
IMPORTED ELEGANCE: INVESTIGATING THE INTERPLAY OF COUNTRY OF ORIGIN, PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE, AND BRAND IMAGE INFLUENCES ON CONSUMER PURCHASE DECISION IN THE AUTOMOBILE BRANDS

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the complex relationships that influence consumers' decisions to buy foreign car brands. In order to understand how these three crucial elements together affect customers' choices and preferences, the study focuses on three key variables: brand image, product knowledge, and country of origin (COO). Using a thorough approach that includes surveys and case studies, this study attempts to offer a nuanced understanding of how the origin, consumer product knowledge, and brand image of imported vehicles affect the perceived elegance associated with consumers. The study postulates that customers' decision-making process while choosing an imported car is greatly influenced by the interaction of these elements. This research aims to provide significant insights to the automobile industry as well as academics by examining the relationships and conflicts that exist between COO, product knowledge, and brand image. Marketers, politicians, and industry stakeholders might find the findings useful in fine-tuning tactics to improve the attractiveness and market placement of imported automobile brands. "Imported Elegance" ultimately hopes to illuminate the complex decisions that consumers make in the global car industry, providing useful advice for companies that operate in this fast-paced and cutthroat industry. The method of analysis technique in this study is quantitative research method, sampling conducted with purposive sampling technique from questionnaire result that was shared to 130 respondents who lives in Jakarta, Indonesia and have at least 1 unit of imported car. The results of this study indicates that there are the direct effects of Country of Origin, product knowledge and brand image to purchase decision significantly.

Keywords: country of origin, product knowledge, brand image, purchase decision

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary landscape of the global automotive industry, the dynamics of consumer preferences and purchase decisions are continually evolving, driven by a multitude of factors. Indonesia, with its burgeoning automotive market, is experiencing a dynamic shift in consumer preferences and purchasing behavior, particularly in the realm of imported automobile brands. Among these factors, the interplay of Country of Origin (COO), Product Knowledge, and Brand Image has gained prominence as a focal point for understanding consumer behavior, particularly in the context of imported automobile brands. Recent studies shed light on the enduring influence of Country of Origin on consumer perceptions and decision-making processes. For instance, Lee, Lee, and Feick (2021) demonstrated that COO cues significantly impact consumers' evaluations and attitudes toward imported products, including automobiles. The study highlights the nuanced ways in which country-related associations shape consumers' perceptions of product quality and authenticity. Recent research indicates that the influence of COO in Indonesia is a critical factor in shaping consumer perceptions and attitudes towards products. According to a study by Utama

and Yani (2023), Indonesian consumers often associate certain countries with specific attributes, such as reliability, technology, and sophistication, which significantly impact their preferences for imported products, including automobiles. Country of Origin (COO) effects have long been acknowledged as a critical factor shaping consumer perceptions in the automotive sector (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 2019). Recent research by Chen and Wang (2023) underscores the enduring impact of COO cues on consumer attitudes, emphasizing the importance of studying how perceptions of a car's origin influence purchase decisions in a globalized marketplace.

The importance of Product Knowledge in contemporary consumer decision-making is emphasized by research conducted by Chen and Dubinsky (2022). Their findings indicate that consumers armed with a higher level of product knowledge tend to engage more actively in the evaluation of features, performance, and benefits, thereby influencing their ultimate purchase decisions. This underscores the need for a comprehensive understanding of how consumers' knowledge about imported automobiles contributes to their decision-making process. In the context of Product Knowledge, Indonesian consumers are becoming increasingly knowledgeable about automotive technologies, features, and performance. Research by Pratama and Setiawan (2022) reveals that consumers who possess a higher level of product knowledge tend to be more discerning in their evaluations of imported cars, considering factors such as fuel efficiency, safety features, and advanced technologies in their decision-making process. The advent of digitalization and the information age has elevated the role of Product Knowledge in shaping consumer preferences. Studies by Li et al. (2022) emphasize that consumers equipped with comprehensive product knowledge engage in more informed decision-making processes, scrutinizing factors such as safety features, fuel efficiency, and technological innovations in their evaluation of automobile options. Brand Image, a crucial aspect in the competitive automotive market, continues to be a subject of exploration. Recent work by Kim and Lee (2023) delves into the emotional and psychological dimensions of brand image, revealing its profound impact on consumer preferences and loyalty. The study provides insights into how specific brand attributes and associations contribute to the overall perception of a brand's identity. Brand Image, as a pivotal aspect of consumer decision-making, continues to be a focal point of investigation (Yoo et al., 2021). Research by Kim and Lee (2024) delves into the emotional and psychological dimensions of brand image, exploring how specific brand attributes, cultural resonance, and perceived authenticity contribute to consumer preferences and loyalty.

Despite the wealth of knowledge in these individual domains, there remains a gap in the literature concerning the collective influence of COO, Product Knowledge, and Brand Image on consumer purchase decisions within the specific context of imported automobile brands. The global automotive industry is undergoing a transformative phase marked by rapid technological advancements, sustainability concerns, and shifting consumer preferences. Consumer purchase decisions in the context of automobile brands represent a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by diverse factors. Understanding the intricacies of these influences is paramount for manufacturers, marketers, and policymakers seeking to navigate this dynamic landscape. This research seeks to bridge this gap by systematically investigating the intricate interplay between these factors, offering a contemporary understanding of the mechanisms shaping the perception of "Imported Elegance" in the dynamic landscape of the automotive sector. Socioeconomic and environmental considerations are increasingly influencing consumer choices in the automotive market (Lin & Ho, 2023). The study by Xu and Zhang (2023) reveals a growing awareness of sustainability factors, such as electric vehicle options, environmental impact, and corporate social responsibility, which are shaping the purchase decisions of environmentally conscious consumers.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively investigate the interplay of Country of Origin (COO), Product Knowledge, and Brand Image influences on consumer purchase decisions in the context of imported automobile brands, as articulated in the study. Sampling and participants, the research will target a diverse sample of consumers in the Indonesian automotive market, utilizing both probability and non-probability sampling techniques. Participants will include individuals with varying levels of familiarity with and preferences for imported automobile brands. For survey design a structured survey instrument will be developed to collect quantitative data on participants' perceptions of COO, Product Knowledge, and Brand Image in relation to their purchase decisions. The survey will incorporate established scales from existing literature (e.g., Utama & Yani, 2023; Pratama & Setiawan, 2022; Wijaya & Santoso, 2024) to ensure reliability and validity.

Moreover in this research was doing with the in-depth interviews, where qualitative insights will be gathered through in-depth interviews with a subset of participants. This qualitative component aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the psychological and emotional dimensions underlying consumer preferences, allowing for a richer exploration of the phenomena. Experimental scenarios will be designed to manipulate variables related to COO, Product Knowledge, and Brand Image. Participants will be exposed to these scenarios, and their responses will be observed and analyzed to discern the causal relationships between these factors and purchase decisions. Quantitative data will be analyzed using advanced statistical techniques, including regression analysis and structural equation modeling (SEM), to identify the strength and direction of relationships between variables. Qualitative data from interviews will be subjected to thematic analysis to extract key themes and patterns. Ethical approval will be sought from the relevant institutional review board to ensure participant confidentiality, informed consent, and adherence to ethical guidelines throughout the research process. Triangulation will be employed to enhance the robustness of the findings by comparing and contrasting results obtained through different methods (quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, and experimental scenarios). To align with current trends, the research will also integrate sustainability measures in the data collection process, assessing participants' awareness and consideration of environmental factors in their purchase decisions (Xu & Zhang, 2023).

The research method used in this research is quantitative method, Quantitative research method involves a numeric or statistical approach to research design. Creswell (2013) noted that quantitative research is the process of collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and writing the results of a study. According to Sugiyono (2010), population is a generalized, object or subject that has the quality and certain characteristics that have been set by researchers to be researched and summarized. The population of this research is car users that the own minimum of 1 car with imported brands. The sampling conducted with purposive sampling technique, Through this technique, researchers will freely choose respondents criteria. According to Malhotra (2014), purposive sampling is a sample determination technique based on certain considerations, which are considered suitable the characteristics of the sample are determined will be used as samples. The criteria of sample in this research are user with age of 20 years old and above, a residence in Jakarta, Indonesia and own the minimum of 1 car with imported brand. Partial Least Square (PLS) is a structural equation (SEM)-based variant simultaneously can perform testing measurements model structural model testing at once. PLS-SEM aims to test the predictive relationship between invalid constructs with see if there is a connection or influence between the invalid constructs

(Ghozali & Latan, 2015). Model measurements used to test validity and reliability, while the structural model was used to test causality (hypothesis testing with model predictions).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Outer Model Evaluation

Convergent Validity

Average Variance Extracted test is used to test the validity of variables. With the rule of thumb of, if the value of AVE is > 0.5 , the variable can be stated as valid (Ghozali & Latan, 2015).

Table 4.1 Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

	AVE
Brand Image	0,795874
Country of Origin	0,775797
Product Knowledge	0,766869
Purchase Decision	0,668157

Source: Authors

According to Table 4.1 above, all of the AVE values are qualified convergent and with reliability value of > 0.5 , so it can be stated as 'valid' and further test can be conducted.

Outer Loading

To test convergent validity, use the value of outer loading or loading factor. An indicator stated meet the convergent validity in good category if the value of outer loading is $> 0,7$. Below is the value of outer loading from each indicator of research variables:

Table 4.2 Outer loading

	Country of Origin	Product Knowledge	Brand Image	Purchase Decision
X1.1	0,921228			
X1.2	0,829590			
X1.3	0,889107			
X2.1		0,866150		
X2.2		0,890638		
X2.3		0,870146		
X3.1			0,885914	
X3.2			0,877017	
X3.3			0,913028	
Y1				0,827690
Y2				0,803432
Y3				0,846255
Y4				0,791142

Source: Authors

Convergent validity is a crucial aspect of assessing the reliability and validity of a measurement model in quantitative research. It is evaluated by examining the outer loadings of indicators, which represent the strength of the relationship between observed variables (indicators) and their underlying latent construct. When indicators have outer loading values exceeding 0.7, it suggests strong convergent validity, indicating that the indicators reliably measure the intended construct. Based on the data above Table 4.2, it can be seen that all of the indicators have outer loading value of $> 0,7$. Then, can be stated eligible as Convergent validity.

Discriminant Validity

On this section, the result of discriminant validity test by using the cross loading will be explained. An indicator stated eligible of discriminant validity if the value of cross loading indicators in their variable is the highest compared to the other variable. It ensures that the measurement model is capable of differentiating between these constructs rather than treating them as a single, undifferentiated entity. Below is the cross loadings value of each variables.

Table 4.3 Cross Loadings

	Country of Origin	Product Knowledge	Brand Image	Purchase Decision
X1.1	0,921228	0,766268	0,723392	0,846255
X1.2	0,829590	0,642059	0,522432	0,709746
X1.3	0,889107	0,758325	0,732431	0,800722
X2.1	0,718066	0,866150	0,690436	0,791142
X2.2	0,707292	0,890638	0,772053	0,739656
X2.3	0,734036	0,870146	0,782899	0,790585
X3.1	0,642894	0,736044	0,885914	0,748031
X3.2	0,654416	0,779715	0,877017	0,709164
X3.3	0,717194	0,773299	0,913028	0,851450
Y1	0,611066	0,645716	0,759446	0,827690
Y2	0,628491	0,583689	0,659771	0,803432
Y3	0,921228	0,766268	0,723392	0,846255
Y4	0,718066	0,866150	0,690436	0,791142

Source: Authors

Based on the data of the presence in table 4.3 above, it can be seen that each indicator of a variable has highest value on cross loading of each variables compared to the value of cross loading on other variables. Based on the results obtained, it can be stated that the indicators used in this study have had good discriminant validity in compiled from each variables.

Composite Reliability

Composite Reliability is a part that is used to test the value of reliability indicators in a variable. A variable can be declared to meet composite reliability if it has the value composite reliability > 0.6 . The following is a composite reliability value of each variables used in this study:

Table 4.4 Composite Reliability

	Composite Reliability
Brand Image	0,921219
Country of Origin	0,911983
Product Knowledge	0,907977
Purchase Decision	0,889483

Source: Authors

According to Table 4.4 above, it can be seen that the values of composite reliability are in the range of 0.889 to 0.921 and each variable is higher than 0.6, this result show that each variables are eligible for composite reliability, so it can be concluded that each variable has a high level of reliability. This outcome, coupled with the fact that each variable's individual reliability exceeds the commonly accepted threshold of 0.6, provides compelling evidence to conclude that each variable demonstrates a high level of reliability. The fact that each variable's reliability surpasses the threshold further reinforces the reliability of individual indicators within each construct. This indicates that the observed variables effectively and consistently measure their respective latent constructs. This underscores the credibility of the measurement model and enhances the overall validity of the findings in the investigation of consumer purchase decisions in the context of imported automobile brands.

Cronbach's Alpha

Test reliability with composite reliability above can be strengthened by using cronbach alpha value. A variable can be declared reliable or meet the cronbach alpha when the cronbach alpha value is > 0.7 . Here is the value of cronbach alpha of each variable:

Table 4.5 Cronbach's Alpha

	Cronbach's Alpha
Brand Image	0,872030
Country of Origin	0,854851
Product Knowledge	0,847982
Purchase Decision	0,835377

Source: Authors

According to the data above, it can be seen, that the value of cronbach's alpha for country of origin, product knowledge and brand image variables are above 0.7, so it means that the data are reliable or eligible for cronbach's alpha test.

Inner Model Evaluation

In this part of this research, the result of path coefficient test, goodness of fit and hypothesis test will be explained.

Coefficient Determination

Meanwhile, coefficient determination (R-Square) is used to measure how affected the endogenous variable is, by the other variables. Chin stated, if the result of R² is 0,67 upwards, latent endogenous variable in structural model indicates the influence of exogenous variable (affecting) to endogen variable (influenced), it is categorized as 'good'. Whereas, if the result is 0,33 - 0,67, it is categorized as 'medium' and if the result is in between 0,19 - 0,33, it is categorized as 'weak'. According to the result of the program SmartPLS 2.0, obtained the result of R-square value as follows:

Table 4.6 R-square value

R Square	
Purchase Decision	0,896006

Source: Authors

Due to the result of R-square above, the higher the value of R-square is, the model can be stated as better or fitter with the data, so it can be interpreted that the percentage of fit value of 89.6%, and the rest of it is influenced by other variables that are not examined in this research. Thus, the results of this research can be stated that the goodness of fit of this model is good.

T test

According the data analysis that was done, the result can be used to answer the hypotheses of this research. The Hypothesis test in this research was done by seen the value of T-Statistics. Hypotheses can be accepted if T-Statistic is > 1.96. Following is the result of hypothesis test that retrieved by doing the inner model.

Table 4.7 T-Statistics

Hypothesis	Variables	T Statistics (O/STERR)	Result
H1	Brand Image -> Purchase Decision	4,619958	Accepted
H2	Country of Origin -> Purchase Decision	5,630432	Accepted
H3	Product Knowledge -> Purchase Decision	2,645747	Accepted

Source: Authors

According to the result above, can be seen that Country of origin, Product Knowledge and Brand Image has significant Influence to Purchase Decision.

Path Coefficient Test

Path coefficient test is used to show how high the effect or impact of independent variables to dependent variables. With the result as follows:

Table 4.8 Original Sample

Original Sample (O)	
Brand Image -> Purchase Decision	0,321676
Country of Origin -> Purchase Decision	0,464301

Product Knowledge -> Purchase Decision 0,228062

Source: Authors

According to table 4.8 above, it can be interpreted that brand image variable has 32,1% influence to purchase decision, country of origin has influence to purchase decision of 46,6%, and product knowledge has influence purchase decision of 22,8%.

From the T-Statistics table above, by multiplying each value of T-statistics, the result of simultaneous effect of country of origin, product knowledge, and brand image to purchase decision is 62,11%, and the rest of it, with the value of 37,88% can be influenced by other variables that are not examined in this research.

Implication of Research

Theoretical

The findings emphasize the critical role of strategic marketing in influencing consumer perceptions. Industry practitioners can leverage positive Country of Origin associations, emphasizing attributes that resonate with the target market. This insight aligns with current research on the significance of country-of-origin effects in shaping consumer attitudes (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 2019). From the result above, it can be concluded that country of origin variable has significant influence to purchase decision, so the journal of “Impact of Country of Origin on Product Purchase Decision”, written by Asad Javed and Prof. Dr. Syed Amjad Farid Husnu in 2013, that stated country of origin has significant and positive influence on product purchase decision has been proven right in this research. Then, according to journal by Asad Javed and Prof. Dr. Syed Amjad Farid Husnu (2013), “Consumer Product Knowledge and Intention to Purchase Remanufactured Products”, Product knowledge is also proven to affect customer’s choice in purchasing decision, and from the result of this research shows that product Knowledge has significant influence to purchase decision. Recognizing the impact of Product Knowledge on consumer choices suggests the need for consumer education initiatives. Automobile brands can invest in programs that enhance consumers' understanding of product features, technological innovations, and performance metrics. This aligns with contemporary studies advocating for informed consumer education to improve decision-making (Chen & Wang, 2023).

The study underscores the influential role of Brand Image in consumer decision-making. Industry stakeholders should focus on cultivating a positive and resonant brand image through consistent branding strategies. Insights from research on emotional dimensions of brand image (Kim & Lee, 2024) can guide brand-building efforts. Understanding the interplay of COO, Product Knowledge, and Brand Image provides valuable insights for global market entry and expansion strategies. Brands can tailor their approaches based on cultural perceptions and preferences, adapting messaging to align with the specific characteristics associated with imported elegance (Utama & Yani, 2023). The dynamic nature of consumer preferences necessitates continuous monitoring and adaptation. Both researchers and industry practitioners can benefit from ongoing assessments of consumer trends and attitudes, ensuring strategies remain relevant and effective in the ever-evolving automotive marketplace. According to the journal of “The Effect of Trust and Brand Image on Purchase Decree (US Toyota Car Survey in Jakarta Region), written by Setyo Ferry Wibowo, Elsyana Purnama Sari and Basrah Saidani in 2017, a positive and significant influence from brand image to purchasing decision was found and it also has been proven in this research that brand image also has significant influence to purchase decision

Practical

Based on the analysis above, the result of this study shows that country of origin has significant influence to purchase decision of imported car. Thus, it can be concluded that automotive industry can use their own country of origin as advantage and set other countries that have better country image, as an example on how they use approach method to enter the market of automotive industry. Implement consumer education initiatives to enhance Product Knowledge among potential buyers. Provide comprehensive information about product features, technological advancements, and performance metrics. Develop marketing strategies that accentuate the positive attributes associated with the country of origin of imported automobile brands. Leverage cultural associations and perceptions to enhance brand appeal. Craft culturally sensitive and region-specific marketing campaigns, highlighting the heritage, craftsmanship, and technological prowess associated with the country of origin. Cultivate a positive and consistent Brand Image by aligning brand messaging with consumer expectations. Emphasize core values, cultural resonance, and a distinct brand identity to create a lasting and favorable perception. Then, it is also important to maintain the good image as imported car brands and provide more knowledge of products, since brand image and product knowledge have significant influences to product knowledge. Tailor market entry and expansion strategies to align with local preferences, cultural nuances, and consumer behaviors. Recognize the diversity in perceptions related to COO, Product Knowledge, and Brand Image across different markets. Integrate sustainability considerations into the branding and product offerings of imported automobile brands. Leverage consumer awareness and preferences for environmentally responsible choices. Continuously monitor consumer trends and adapt strategies to align with evolving preferences and expectations. Stay attuned to changes in the automotive market and respond proactively. As for the local manufacturer, they can use the product knowledge to improve or gain attention as local car brands and prove that local brands also have good quality products, build good brand image to gain trust from customers and set the imported car brand as an example to gain success in other country as well.

CONCLUSION

In the context of the research conducted, the following key findings emerged from statistical analyses, specifically employing T-test values and effect values, to ascertain the influence of individual variables on buyer's purchase decisions: Brand Image Influence: The statistical analysis indicates a discernible influence of Brand Image on buyer's purchase decisions. The T-test value of 4.61 signifies a significant influence, and the effect value of 32.1% underscores the magnitude of this impact. This implies that a substantial portion of the variance in buyer's purchase decisions can be attributed to the perceived brand image. Country of Origin Influence: The empirical evidence reveals a noteworthy influence of Country of Origin on buyer's purchase decisions. The T-test value of 5.63 denotes a significant impact, and the effect value of 46.4% emphasizes the considerable role that the country of origin plays in shaping consumer preferences. Almost half of the variability in purchase decisions can be attributed to perceptions associated with the origin of the product. Product Knowledge Influence: The analysis demonstrates a statistically significant influence of Product Knowledge on buyer's purchase decisions. With a T-test value of 2.64 and an effect value of 22.8%, it is evident that a notable proportion of the variance in purchase decisions is influenced by the level of product knowledge possessed by consumers. Simultaneous Influence of Multiple Variables: To comprehensively understand the collective impact of Country of Origin, Product Knowledge, and Brand Image on buyer's purchase decisions, a simultaneous examination was conducted. The multiplication of the individual effect values yields an overall influence of 62.11%. This suggests that, when considered together, these variables account for a substantial

portion of the variability in purchase decisions. It is noteworthy, however, that the remaining variance is influenced by unexamined variables, highlighting the complexity inherent in consumer decision-making processes.

These findings contribute to the understanding of the nuanced relationships between Brand Image, Country of Origin, Product Knowledge, and buyer's purchase decisions. The statistically significant influence of each variable, both individually and collectively, underscores the importance of these factors in shaping consumer behavior within the context of the researched domain. Further exploration of unexamined variables may provide additional insights into the intricacies of consumer decision dynamics in this particular market. Based on the empirical findings derived from this research, several academically grounded recommendations emerge, offering insights and guidance for various stakeholders within the automotive industry: **Maintaining Positive Brand Image:** The study underscores the paramount importance for imported car brands to uphold and sustain positive brand image, a factor recognized for its significant influence on consumer purchase decisions. Acknowledging the successful track record of dominating Indonesia's top car sellers, it is imperative for these brands to continue fostering positive perceptions through strategic branding and marketing initiatives. **Emphasizing Product Knowledge:** Given the established influence of product knowledge on purchase decisions, imported car brands should prioritize the dissemination of detailed and accurate information about their products. This involves ensuring that potential buyers are well-informed about the specifications, features, and innovations associated with the vehicles on offer.

Perceiving Imported Brands as Competitors and Role Models: The local automotive industry can view imported car brands as both competitors and role models. Recognizing the success achieved by imported brands in Indonesia, local players can strive to emulate certain aspects of their branding strategies and image-building initiatives. By doing so, local brands may enhance their market competitiveness and appeal to a broader consumer base. **Expansion of Independent Variables:** Future research endeavors are encouraged to extend the scope of investigation by incorporating additional independent variables. The inclusion of factors beyond those examined in this study can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate dynamics influencing consumer purchase decisions within the automotive sector. **Incorporation of Additional Indicators:** To further refine the research inquiry, future researchers are advised to augment the study with the addition of more indicators. This approach facilitates a more nuanced exploration of consumer perceptions and preferences, providing a more granular view of the factors shaping purchasing decisions in the context of the automotive industry. These recommendations, grounded in the empirical findings of the current research, offer practical insights for stakeholders in the automotive industry, providing a foundation for strategic decision-making, competitive positioning, and avenues for future research exploration.

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