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## **Country-of-Origin Influence on Quality Perception of Products Sold in GCC Countries: A Case Study**

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### Abstract

This paper attempts to test the importance of country of origin in influencing the quality perception of products by GCC consumes.

### Keywords

Country, Origin, Influence, Quality, Perception, Products, Sold, GCC, Countries, Case, Study

### Disciplines

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## Country-of-Origin Influence on Quality Perception of Products Sold in GCC Countries: A Case Study

Mokhtar M. Metwally

### Abstract

*This paper attempts to test the importance of country of origin in influencing the quality perception of products purchased by GCC consumers. A sample of 139 consumers in the Emirate of Dubai in UAE was analyzed to find out consumers' perception of seven product lines, sold by eight countries. Multiple regression analysis results suggest that Dubai consumers' preferences focus upon a limited number of products produced by various countries*

### Introduction

Companies contemplating global marketing would find that markets in the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), namely Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are less risky than many other markets. The GCC countries have very low debt, inflation and unemployment. They enjoy stable currencies, impose very low tariffs (At the most 5% on any imported product), no trade barriers or exchange controls and though raw-material exporting economies, have large segments of high-income consumers who can afford to purchase expensive products.

However, demand for many consumer products, particularly expensive brands has been subject to substantial fluctuations over the last few years. This may be due to major forces and events in the buyer's environment (economic, technological, political and cultural) as well as to consumers' response to various marketing stimuli the marketing organization might use.

GCC countries have many common traits and behaviors. However, the buyers' behavior is influenced by so many factors. Several models of the consumer buying process have been developed by marketing scholars. The most prominent models are those by Nicosia (1966), Howard and Sheth (1969), Bettman (1979), Engel, Blackwell and Miniard (1986) and Schiffman and Kanuk (1994).

Despite the fact that most, if not all, GCC consumers are subject to similar cultural and political factors, their buying decision are influenced by personal characteristics such as the buyer's age, life cycle stage, occupation and economic situation (Craig-Lees et al, 1995 and Kotler et al, 2004).

A persons' buying choices is also influenced by many psychological factors such as motivation, perception, learning beliefs and attitudes and personality and self- concept (Maslow, 1970 and Piirto, 1992).

The GCC consumer's behavior is also influenced by social factors such as consumer's household type and reference groups as well as social roles and status (Menasco and Curry, 1989 and Corfman, 1991). Socioeconomic status seems to have a strong effect on preferences for many products in the GCC countries.

Loyalty status also plays an important role in purchasing various brands of products in GCC countries. Some consumers are completely loyal. They buy one brand during their life; others are loyal to two or three brands or favor one brand while sometimes buying another. Still other buyers show no loyalty to any brand.

The marketing mix elements play an essential role in determining the consumer decision. The Marketing organization that really understands how GCC consumers will respond to different product features, prices and advertising appeals would have a great advantage over its competitors.

Product quality is a major positioning tool. It reflects the ability of the product to perform its functions. As indicated by many researchers, quality is a competitive opportunity (Garvin, 1987, Jacobson and Aaker, 1987 and Rose, 1992). Also brand will attract people whose actual or desired self-images match the brand's image (Kapferer, 1992).

Companies that sell products in GCC Countries need to decide how much, if at all, to adapt their marketing mixes to local conditions. The argument for localizing is that every market is different and the winning competitor is the one who best adapts the offer to local markets (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1989). A global marketing planning matrix accommodating both standardization and adaptation may prove very beneficial (Quelch and Hoff, 1986).

Adapting product and promotion strategies in GCC markets is of special importance (Keegan, 1995). Local conditions in GCC countries (e.g. hot weather in summer, lack of free-highways, and low price of oil) make it necessary for manufacturers to introduce GCC standards of their products. . Also, many GCC citizens would pay more attention to product attributes and price. Companies should adapt their communications to these themes. Also, companies should adapt their communications to these themes. Moreover, using marketing public relations, to build brand awareness and knowledge for both new and established products may prove more effective than advertising in the case of the GCC countries (Duncan, 1985).

Global marketers may also need to adjust their prices for sale in GCC countries to pay attention to fluctuations in oil prices, since oil is the major source of income in these countries. (Nagle, 1987). Moreover, although producers may have an efficient distribution system, they should provide opportunities for

forward integration by which the supplier can capture some of the value-added in the distribution chain. It is noticed, for example, that most car agents offer only particular lines of products and do not respond to customers' demand for other lines.

The country of origin of a product, typically communicated by the phrase "made in [country]", has a considerable influence on the quality perception of that product (Hollensen, 2002). Some countries who sell particular products in members of the GCC have excellent reputation, while others who sell the same products do not have a good reputation. Products made in some countries are evaluated much higher than those made in other countries. The country of origin can be more important than the brand name (Czinkota, 1995 and Onkvisit and Shaw, 1989). Consumers' preference for country of origin varies with respect to the product (Ettensen, 1993). A country's fame and name do not guarantee market penetration of all its product lines. Product attributes (reliability, durability, etc.) could help market penetration of products despite negative country-of-origin perceptions (Johansson et al., 1985 and 1994).

The aim of this paper is to test the importance of country of origin in influencing the quality perception of products purchased by GCC consumers. A sample of 139 consumers in the Emirate of Dubai in UAE was analyzed to find out consumers' perception of seven product lines, namely: cars, durable goods clothes and shoes, food, cosmetics and perfumes, medicine and electronics sold by eight countries, namely: Australia, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, South-East Asian Region, UK and USA

The paper is divided into three sections. Following the introduction, section two examines the sample characteristics. The methodology and statistical results are given in section three. Finally, section four summarizes the main conclusions.

### Sample Characteristics

Before going into data collection, preparation and analysis, two focus groups were interviewed. Each group has a size of 10 (pre-screened) respondents. A large percentage of members of the focus groups advised that most, if not all, of their purchases are branded products. However, some 90% of those members stressed that the quality perception of the product depends heavily on the country-of-origin

Following the focus groups interviews, a survey was conducted during the three months of September-November 2004. The survey covered a sample of 139 consumers living in the Emirate of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. The sample size was determined using 95 percent confidence level; 0.05 level of precision and a 0.9 population proportion.

Sample size  $n = \{z^2 [(\pi)(1-\pi)] / D^2\} = \{1.96^2 [(0.9)(1-0.9)] / 0.05^2\} = 139$

The respondents were selected at random using *simple random sampling*. Under the assumption that most consumers have telephones, the population size was estimated using the 2003 Telephone Directory in the Emirate of Dubai. The respondents were asked, through telephone interviews, to give their preference, using a 10-point scale, for purchasing the following seven product lines from eight countries:

#### Products:

4. Cars
5. Household Durables
6. Clothes and Shoes
7. Food
8. Perfumes and Cosmetics
9. Medicine
10. Electronics

#### Country-of-origin:

11. Australia
12. France
13. Germany
14. Italy
15. Japan
16. South East Asia
17. UK
18. USA

The main demographic characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 1. The sample is representative of total population taking into account the percentage of expatriates to nationals. The demographic characteristics based on age, gender, family size, education and income suggest that variability in consumer needs, wants and usage rates.

Dubai consumers' preferences for special product lines produced by various countries are affected by a number of stimuli including marketing mix elements (product, price, placement and promotion) as well as major forces and events in the buyer's environment (economic, technological, political and cultural).

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Variable	No.	%
Sex:		
Males	115	82.7
Females	24	17.3
Nationality		
Local	37	26.6
Expatriates	102	73.4
Age		
18 and less than 25	14	10.1
25 and less than 35	54	38.8
35 and less than 45	36	25.9
45 and less than 60	29	20.9
60 or more	6	4.3
Marital Status		
Never married	39	28.1
Married	89	64.0
Divorced	9	6.5
Widow/Widower	2	1.4
Number of Children		
Nil	47	33.8
Less than 3	49	35.3
3-5	27	19.4
6-8	11	7.9
Over 8	5	3.6
Level of Education		
Primary	21	15.1
Preparatory	27	19.4
Secondary	49	35.3
Diploma after Secondary	13	9.3
University Degree	26	18.7
Higher Education	3	2.3
Occupation		
Laborer	4	2.9
Technician	16	11.5
Public Servant	50	36.0
Private Sector Employee	54	38.8
Self-Employed	13	9.4
Other	2	1.4
Monthly Income		
Less than 5000 Dh (US\$ 1360)	25	17.9
5000 and less than 10000 Dh (US\$1360 - 2717)	55	39.6
10000 and less than 15000 Dh (US\$2717-4076)	29	20.9
15000 and less than 20000 Dh (US\$4076 - 5480)	14	10.1
20000 and less than 25000 Dh (US\$4076 - 6793)	10	7.2
More than 25000 Dh (US\$6693)	6	4.3

## Methodology and Statistical Results

To test the importance of the country of origin in influencing the quality perception of products purchased by GCC consumers, a questionnaire made up of three sections was sent to sample elements. The first part was a question on country-of-origin (general) preference in terms of availability of products, quality of merchandise price and communication, using a 10-point scale with highest numbers indicating more positive ratings (Malhotra, 2004). The second part of the questionnaire asked respondents to rate their preference for each country-of-origin with respect to *each product* line. All the ratings use a 10-point scale. The third-part of the questionnaire requested respondents to reveal some demographic characteristics.

Multiple regression analysis was used to explain country-of-origin preference in terms of product-line preference. The following model was tested:

$$y = b_0 + b_1 x_1 + b_2 x_2 + b_3 x_3 + b_4 x_4 + b_5 x_5 + b_6 x_6 + b_7 x_7 + \mu_i$$

Where:

$y$  = the respondent's perception of products of the  $i$ th country-of origin

$x_j$  = the respondent's preference for the  $j$ th product-line originated in the specified country-of-origin ( $j = 1, 7$ )

$\mu_i$  = error term

The model was tested for the mentioned eight countries of origin. The OLS regression results are given in Table 2. These results suggest that:

19. The model for each country-of origin is a good fit as indicated by level of significance of the F value (Maddala, 2000). This level is less than .01 in all cases
20. The value of R<sup>2</sup> differs substantially between various countries of origin. It is the highest in the case of Japan, followed by USA and the lowest in case of South-East Asian countries.
21. The "t" values suggest that Dubai consumers' preferences vary significantly between products produced by the same country.
22. Food is the only Australian product that has a significant preference by Dubai consumers
23. Dubai consumers' preferences for French products are statistically significant only for cosmetics and perfumes
24. Cars, durables and electronics are the only Germany products to which Dubai consumers attach significant preference.

25. Dubai consumers preference for Italian products is only significant for clothes & shoes
26. Cars and electronic products are the only products made in Japan that have significant preferences in Dubai
27. Clothes & shoes are the only products made in South East Asian that have significant preferences in Dubai
28. Dubai consumers preference for UK products is only significant for medicine and electronics
29. Durables medicine and electronics are the only US products to which Dubai consumers attach significant preference.

4. The standardized coefficients refer to the degree of importance of the independent variables (Mittelhammer et al, 2000). The values of these coefficients, as given in Table 1, suggest that Dubai consumers attach their highest preference to the following products originated in specified countries:

Country-of-origin	Most preferred products by Dubai Consumers
Australia	Food
France	Cosmetics and Perfumes
Germany	Cars
Italy	Clothes and Shoes
Japan	Cars and Electronics
South-East Asia	Clothes and Shoes
UK	Medicine
USA	Household Durables

The regression results would seem to support the hypothesis that the country of origin of a product has a considerable influence on Dubai consumer's perception of that product.

Since there is a high degree of similarity in cultural and environmental factors affecting the purchasing decisions of Dubai consumers and other GCC consumers, the results of this case study can be generalized in testing the country-of-origin Influence on Quality Perception of Products Sold in GCC countries.



Table 2: Regression Results

## 1. Australia:

N= 139, R<sup>2</sup> = 0.298, F\* = 7.944

Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.357	.492		2.761	.007
Cars	7.992E-02	.107	.067	.750	.455
Household durables	3.832E-02	.032	.098	1.211	.228
clothes & shoes	5.369E-02	.097	.056	.554	.580
food	.380	.100	.373	3.798	.000
cosmetics & perfumes	8.593E-02	.060	.160	1.424	.157
medicine	6.286E-02	.095	.100	.662	.509
electronics	8.758E-02	.091	.131	.960	.339

a. Dependent Variable: Preference

## 2. France:

N= 139, R<sup>2</sup> = 0.365, F\* = 10.744

Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
(Constant)	-4.886	.693		-7.011	.484
Cars	8.074E-02	.058	.110	1.397	.165
Household durables	.143	.102	.120	1.398	.164
clothes & shoes	.138	.070	.155	1.973	.051
food	1.374E-02	.079	.013	.175	.861
cosmetics & perfumes	.460	.087	.440	5.307	.000
medicine	6.443E-02	.064	.072	1.002	.318
electronics	9.481E-02	.096	.072	.964	.337

a. Dependent Variable: Preference

## 3. Germany:

N= 139, R<sup>2</sup> = 0.414, F\* = 13.223

Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
(Constant)	-682	.800		-852	.396
Cars	.251	.057	.340	4.384	.000
Household durables	.317	.109	.218	2.899	.004
clothes & shoes	4.295E-02	.105	.028	.408	.684
food	1.258E-02	.091	.011	.138	.890
cosmetics & perfumes	5.986E-02	.066	.067	.905	.367
medicine	.119	.066	.144	1.788	.076
electronics	.199	.076	.212	2.608	.010

a. Dependent Variable: Preference

Table 2: (continued)

## 4. Italy:

N= 139, R<sup>2</sup> = 0.329, F\* = 9.176

Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.728	.628		2.751	.007
Cars	-5.216E-02	.053	-.115	-.978	.330
Household durables	.164	.090	.218	1.826	.070
clothes & shoes	.156	.077	.207	2.017	.046
Food	6.241E-02	.090	.062	.694	.489
cosmetics & perfumes	.150	.078	.207	1.928	.056
medicine	5.970E-02	.077	.067	.771	.442
electronics	.106	.113	.080	.939	.349

a. Dependent Variable: Preference

## 5. Japan

N= 139, R<sup>2</sup> = 0.496, F\* = 18.445

Coefficients(a)

	Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
(Constant)	-1.030	.659		-1.562	.121
Cars	.258	.056	.346	4.640	.000
Household durables	.322	.091	.270	3.537	.001
clothes & shoes	.068	.089	.045	.693	.490
Food	-.005	.070	-.005	-.071	.944
cosmetics & perfumes	-.001	.080	-.001	-.020	.984
medicine	.115	.058	.139	1.973	.051
electronics	.269	.056	.347	4.844	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Preference

## 6. South East Asian Countries:

N= 139, R<sup>2</sup> = 0.252, F\* = 7.599

Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.346	.468		2.891	.005
Cars	7.674E-02	.106	.055	.722	.472
Household durables	4.250E-02	.032	.110	1.347	.180
clothes & shoes	.361	.098	.355	3.679	.000
food	.119	.102	.156	1.167	.245
cosmetics & perfumes	7.564E-02	.059	.141	1.291	.199
medicine	1.755E-02	.106	.028	.166	.869
electronics	7.675E-02	.092	.114	.838	.404

a. Dependent Variable: Preference

Table 2: (continued)

## 7. USA

N= 139, R<sup>2</sup> = 0.468, F\* = 16.463

Coefficients	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t Sig.
(Constant)	-9.15	1.027	-890.375
cars	8.368E-02	.102	.073
household durables	.288	.079	.307
clothes & shoes	5.075E-02	.112	.033
food	2.385E-02	.097	.021
cosmetics & perfumes	8.145E-02	.083	.091
medicine	.181	.069	.219
electronics	.397	.118	.272

a Dependent Variable: Preference

## Conclusions:

The main conclusions of this paper may be summarized in the following:

30. The country-of-origin has a significant impact GCC consumers' perception of various product lines
31. GCC consumers' preference for a particular country-of-origin is associated with special product lines.
32. GCC consumers give high preference to cars produced by Japan and Germany; household durables produced by USA; clothes and shoes produced by Italy and South East Asian countries; food made in Australia; cosmetics and perfumes made in France; medical products made in UK and electronics made in Japan.
33. The findings of this study regarding GCC consumers' perception of country-of-origin should be of great interest to firms of various countries that try to penetrate the GCC region

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