness from not being lied to (2)
		Neutral Indifference (3) Surprise (2) Confusion (2)	Neutral Indifference (2)
Haier	No (2) Yes (6)	Negative Disappointment (3) Betrayal (2) Wrongful misleading (1) Uncertainness (1)	Positive Proud that instincts were right (2) Feeling good (2) Happy (1) Trusting (1) Satisfied (1)
		Neutral Indifference (3)	Neutral Indifference (3)

		Sole focus on quality, not COO (1)	
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Despite the variance in pre-purchase checking of the COO for the product types, recurrent themes can be identified. No positive feelings were reported from misclassification, nor negative feelings from correct classifications. Around half of the participants reported to be indifferent to the topic, but for the ones that weren't, the results indicate two things: 1) If not neutral, the feelings from misclassifying COOs are negative, such as feelings of betrayal, disappointment, being lied to or misled. 2) If not neutral, the feelings from a good originating from the initially perceived COO are positive, such as feelings of generally feeling good, happy, or proud of the correct classification. Country image didn't seem to play a part, like suggested by Cakici & Shukla (2017). Almost all of the neutral feelings reported were indifference. This suggests that misclassifications ought to be avoided: is the consumer isn't indifferent to the topic, there are only losses to be had from misclassification, and positive effects to be had from correct associations.

4.1.2. Consumer ethnocentrism

While the degree to which the participants preferred buying domestic in the product examples varied, with domestics being preferred in food, foreigners in household appliances and clothing falling in between, the feelings from COO misclassification don't appear to vary based on the preferences. Additionally, consumers with similar scores on ethnocentrism (#6 and #8, both low), reported vastly different feelings with #6 being mostly indifferent to the topic and #8 feeling strongly about COO misclassification.

4.1.3. Consumer expertise

No positive effects on feelings after misclassification were reported to happen due to high or low expertise in the product category on any of the product examples. Around half of the participants reported their expertise to have no effect, and around half reported negative effects on feelings. Both in food and clothing, experts reported that they “should have known” (#7 and #4) that the products don’t originate from the associated COOs, causing negative feelings like disappointment. One participant reported the effect to be adverse, but only in an interview scenario and that he wouldn’t probably notice a conscious change in real life (#5). In household appliances, two participants (#1 and #8, expert and non-expert) noted that misclassification would negatively affect their approach to the brand in the future. The results suggest once that if a consumer feels like COO misclassification does impact their feelings, the feelings, no matter the level of expertise in the product category, are negative.

4.1.4. High-involvement vs. Low-involvement decisions

Buying something expensive was most often reported as a situation in which participants would elaborate on COOs more. In general, the feelings reported from misclassification don’t vary much between the differently priced products. The only mention of price as a factor is from participant #7, who reported that in the case of the most expensive good, the dishwasher, the price is a cause for more negative feelings due to her own expertise in the product category. From this study, no conclusions can be made on the debated effects of high-involvement vs. low-involvement decisions in COO effects.

4.1.5. Hedonic vs. utilitarian products

Product type was mentioned the most as a variable affecting the participants’ COO elaboration amount. In food products and Dolmio, participants reported that they’d feel that the product doesn’t taste as good after finding out that Italy is not the actual COO of

the good (#3, #5, #8), emphasizing the hedonic qualities of the product. In the case of Napapijri, participants noted that they would not feel differently about the quality and the warmth of the jacket even when they had misclassified the COO (#3, #4, #5, #8), emphasizing the utilitarian qualities of the good. With the dishwasher, nearly all the comments were about the functional or the utilitarian qualities of the dishwasher (#3, #5, #6, #8), with participant #5 encapsulating the common thoughts of the participants:

“If the pipes go the right way as in Finland, I don’t think the actual COO matters.”

In conclusion, the participants weighed the hedonic and utilitarian functions of the goods differently, as can be expected, but the varying emphasis didn’t seem to have an effect in their feelings from misclassification but in one example: Haier. Even then the, feelings were both neutral in the case of misclassifying the COO (#1) or positive is the good was from the misclassified COO (#7). Based on this study, no conclusions can be made on how the metrics of hedonism or utilitarianism of a good affect the feelings consumers have after misclassifying a good’s COO.

4.2. Thoughts on foreign branding & strategies

4.2.1. Localization

Localization of product offerings was seen as a good business practice, with no participants reporting negative thoughts about the practice. Even though one participant wasn’t sure of how successful these kind of strategies can be (#4), localization is thought of as a good business practice that increases value for both customers and the company.

4.2.2. Not interfering with COO misclassification

In cases of firms not interfering with their COO being commonly misclassified, the majority of respondents would prefer to know the actual COO of the company (#1, #2, #3, #6, #7), with some opining that a firm should take active measures to correct misclassifications, even if they aren't inherently caused by the firm's actions (#1, #3, #7). Participants #5 and #8 thought that if the blame from COO misclassifications can't be attributed to the firm, they wouldn't expect the firm to take active measures to correct consumers. One participant (#4) thought positively of the practice, as long as the association is positive. However, participants reported once again feelings of betrayal (#1), misleading (#2, #6), and being lied to (#7), so it might seem like a good idea to take active, COO corrective measures even if some consumers don't deem it necessary.

4.2.3. Foreign branding

Foreign branding, defined as "making products seem as if originating from another country" for making the concept easier to grasp, was seen mostly negatively, with participants reporting thought such as the practice being misleading (#2, #3), unethical, (#3), deceiving or lying (#5, #7, #8). From the neutral participants, #5 mentioned that

"As a consumer I'm not too happy about that they want to deceive me, as a business student, that's genius"

One participant (#4), explained her positive approach to both foreign branding and not interfering with misclassification by noting that the strategies are very smart, as long as consumers don't notice them being done. This would strengthen the point of Aichner et al (2017) in the sense that consumers finding out about COO misclassification can be detrimental for brands.

As far as methods go, the use of national flags of other countries was mentioned as being unacceptable (#1, #2, #3, #4, #6, #7, #8), along with national symbols (#4 and #8). Other, perhaps less explicit associative methods such as language (#2, #6, #7), national

landscapes (#2, #7) and others (#4) were seen as acceptable when utilizing foreign branding.

Foreign branding was perceived to become more prevalent in the future, but many participants added seemingly negative comments to the increasing trend, such as the practice being cheating (#1), misleading (#3), having a negative effect (#7) and hopefully being put to a stop (#8). Availability of information (#4) and education (#7) were seen as methods to cognitively resist the effects of foreign branding, and participant #6 noted that the practice will increase as long as it's accepted by the general population and lawmakers. Despite the majority of participants leaning towards a negative view of foreign branding, we must remember that the real-life response to finding out about COO misclassification can be both negative and indifferent. For the indifferent segment, foreign branding can very well remain a functioning marketing strategy, even if their thinking of the topic on a conceptual level is cautious.

4.3. Limitations of the study

This study does not go into depth about the different variables identified as affecting consumers' COO elaboration. The brand relationships the participants had with the brands of the product examples used might have had an effect on the results, as well as the framing of foreign brand questions following right after a series of questions on almost uniformly COO misclassified product examples.

The convenience sample of the participants was an all-business-student one from the same university, studying on the same campus. For future reference, conducting consumer interviews for better applicability to greater populations of young consumers would require more variety in the interview participants, mainly in the areas of different socio-economic situations and background, as well as levels of education. As they stand now, the results of this study are not applicable to large pON

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1. Main findings

Finding out about COO misclassification has been found to have adverse effects on product evaluations. This study attempted to find out the feelings young consumers have after being informed of their misclassification of goods' COOs and the thoughts and ideas they have about the practice of foreign branding.

The feelings the participants of the study reported to have fell into two categories: neutral or negative. The amount that consumers engage in COO elaboration varies greatly based on demographics, ethnocentrism, expertise, level of involvement in the decision and the product type. For some participants, the reported COO effects were insignificant as well as their feelings after cases of COO misclassification. For the ones that weren't indifferent to the situations, however, the feelings associated with misclassifying COOs were those of betrayal, disappointment, being misled and being lied to. Conversely, the feelings associated with finding out about correctly classifying goods' COOs were either neutral or positive. Either way, the results indicate both detrimental effects of COO misclassification and positive effects of correct COO classification.

The participants expressed thoughts of foreign branding becoming an increasingly prevalent business strategy in the future, but this was viewed mostly negatively or neutrally. Even the participant having a positive approach to foreign branding noted that the practice is successful only until consumers find out about it.

5.2. Implications for international business and marketing

The participants, young consumers all, approached the issues of both COO misclassification and foreign branding with either critique or indifference, and the few positive approaches additionally noted the dependence of consumer being unaware of such practices being utilized for them to work. If a sustainable foreign branding strategy, that is, one that can't be identified by consumers, can't be conducted, businesspeople and marketers alike are better off promoting accurate COO recognition among consumers

due to the positive feelings associated with accurate COO recognition. Misclassifying the COO can cause negative feelings about not only the product in question but the brand in general.

Marketers have, for years, identified the impact that a positive COO association can have on the success of a good, but means have to be developed to either avoid consumers noticing these practices or avoiding foreign branding and COO misclassification altogether. From these two alternatives, for foreign branding remains the danger of the misclassification being found out, and for promoting accurate COO recognition remains the danger of missing out on the positive effects of foreign branding on the success of goods being marketed.

5.3. Implications for policy making

The real-life responses to finding out about COO misclassification taken aside, the majority of participants clearly indicated that the use of national flags of other countries, as an example, is unacceptable. Additionally, many expressed concern over increasing foreign branding and some hoped for the practice to be put to a stop. When asked about if a line should be drawn over what methods are acceptable and what aren't, the responses varied from unsure to "If one method is acceptable for one firm, all methods should be acceptable for all firms". On a conceptual level, the participants' concern over foreign branding affecting less-educated consumers more and flat-out deeming the practice unethical is something that might want to be considered in legislation concerning marketing.

5.4. Implications for further research

Identifying the consumer reaction to finding out that the good being marketed is not from the naturally associated COO is key. Further research is required in what characteristics of product categories, brands and consumer segments and demographics effect and in what way to the manner in which news about misclassification might be taken. Another avenue for research is best marketing practices for promoting accurate COO recognition.

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Appendices

1. Respondent demographics

Age:

Gender:

Occupation:

Nationality:

Do you currently live, or have you lived abroad (in a country other than your home country)?:

In what languages would you say you know the basics in?

Appendix 1.

▲ 3. Interview

▲ Warm-up questions

1. Is the country-of-origin of goods relevant for you?
2. How much do you tend to elaborate on countries-of-origin?
3. What affects your likeliness to think about a good's country-of-origin? I.e. product type, product expertise, something else?
4. What does country-of-origin mean for you?
5. Do you think you are able to accurately recognize goods' countries-of-origin?
6. Please name 3 countries you perceive as "good reputations COOs" and 3 countries you perceive as "bad reputation COOs"

Appendix 2.

Misclassification questions

3 examples, same set of questions for each

In the order of figure 1 + questions, figure 2 + questions, figure 3+ questions

(Example 1; buying a can of pasta sauce) You've decided to make yourself pasta for dinner, and are purchasing a ready-made pasta Bolognese tomato sauce. In the supermarket, you are presented with this information about the brand Dolmio's product, Dolmio Sauce for Bolognese Original. You decide to purchase the product for a price of 2€.

(Example 2; buying a fashion product) You've decided to buy yourself a new, high-quality winter jacket. In a clothing store, you're presented with the following information about the brand Napapijri's product, Rainforest Winter jacket. You decide to purchase the product for a price of 300€.

(Example 3; buying a dishwasher) You've decided to invest in a new dishwasher. In an appliance store, you're presented with the following information about the brand Haier's product, Haier 60cm freestanding dishwasher. You decide to purchase the product for a price of 700€.

7. Do you know this brand?
8. What country do you associate the brand with?
9. Do you usually check the COO of goods such as X?

Disclose actual COO of good discussed

10. How do you think it would make you feel if you found out that you have misclassified the country-of-origin of a good like X?
 - 9.1 Do you think you would feel differently if the product was actually from the COO you associated it with?
 - 9.2 On a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 being the very much and 1 not at all, how would you rate your degree of preferring local (*insert product type based on example being discussed*) goods to domestic? Are there specific reasons for why you answered X?
 - 9.3 Would the level of familiarity you have with the brand or the product category affect your feelings? *Continue with*
Can you explain that?

Appendix 3.

What do you think about foreign branding

10. Describe your feelings about companies specializing their products to fit local tastes, without necessarily using local manufacturing or ingredients, such as McDonald's with their Rye bread hamburger
11. What do you think about companies knowingly letting consumers misclassify their COO and not interfering, such as with Nokia and consumers associating them with Japan?
12. What do you think about companies knowingly specializing their products and marketing to make their products seem like they originate from another country?
13. Do you think there's a line that companies shouldn't cross if they decide to opt for foreign branding as a strategy?
14. Foreign branding can be done in multiple ways. Brands can include the COO in the company's or the good's name, such as with Air America; including typical COO words in the company's or the good's name, such as with Novo Nordisk; using typical COO language, such as with Volkswagen and "Das Auto"; using COO flags and/or national symbols; and using COO landscapes or famous buildings. Do you think there are differences in what methods are more or less acceptable than others? Can you explain why?
15. In the light of an ever-globalizing world and the increasing availability of information, what do you think about the future of foreign branding?
16. If you have something coming to your mind, can you describe an experience you've had with foreign branding or misclassification?
17. How often do you usually think about the topics discussed in this interview?
18. Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix 4.



The Italian favourite. A careful balance of ripe tomatoes, basilico fresco and a pinch of herbs and spices. It's easy to enjoy the taste of today's Italy with Dolmio.

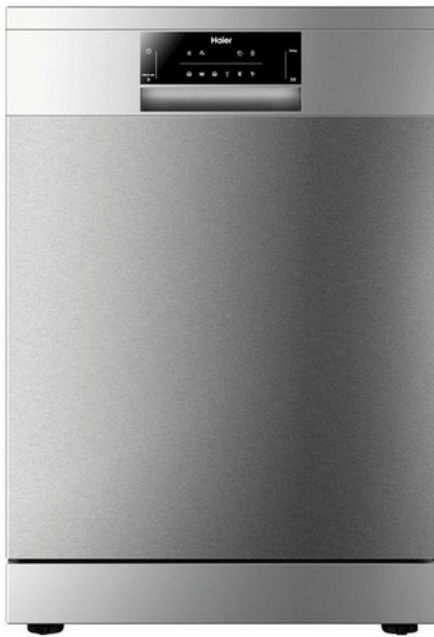
Appendix 5.



Maintain comfort and style on your rugged adventures with this iconic Rainforest winter pullover jacket, ideally designed for mild winter weather, it is perfectly suited for active and dynamic lifestyles. Complete with breathable, waterproof technology, this fully quilted anorak features an adjustable hood and spacious kangaroo pocket.

Appendix 6.

Haier



HDW15G3X

Silver

15 Place Setting

Key Features

Long lasting Anti-Bacterial Treated (ABT) door seal and filter
Electronic, Sensor Touch, LED control panel
Easy Lift height adjustable upper basket
Delay start function (1-24 hrs)

Dimensions

H 850 x W 598 x D 598

Appendix 7.