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**Origin, Product Evaluation and Willingness to Buy: A Study of
Young Myanmar Consumers' Mobile Phone Choices**

Arnt Kyawt Ni

**A Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

Department of Logistics, Operations, Hospitality and Marketing

The Business School

University of Huddersfield

July 2020

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Acknowledgment

The completion of this thesis is the results of both the researcher's effort and the supporters who have contributed their knowledge, encouragement, and advice in this lengthy Ph.D. journey. Thus, I would like to acknowledge their kindness.

Firstly, I would like to show my gratitude for my main supervisor Dr. Qing Shan Ding and co-supervisor Dr. Nicoleta Tipi, who have supported with valuable guidelines throughout these years. Their guidelines and feedbacks on my drafts help me to become a knowledgeable researcher. Their patience and understanding encourage me to continue with the study in the most challenging times. I am also indebted to the reviewers for their valuable time spent on examining my thesis.

Secondly, I would like to thank my colleagues and friends who have supported me emotionally and shared their knowledge with many helpful suggestions. Many thanks go to the participants in the research survey and the in-depth interviews who have voluntarily spared their time to answer my questions patiently. This research would not have successfully completed without their participation.

Moreover, I thank our business school's PGR support staffs, IT support staffs and administrative staffs who are friendly and helpful whenever I ask for the support. I would like to gratefully acknowledge the Vice-Chancellor's Scholarship provided for this Ph.D. by the University of Huddersfield. This journey would not have been possible as an international student without financial support by university.

Last but not least, I would like to thank and 'dedicate' this thesis to my beloved mother, who always supports and encourages me to aim high in life. She is a great consolation to me having an inspiration and a motivation for earning this degree.

Abstract

Over the last decades, country of origin (COO) and its associated concepts have received a substantial amount of research interests. They have been considering as essential instruments to explain consumers' product evaluation and willingness to buy local or foreign brands. In international marketing literature, however, COO concept remains as one of the most debatable topics due to the effect of globalisation and the movement of the global supply chain in the production process.

The change of modern consumer perceptions and preferences in the evaluation of products leads to the debates amongst the scholars about the relevance of COO, and thus, leads to cultivating the research questions of the current study. This research focuses on the COO construct from the dimension of the county of a brand (brand origin) and image-related constructs to investigate Myanmar young professionals' product evaluation and purchase intention. Hence, the main contribution of this research aims to extend the application of COO concept into Myanmar consumers context.

The majority of COO and related ascendant concepts are explored in developed countries, and a few studies are conducted in developing countries with accessible research facilities. However, newly emerging economies such as Myanmar have less privilege to research due to their hardships in political, economics, and level of country development. Thus, this study offers essential insights on the behaviour of Myanmar young professionals in product evaluation and purchase process of the research product (i.e., mobile phones) as well as the advanced perspective of the relationship between origins- and images-related country and brand constructs and consumers' attitudes.

By extending the boundary of COO concept application into a new research context, the findings are beneficial for international marketers by highlighting the importance of product country image, COO, and brand image as predictors of consumer purchase behaviour. One main contribution of this study is that it empirically examines the consumer-level determinants of COO in a newly emerging country context where consumer behaviour research is limited. The initial survey conducts in a metropolitan city of Myanmar, Yangon where target respondents, young professionals, are based and received 245 valid questionnaires. The follow-up, 20 interviews take place amongst the chosen participants for insightful one-to-one interviews.

The findings show that product's country image is the most influential factor in product evaluation, whereas the brand image is the most influential one on purchase intention for the mobile phones in Myanmar. The product evaluation can serve as a partial mediator between the relationships of 'product's country image – willingness to buy' and 'brand image – willingness to buy.' Revealing the brand name of the product and the country name of its origin can only affect to some extent on product evaluation, yet the factor itself does not influence consumers' purchase intention. One of the interesting findings shows that COO has no impact on Myanmar consumers' product evaluation but has a direct influence on their purchase intention. All these results of the conceptual relationships of quantitative analysis are complemented by the discussion and findings extracted from in-depth interviews. The practicality of this research offers beneficial suggestions for various stakeholders who are keen to observe consumer behaviour of not only Myanmar young adults but also other young consumers of newly emerging economies wherein similar situations.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Main contents

- **Research problem identification**
- **Aim and objectives**
- **Thesis structure**

This introductory chapter presents four sections as follows. Firstly, the research problems are identified based on reviewing the literature systematically. Not only the classical limitations in COO field but the contemporary debates amongst the scholars on the gradually increased complexity of COO concept are also discussed. The second section mentions the research aim objectives proposed to explore in this particular study. The research questions derive from the limitations of previous studies and the researcher's curiosity and motivation to conduct empirically. Then, the structure of the whole thesis is briefly mentioned in the third section in order for readers to have an overview of the upcoming chapters. Since Myanmar used to be an under-researched area in the marketing and the country's information is rarely found in the research community, the final section devotes to introduce the necessary information about the research country such as the political, economic and geographical backgrounds along with the overview of consumer behaviour practice in the market.

1.1 Research Problems Identification

There have been over five decades of scholarly research on how the origins of countries influence consumers. More recently, studies on the country of origin and related fields have been conducted in both developing and developed countries. For instance, the effect of COO on brand personality perceptions among Turkish consumers (Basfirinci, 2013), the perceptions towards US products in Kuwait (Maher and Cater, 2011), the effect of country-of-origin and brand origin in the Indian market (Batra et al., 2000; Kinra, 2006), Australian consumers' willingness to buy (Josiassen et al, 2011), consumer ethnocentrism and willingness to buy in China (Wang and Chen, 2004; Wu and Fu, 2007), the county of origin effect in Pakistan (Khan and Bamber, 2008), Polish consumers' evaluation of foreign products (Cumberland et al, 2010), and the brand origin effect in Tunisian consumers (Essoussi et al, 2011). The general outcomes from reviewing previous studies can rationalise four considerable limitations that call for future researchers to investigate –

- 1) *Confined cross-cultural representation*: Although there are a considerable number of research studies in the field of the country of origin, the restricted geographical spread of study areas leaves gaps still to be examined. It can cause a weakened cross-cultural understanding and a limited generalisation of results in a broader sense (Han and Won, 2018). Similarly, Papadoupoulos and Helsop (2014) recommended that further studies should expand the implication of COO research in other countries with diverse levels of economic development, culture and consumer behaviour.
- 2) *Meagre measurement scales*: There is a call for more research in this field as reliability and validity of the measurement scales are not assessed to fit within different cultures. In order to generalise and receive an adequate assessment of reliability and validity of the widely-used measurement scales, there is a need to apply the research instruments of COO and brand origin in different cultures and to different types of product (Han, 2017).
- 3) *Research sample limitations*: Using the student sample has held as the common limitations not only in the COO and branding fields but so in general marketing research (Ashraf and Merunka, 2017).
- 4) *Research product scarcity*: The effect of country of origin is changeable depending upon product categories and the level of involvement, leading to inconsistent findings of previous research (Shukla, 2010).

These severe limitations aside, there is a recent debate arising in the COO field. The construct of COO is one of the most reconceptualised topics in the international marketing field. Its newly ascendant concepts – such as country of manufacture, country of design, country of assembly, product country image, brand origin, country of destination and other terms – are favoured by each expert/researcher's perspective of the concept, and this phenomenon leads to ongoing, constructive debates amongst scholars.

Due to the process of globalisation, a product's manufacturing process becomes complex with the involvement of more than one country during the process. The country of origin concept derives from defining as a product's 'made in' label or manufacturing location with the assumption of a product dealing with only one country from the start to finish line. Many scholars (Lim and O'Cass, 2001; Samiee, 2010; Zhou et al., 2010; Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2011; Usunier, 2011) propose to shift the concept of COO from the product-

based level to the brand-based level due to the latter's advantages of high stability and clarity. These scholars remark that COO suffers from a growing irrelevance gap and unimportant origin-related attributes in purchasing situations.

In similar vein, Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009), Magnusson et al., (2011) and Josiassen (2008; 2011) point out the COO and its variants such as country image, country-product image, and country of origin, manufacture, assembly, or design are still relevant and essential in consumers' brand evaluation of products. Roth and Diamantopoulos (2010) remark that the research stream of Country Origin and Country Image should not be entirely neglected but rather cooperate with other constructs to expand the vibrant field of interest to both practitioners and researchers (Magnusson et al., 2011). Respond upon calling for addressing these issues with fresh ideas, this study aims to seek an insightful understanding of both COO and BO and their images variables in influencing consumer attitudes and behaviour. The study considers cues in both product and brand level, and the COO effect stands upon the new dimension of brand origin, taking the mentioned scholars' suggestions into consideration.

In the practical research field, on the other hand, there are very few investigations of reasons why Myanmar consumers, who are in a newly emerging economy, presume that brands or products produced by foreign countries can have a positive or negative personality, or in what ways these brands can impact on their buying intentions. By bridging this research context gap, this study questions *to what extent do the country of origin and brand origin influence Myanmar consumers' product evaluations and willingness-to-buy foreign brands of mobile phones?*

The potential contributions of the study intend to fulfill the requirement of the research on the current knowledge in the COO field along with the contribution to the socio-economic outcomes. The statement includes the theoretical impact, the methodological impact, and the practical implication of the current study. They are presented in *Table 1.1* and the full statement of the impact can be seen in *Appendix 1.1*.

Table 1.1: Contributions of the current study

Theoretical impacts	Methodological impacts	Practical implications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The relevancy of COO is consistent as long as consumers perceive commodities to correlate with places; thus, this study expands the COO effect from the perception of the 'commodity-place' dimension - The integration of the county- and brand-related images of a product in one conceptual model to testify their influence on product evaluation and purchase intention. It extends previous studies by examining the influences and drawing a comparison between the effects of both brand and country levels of the product origins and images on consumer perception - The contribution in the sense of cross-cultural representation which can enhance the COO concept's comparability and generalisation of outcomes as well as the implication of the attitude theory (TBP) -Based on the empirical findings, this study argues that the source of COO can 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This study proposes the examination of situations in which "origins" and "images" testify the evaluation consumption using multi-research methods - A new insight of measurement instruments with the use of a primary quantitative method which is supported and followed by the in-depth interviews. It testifies the assessment of reliability and validity of the COO, product country image, and brand image measurement scales by applying these scales in a somewhat different culture - The choice of the product category is significantly important in the differentiation of the COO effect. This study bridges the gap in the COO research, in which there is less clarity of its role in hybrid product studies - The research design of real-world settings with the use of actual brands and correct origins from the active users of the research product 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This study empirically examines the consumer-level determinants of COO in a newly emerging country context where consumer behaviour research is limited - The findings provide a better understanding of the phenomenon of COO from the branding perspective and other factors that are influential in attitudes and behaviour in buying mobile phones. It also explains both the favourable and unfavourable situation of the Myanmar consumer market. - The recommendations for the practitioners including the situation of the country's economy and focused industry, Myanmar consumers' preferences and buying behaviour, potential effective marketing strategies for companies, and COO and BO implications in Myanmar. - International investors and marketers can learn how Myanmar consumers evaluate on a brand or product and what motivates them to act the final purchase

<p>be viewed as brand-place origin specific to the evaluative situation rather than from a general made-in country origin.</p>	<p>- The use of contemporary analysis method of Structural Equation Modelling</p>	<p>- The research findings offer beneficial suggestions for various stakeholders who are keen to observe consumer behaviour of not only Myanmar young adults but also other young consumers of newly emerging economies wherein similar situations</p>
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1.2. Research aim and objectives

The specific aim and clear objectives are defined in order to answer the research questions of the study. It is aimed to investigate the consumers' perceptions of brand origin and the effect of country of origin on product evaluations and purchase intentions towards foreign brands, in a particular product category. The following six research objectives have been developed in order to achieve the research aim and to answer the research question.

- To identify influential factors of brand and country of origin in product evaluation and consumers' willingness to buy
- To examine the effect of product country image, country of origin and brand image on Myanmar young professionals' product evaluation of foreign mobile phone brands
- To understand whether origin and image cues of country and brand can influence on Myanmar consumers' buying intention
- To determine the role of product evaluation on the relationships between origins-images ascendants and consumers' willingness to buy
- To investigate Myanmar young professionals' preferences and perceptions on foreign branded products
- To explore how Myanmar consumers evaluate mobile phones in their buying decision

All objectives are set to reflect the activities which cultivate a particular stage of the research. The study's methodology is precisely considered once the research question has been identified. Thus, each objective represents the relationships among primary variables that the researcher intends to testify and answer the intended question. The objectives one, two, three,

and four aim to achieve the clarity of conceptual framework quantitatively, while the later objectives answer the research aim in a qualitative manner. Research objectives in this study serve as a guideline to solve the research curiosity. Meanwhile, the study designs to achieve research aim through conventional procedures such as reviewing literature, collecting secondary and primary data, analysing them and discussing results, presenting conclusions, and deciding on recommendations.

1.3. Thesis structure

After introducing the general background of the study, the aim and objectives, this chapter and the following *Chapter 2* introduce the background information of Myanmar, in terms of geography, economy, consumer culture and market situation of the country. Myanmar occupies a geographically strategic location and the resourceful country. It highlights the attractiveness of the host country location for marketers, firms and foreign investments. The country's brief political transformation and economics will be discussed to explain the current market situation of Myanmar as a newly emerging economy. Besides, the international marketing scholars and practitioners will be beneficial from learning the consumer culture and behaviour of Myanmar people in this chapter.

Chapter 3 designs to emphasis on the critical discussion of concepts of Country of Origin, Brand Origin (Country of Brand), Product-related Country Image and Brand Image by bringing previous literature, applied theories in order to expose the constructive arguments and debates of ideologies and gaps in the field. Also, this chapter conceptualises the framework of the research from extant academic literature in order for primary constructs and other relevant antecedents. The main topics of the literature include – the explained sections of primary constructs (COO, BO, PCI, BI), consumers' perception and brand preferences, consumers' product evaluation on brands and subsequently their buying intention. Since the research paradigm is the pragmatism approach, the research hypotheses are developed from theories and assumptions from the literature review. The conceptual model is produced at the end of the chapter.

In *Chapter 4*, the research methodology is constructed by selecting the right philosophies, approaches, and methods and conducted accordingly to accomplish the study aims and objectives. The contemporary philosophical considerations are widely discussed before rationalising a particular method that is capable of answering the research questions of the current study, performing a conventional analysis of the collected data, and evaluating the performance of proposed hypotheses. Since the study practises the mixed-methods research, the data collection methods involve both survey (quantitative) and interview (qualitative) along with their sampling methods. Also, the choice of research context in terms of product, brands, and countries are provided with sufficient justifications for the study. In the scales selection of the quantitative method, the scales from the previous studies are testified in terms of reliability

and validity for the utilisation in this study. In last part of the chapter, the limitation of data and the ethical consideration of the whole research process will be informed.

For the data analysis and findings, **Chapter 5** represents for the quantitative data, and Chapter 6 represents for the qualitative data. In chapter 5, the process and results of the pilot test will be presented in the first section to produce reliable and valid scales and followed by the main data analysis using PLS-SEM technique. The study conducts as quantitative research with the correlational design, which explores and observes the relationships among variables. The paths in the model will be tested by various analysis methods including mediation in order to prove/reject the proposed hypothesis of the study.

In **Chapter 6**, on the other hand, the qualitative exploratory research will be conducted in the investigation of more in-depth knowledge if 'why' and 'how' than a descriptive question of 'what' that is answered in the previous quantitative chapter. The one-to-one interviews are conducted; the obtained data transcripts are analysed and coded by practising thematic analysis. The results are critically chosen among the answers of the interviewees to use as support arguments and legitimate evidence as to the assurance of the data's quality and reliability.

As the discussion section, **Chapter 7** will be discussed critically under the extant literature review discussed in Chapter 3 to improve the credibility of the study as well as contribute the new knowledge to the COO research field. The chapter then focuses on the discussion of the findings accumulate the conceptual model, and hypotheses developed for this research.

Chapter 8 is the last chapter of the research and presents as 'conclusion and recommendations' sections. All things undertaken in the previous chapters will be re-examined in order to ensure the research aim and objectives formulated in Chapter 1 have achieved as well as the research question has answered accordingly. Beyond the outlining of the limitations of the research, the appropriate recommendations are suggested for the research community and the practitioners of both inside and outside academia.

Chapter 2: The background of Myanmar

This chapter introduces the required information about the context of the research country, Myanmar. As a result of the significant lack of research interest by the academic scholars and empirical research in Myanmar, it needs to provide the sufficient information on the research phenomenon concerning an overview of Myanmar including geography, political, economy, social culture, and consumer behaviour.

2.1. Geographical background

Myanmar, formally known as Burma, is a country in Southeast Asia region and surrounded by China, India, Thailand, Bangladesh, and the Andaman Sea. It is a densely-forested country and stands as one of the largest exporters of teak and natural resources, including jade, ruby, sapphire, pearls, and other natural resources and raw materials. Also, it is one of the most significant off-shore oils and gas zone suppliers to its borderline countries, China and Thailand. Myanmar is in an advantageous position due to its geostrategic location in the heart of the world's two fastest-growing economies of China and India. This factor creates Myanmar as an attractive emerging market with the potential of significant foreign investment from the world, especially the Western countries and China.



Figure 2.1: Map of Myanmar

Source: LonelyPlanet.com (2018)

2.2. Country Background

According to Census Report (2017, March), the population of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar is 51,486,253 with men 24,824,586 and women 26,661,667 (dated on March 29th, 2014). In term of urban and rural differentials, 30 percent of the population is in urban areas, and 70 percent in rural areas.

Table 2.2: Myanmar Population size and growth, low, medium and high variant projections, 2014-2050 (numbers in thousands)

Year	Population			Growth index			Period	Population growth rate		
	Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High		Low	Medium	High
2014	51,991	51,991	51,991	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2015	52,451	52,451	52,451	100	100	100	2015-20	0.86	0.88	0.91
2020	54,764	54,818	54,904	104	105	105	2020-25	0.80	0.84	0.92
2025	56,989	57,178	57,485	109	109	110	2025-30	0.70	0.76	0.88
2030	59,008	59,399	60,058	113	113	115	2030-35	0.56	0.64	0.79
2035	60,677	61,343	62,478	116	117	119	2035-40	0.40	0.51	0.69
2040	61,912	62,932	64,672	118	120	123	2040-45	0.24	0.38	0.59
2045	62,674	64,147	66,613	119	122	127	2045-50	0.09	0.26	0.50
2050	62,957	64,984	68,314	120	124	130	-	-	-	-

Note: Population numbers for 1 October. Growth index = population for year divided by 2015 population multiplied by 100. Growth rate = $\ln(P_2/P_1)/t$, P_1 beginning population, P_2 ending population, and t the length of the period.

Source: The Department of Population, Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population (2017, March)

Myanmar ranks 148 of 189 in the 2017 countries and territories which belongs to the medium human development category (index: 0.578). Although the country's HDI value increases each year gradually, poverty is still widespread, the life expectancy is 66.7 years, the adult literacy rate is 75.6 percent in 2017 (UNDP, 2017), and the per capita income is USD 1275 in 2016 (Trading Economics, 2016).

Table 2.3: Demographic characteristics of Myanmar

Demography	Total Population (Millions)
Total population (millions)	53.4
Median age (years)	27.7
Old-age (65 and older) dependency ratio (per 100 people ages 15-64)	8.5
Population ages 15–64 (millions)	36.0
Population ages 65 and older (millions)	3.1
Population under age 5 (millions)	4.5
Sex ratio at birth (male to female births)	1.03
Urban population (%)	30.3

(Source: UNDP, 2017)

2.3. Political Background

1962-2011: Understanding the political situation mostly influences the business culture (i.e., the ways of doing business) of Myanmar. The political factor contributes tremendous impact on the country's economics and subsequently, people's lifestyles, consumer behaviour, and the overall market situations. Currently, it is a relatively young democratic country which has recently transformed from the autocratic military regime which had ruled the country almost six decades (1962-2011). Western countries often refer the former military government as 'oppressive regime,' and the world regards it as 'illicit government' due to the involvement of human right violations to minority ethnic groups, lack of transparency, high corruption and other unconstitutional political issues (OECD, 2013). Many western countries conduct the political and economic sanctions to show their unsupportive will against the military regime.

2011- 2015: This period is regarded as Myanmar political reforms with the process of power transfer to the so-called nominally civilian government where most of the official authorities from the political institutions have a military background (Chalk, 2013). Due to the reforms, the positive changes in the country's political and economics occur including the temporary cease of European Union (EU) for all of the economic sanctions except arms embargo in 2012 (BBC, 2013) as well as United States reduce all the restrictions of investing the U.S companies in Myanmar (Department of US Embassy, 2011).

2015- present: The current constitutional government of Myanmar has not fully transitioned into a democratic country but rather into a hybrid system. The old military institution still maintains the total control over the country's security concerns, foreign policy, the areas under the direct ruling of the military and the main pillars of the resource economy. The institution allows the military's right to reverse the transition of democracy movement if the elected civilian government challenges the military's authority. Moreover, the military actions on dealing with the immigrants' crisis attract the international criticism which cause the civilian government leader to defend on behalf of country at the International Court of Justice recently, in December 2019.

Despite the political conflicts within the country, Myanmar is still positively perceived as a market with growth potential for international investments due to its economic liberalisation. The progress on political reform is, however, still limited ahead of November 2020 elections. The relationships of Myanmar with neighbouring countries, particularly China and India, are diplomatically strong than the western countries who remain concerns about within-country political situations.

Table 2.4: Myanmar post-independence history

1826-1947	Burma, one of the British colonies
1947	The assassination of General Aung San
1948	Independence from the British Empire
1958	Military takes power for the first time, until 1960
1962	Military coup deposes civilian government, implements the Burmese way of socialism, all non-agricultural enterprises are nationalised.
1988	The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) takes power through an internal coup. A market economy is declared with enacting of the first Foreign Investment Law
1989	Burma renamed Myanmar
1990	First sanctions imposed after SLORC annulled the elections results which National League for Democracy (NLD) wins 392 of 492 seats and 53% of popular vote
1997	Myanmar joins ASEAN. SLORC renamed the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).
2005	Nay Pyi Taw became a new capital of Myanmar, moved from Yangon (formerly Rangoon)
2010	Elections boycotted by NLD because of continuing imprisonment of dissidents and disputes over the 2008 Constitution.

2011	SPDC formally transfers power to a new Union Government. U Thein Sein (former General) becomes president
2012 (April)	By-elections held to fill 45 seats vacated by members assuming ministerial office. NLD wins 43 seats. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is elected.
2015	General elections are held, NLD wins and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi becomes the State Counsellor of Myanmar.
2017	Refugee crisis attracts the international attentions, the UN investigates the human rights abuses allegation by the Myanmar's military leaders against Rohingya minority.
2020	General Elections to be held.

Economic background: Myanmar used to be the largest exporter of rice in 1962 and the most robust economy in Southeast Asia (The Economist, 2016). However, the economy declined gradually since the military government coped the country in 1962, and the country first included in the list of least developing countries (LDC) in 1987 (UN, LDC Factsheets). Since the country experiences the world's economic sanctions for nearly three decades and suffers the profound consequences of isolation from western countries, China becomes its most important alliance. In recent years, the economy seems to improve eventually after the country's political reforms after 2011. Asia Development Bank (ADB) states that the economy grows by 7.8 percent in both 2014 and 2015 fiscal years. As in 2018 of ADB data, the economic growth rate percent per year shows a positive constant (5.9 percent in 2016, 6.8 percent in 2017, 6.2 percent in 2018, 6.6 percent in 2019 forecast and 6.8 percent in 2020 forecast).

Along with the multifaceted transitions of political reforms, the country has been regarded as a newly emerging market by many experts and practitioners. Despite having difficulties mentioned above still exist, Myanmar is advantageous from perspectives including abundant natural resources, affordable labour, strategic location, and potential market growth for multinational corporations to invest in the country. According to Oxford Business Group's (2014) report, the economic growth would significantly increase for the 2014/2015 fiscal year with 9.1 percent (higher than IMF and the World Bank projection of 8.5 percent), and also FDI is estimated to grow 70 percent in the same period.

Myanmar offers many benefits for international investors including its strategic location, plenty of natural resources, an untapped cultural heritage for tourism, a young population for workforce. However, it is challenging for Myanmar when it positions as an open, market-based economy. Like any other transformation, it will take time for the current government to restore

the implementation of labour and environment standards, human rights and consumer protection throughout the country. Thus, it is crucial for investors to contribute in planning inclusive and sustainable development. An OECD's report (2014) suggested the institutional voids in Myanmar to consider for MNEs with potential investment. These areas include human rights, employment and industrial relations, environment, combating bribery, bribe solicitation and extortion, science and technology, taxation, competition as well as consumer interests.

On the other hand, the workforce of young office workers is thriving with a significantly large youth population. Over 55 percent of the population is under the age of 30 and create a valuable opportunity for the country's economic growth and purchasing power (The Economists, 2015). Besides, the literacy rate of the youth population (89.5%) is higher than regional peers as Laos (73%) and Cambodia (80%). The growth of the young educated workforce and skillful labour market plays an essential role in the country's level of development. From the marketing perspectives, the research on the segment of young professionals is practical and introspective in the long run.

2.4. Consumer behaviour practices in Myanmar

The consumption behaviour of Myanmar experiences constant changes after the 2011's economic reform, changing from a generation of necessity to a generation of need for social appearance and lifestyles (Myanmar Times, 2018). In 2018, Thai-based behavioural research firm, 'Envirosell Thailand' finds the consumption pattern of Myanmar consumers as the integration of new lifestyles and personal emotion-based purchase which brings various business opportunities for foreign retailers.

Nomura Research Institute from Japan has investigated the consumer behaviour in five ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries, including Myanmar, Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia. The research has shown that Myanmar consumers are "not highly demanding consumers, but [have] a rapid take-up of advanced products/services..."(Kurabayashi, Niimi and Yatsunami, 2013). Market research by Euro-monitor International identifies Myanmar as one of the 20 Markets of the Future that will offer the most opportunities for consumer goods companies globally (MyanmarTimes, 2014).

The consumer behaviour of Myanmar people mainly depends on economic, cultural, and demographic factors. Different from other developing countries where the majority of consumers are middle class, Myanmar has a distinct shortage of middle-class consumers, since

the country implemented economic reforms in mid-2011. The consumer market of Myanmar is less developed than other Southeast Asia countries, in consideration of enacting Myanmar's consumer protection law in mid-2014 (Kyaw, 2015). On the other hand, market intelligence was limited significantly before the democratisation of the country in 2011.

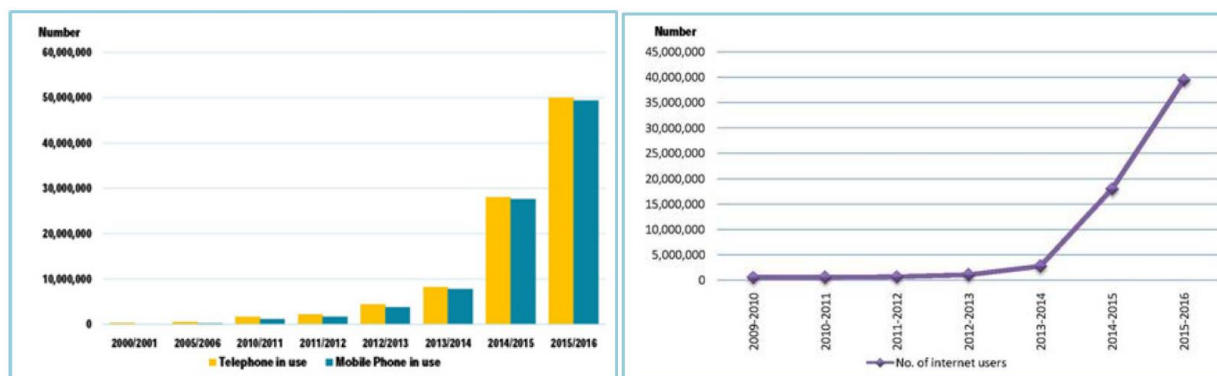
Myanmar Consumer Union (MCU) is formed in 2012 and target to enhance consumers' education in the context of raising awareness about consumers' rights, highlighting the consumers affairs and upgrading information. Along with the reforms of politic and economy, the President of the country sets the factor that "raising the quality of life of the majority of the people" as one of the country's main priorities (Myanmar Consumer report, 2017). The Myanmar Consumer Protection Law was enacted in 2014 along with the new emergence of e-business and online business culture in Myanmar. It means that the country market of Myanmar has a significantly positive outlook for both foreign and local retailers.

Despite these factors, the country has potential growth opportunities and expected that the annual GDP growth would be at 8 percent between 2013 and 2018 (Euromonitor, 2014). Besides, it is anticipated that the number of middle-class consumers will double by 2020 while the population of the country will reach 56 million. The country's GDP per capita is estimated to more than double between 2014 and 2019 (from USD1,480 to USD3,052).

Undoubtedly, Myanmar consumers used to have a limited selection due to a lack of choice in goods, and markets being less crowded with competing products. However, the transition from military dictatorship to democratisation has been attracting foreign investors, especially from western countries, to its growing consumer market. The consumerism trend and status show the positive development in terms of the Myanmar Consumer Price Index (CPI) which increase by 11.44 percent in 2015-2016 (compared to 5.9 percent in 2014-2015).

Notably, the teleport and communications sector is the most booming market in the country and show dramatic changes along with the increasing number of phone and internet users. More than 39.9 million telephones and more than 39.4 million mobile phones were in use, and the number of internet users is about 39 million in 2015-2016. In 2013-2014 according to the above figure, phone users were under 10 million and internet users under 5 million (Myanmar Consumer Report, 2017, p. 35).

Table 2.5: Communication statistics



Mobility and Communications	Internet Users, Total (% of the population)
Internet users, total (% of the population)	25.1
Mobile phone subscriptions (per 100 people)	95.7

Source: Ministry of Teleport and Communications (2016)

2.5. Myanmar Telecommunications Industry

When Myanmar Post and Telecommunication (MPT) firstly introduced the cellular mobile phones in 1993 with a luxurious price tag of USD 1500 per SIM cards or mobile phone system officially. Following years in 1996-1997, the systems of digital AMPS and CDMA are introduced. In 2002, GSM commercially launched and in 2008, the MPT provided the first 3G service network to a limited number of phones. In 2013, MPT introduced 1.5 USD SIM cards with limited availability and the government welcomed two international telecom operators; Qatar based Ooredoo and Norway based Telenor (Myanmar Digital Marketing, 2016).

Before 2013, the telecommunications system of Myanmar has been monopolised by Myanmar Post Telecommunication (MPT), a state-owned enterprise operated under Ministry of Transport and Communications. Under military rule, Myanmar had significantly low usage of mobile phones among citizens due to the government restrictions on pricing and lack of facilities and infrastructure. However, after the democratisation in 2011, the new government became liberalistic the telecom market by licensing to new service providers. With the market entry of Qatar-based ‘Ooredoo’ and Norwegian ‘Telenor’ group in 2014, it has been rapidly increased the number of mobile phone users, subscribers and expanded the country’s infrastructure. Thomas (2013) remarked that “the lack of mobile phones in the country of about

60m people, coupled with the projections for rapid economic growth, has attracted interest from most of the world's major international telecoms groups" (Financial Times, 2013).

The official launch of Ooredoo and Telenor finally started in 2014. Since then, Myanmar Telecom sector has been developing as the fastest growing market of Southeast Asia and the country itself. In 2017, the usage of the mobile phones market was estimated to reach six million smartphones, along with nearly 5.5 million feature phones (Sakawee, 2013). Based on the information by the Myanmar Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology, the number of mobile phones users in year 2014/2015 is estimated to be 50 percent of the population and expected to show the continual growth of reaching 80 percent of the country population in the year 2015-2015 (Rasmussen, 2014).

According to Trautwein (2015), Myanmar became a fourth-fastest-growing mobile market in the world, which means that nearly 6 percent of the worldwide new mobile subscribers (87 million) were Myanmar for the third quarter (July-September), as mentioned in Ericsson's Q3 (2015) Mobility Report. The number of mobile phone users and subscribers in Myanmar is expected to be more than double by 2018 (World Urbanisation Prospects, 2014) due to the affordable and desirable price of SIMs and smartphones. As of June 2015, a mobile phone penetration rate in Myanmar reached half population of the country with the rate of 54.6 percent, increase from less than 10 percent in 2012 (Thant, 2015). As of August 2016, there were 45 million mobile phones subscriptions with the usage of smartphones of between 60 percent and 80 percent, increase from 3-4 million in 2014 (Cunningham, 2016).

Table 2.6: Overview of Myanmar Telecommunication Industry

Service providers	Numbers of subscribers	Population of Myanmar
Telenor	13.7 million	53 million
MPT	14 million	
Ooredoo	5 million	
Total numbers of users	33 million (approx.)	

(As of January 2017, adapted from Digital in Asia Report)

In terms of mobile phones usage, smartphones are the most popular mobile phones with a rate of 80 percent usage-based on Telenor and Ooredoo reports in 2015. By comparison, the USA has a 75 percent smartphone usage rate and a few Asian countries – Singapore and South Korea have over 80 percent smartphone usage (Bloomberg, 2015).

Considering mobile phone brands, brands with Android platform dominate with 92 percent of market share, whereas iOS has 4.7 percent in Myanmar market. According to ComScore (2014), in American market, Apple ranked as the top smartphone OEM with the market share of 41.6 percent, following by Samsung with the share of 29.7 percent, LG with the share of 8 percent, Motorola with the share of 5.2 percent and HTC with 3.7 percent (comScore MobiLens, Sep-Dec, 2014). It makes Myanmar be one of the highest smartphone usage countries in the world.

In 2015, Chinese brand 'Huawei' is claimed to be as the top smartphone Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEM) with the market share of more than 50 percent. Statistically, precise shares of each OEM are challenging to access or retrieve due to the lack of market reports (LirneAsia, 2015). However, most of the Chinese brands, such as Vivo, Oppo, and CoolPad, are widely purchased in the market, and they dominate the consumer segment with a low budget. There is a prospect of increased purchase in mobile phones in the future because the new, fourth telecom operator called Myanmar National Tele & Communications (MNTC) has licensed in 2017 (Min, 2017).

As a prospect, Myanmar occupies a thriving economy with great opportunities for local and international brands. According to Boston Consulting Group (2013), Myanmar's middle and affluent classes are expected to be double in size (about 15 percent of the population) by 2020. The monthly per-capita income of the middle class was over US\$ 120, which applied to 5.3 million of the population of about 53 million. By doubling in size in 2020, it is expected to grow to 10.3 million (Heijmans, 2013).

2.6. The choice of the research context (country)

Myanmar is selected because it is one of the world's least developed countries in a report from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD, 2014). Thus, the research in Myanmar consumer behaviour would fill the gap in existing knowledge regarding lack of Country-of-origin and brand origin research-based in LDC countries. Moreover, Myanmar's economy has experienced steady growth since 2012, and a report from the Asian Development Outlook (2016) stated that Myanmar is one of the fastest-growing countries in Asia; hence, the research focused in this country would be highly valuable to international business and marketing field.

With a population of estimated 53.9 million (2015) and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita of US\$ 4930.59 in 2015, Myanmar can be considered as one of the most emerging markets in the South-east Asian region (trading economics, 2017). The GDP in Myanmar for the year 2015 was worth US\$ 62.60 billion by representing 0.10 percent of the world economy (World Bank, 2015). GDP in Myanmar averaged US\$ 29.51 billion from 1998 to 2015, reaching the highest amount of US\$ 65.60 billion in 2014 (trading economics, 2017). After the country's democratisation in 2011, Myanmar has a robust economy with the experience of rapid growth. As of December 2016, the annual GDP growth rate of Myanmar was 6.30 percent and ranked 21st place in the world (world economic forum, 2017).

The most populated States/Regions are Yangon (14.3%), Ayeyarwady (12.0%) and Mandalay (12.0%). The least populated States/Regions are Nay Pyi Taw (2.3%), Chin (0.9%) and Kayah (0.6%) (UNDP, 2010). The proportion of the male and female population is 48.2 percent (male) and 51.8 percent (female) for the whole country. Yangon, in particular, has 47.8 percent of male population and 52.2 percent of female population (Census Statistics, 2015) and the highest urban population (70.1 percent) compared to 29.6 percent of the whole country's urban population (UNFPA, 2014).

Table 2.7: The population of Myanmar by gender and state/region

State/Region	Total	Male	Female
<i>Union</i>	51,419,420	24,821,176	26,598,244
Union (enumerated)	50,213,067	24,225,304	25,987,763
Union (not enumerated)	1,206,353	595,872	610,481
<i>Kachin</i>	1,689,654	877,664	811,990
Kachin (enumerated)	1,643,054	854,633	788,421
Kachin (not enumerated)	46,600	23,031	23,569
Kayah	286,738	143,461	143,277
<i>Kayin</i>	1,572,657	775,375	797,282
Kayin (enumerated)	1,502,904	739,234	763,670
Kayin (not enumerated)	69,753	36,141	33,612
Chin	478,690	230,005	248,685
Sagaing	5,320,299	2,518,155	2,802,144
Tanintharyi	1,406,434	700,403	706,031
Bago	4,863,455	2,324,214	2,539,241
Magway	3,912,711	1,814,993	2,097,718
Mandalay	6,145,588	2,919,725	3,225,863
Mon	2,050,282	986,454	1,063,828
<i>Rakhine</i>	3,188,963	1,529,606	1,659,357
Rakhine (enumerated)	2,098,963	992,906	1,106,057
Rakhine (not enumerated)	1,090,000	536,700	553,300
Yangon	7,355,075	3,517,486	3,837,589
Shan	5,815,384	2,908,259	2,907,125
Ayeyawady	6,175,123	3,010,195	3,164,928
Nay Pyi Taw	1,158,367	565,181	593,186

Source: UNFPA Myanmar Census, (2014)

2.6.1. The choice of product and countries for COO and BO

The selection of product to be focused is one of the most crucial decisions for any research. According to Jaffe and Nebenzahl (2001), country-of-origin (COO) and brand origin (BO) perceptions are mostly dependent upon the types of products. There is an increasing number of products for which the country of origin is different from the initial home country of the brand (Chao, 1993). Such products may be referred to as bi-national or hybrid products. Nowadays, the majority of foreign branded products are more recognisable for consumer durables than other product categories, particularly electronics, television sets, cell phones, computers, VCD players, music systems, refrigerators, and washing machines (Kinra, 2006).

Amongst, the product that has been chosen in this research is mobile phones (also referred to smartphones). The product nature of mobile phones is mostly hybrid, and there is a complexity of the country of assembly and country of the company's (brand) name. The study of consumers' perception and evaluation of hybrid products is of crucial importance to the advancement of our understanding of country-of-origin effects (Johansson, 1989, p. 56; Kochunny et al., 1993, p. 23).

On the other hand, Millward (2014) mentions that 49 percent of the total numbers of county's internet users browse the websites via their mobile phones. Along with Myanmar's economic liberalisation, the thriving shift from the tradition market into the e-commerce is clearly seen in the Myanmar market along with the high competition of mobile market especially in metropolitan cities such as Yangon. There is a need to efficiently deliver new marketing strategies and approaches in order to follow the consumers' demand and requirements.

A survey in 2015 revealed that the percentage of mobile penetration (mobile phones and SIM ownership) was higher in Myanmar than other countries in the region. 42 percent of high-income households own mobile phones and even 35 percent of low-income households have them. In comparison, only 9 percent of Indian low-income households own mobile phones in 2006 (nine years after its market liberalisation), 23 percent of Pakistani and 22 percent of Sri Lankan accordingly. More importantly, the most thriving market is the urban population where 65 percent of the market penetration is taken place compared with 27 percent of rural penetration (LIRNEasia, 2015).

By focusing on understanding of consumer behaviour of using mobile phones and the nature of Myanmar telecommunications sector, experts from both inside and outside of academia (i.e., marketers, investors, business-to-consumer researchers and policymakers) can consider the contemporary ideas, deliver unique products with better services to meet users' expectations, in combination with traditional and conservative marketing strategies and approaches. These considerations mentioned above lead to the assessment of research aim which is to investigate Myanmar consumers' preferences and perceptions of COO and BO on their product evaluation and willingness-to-buy.

Myanmar Telecom market offers the interesting opportunity for investors around the world after its economic isolation under the regime of military government. Based on the historical evidence in other countries, such prosperous in the telecommunication sector with the availability and use of mobile phone connectivity can bring the transformative effect in the

country. Myanmar is a perfect place to study such impacts in the condition that it used to be one of the least-connected countries in the world for many decades. The reform of economic liberalisation encouraged Ooredoo and Telenor to enter into Myanmar's market in September 2014. In the absence of other studies, the data from this research fieldwork guides an appropriate baseline for further research.

Srivastava (2005) proposes that the consumer utilisation of mobile phones has changed from using phones as a technical object to a critical social object. People used to utilise phones for a clear communication purpose but currently, the mobile phone act as more significant electronic interactions between friends and family than traditional face-to-face interaction which have been significantly diminished (Rauch, 2005). Consequently, the mobile phone is a fascinating research product which plays a crucial role in shaping individual cultural norms and values in today's world.

2.6.2. Criteria of the countries for the research

Millward (2014) surveys the usage behaviour of Myanmar mobile phones users and finds that the majority of 96.5 percent use Android smartphones. According to the sales figures represents by three major telecom companies of Myanmar, Ooredoo, Telenor and government-owned MPT, 60 percent of mobile phones users are smartphones users (The Daily Star News, 2015). In Myanmar smartphones market, the majority of market is dominated by the Chinese mobile phone brands. In Millward's study, 71 percent of participants claimed to use Huawei which is the market leader at the time. Other brands also share the market accordingly. Recently, more users start buying diverse brands in the market, including Apple, HTC, Samsung, Xiaomi which are the favourite brands of consumers with significant market shares.

Sakawee (2013) points out that the purchasing behaviour of Myanmar consumers for smartphones mainly relies on the individual's income. Besides, Jamesaung (2014) reports that consumers have various aspirations, and various purchase criteria for mobile phones and use mobile phones in different ways. To be able to cover this diverse spectrum of users' preference, this study considers four brands which have dominant market share with well-established users, namely Apple, Samsung and Xiaomi. From a theoretical perspective, the brands need to align with the purpose of research inquiry which is to explore Myanmar consumer perceptions and evaluation of foreign products.

The selected countries represent the country-of-origin and brand origin of foreign countries with different levels of economy (*The countries' profile is shown in Table 3.4*). The reason for choosing these countries is to ensure that the two groups are, to some extent, similar in terms of specific criteria of interest to this research. It is noted that the ordered arrangement would not influence the outcome since the main focus of this research is to ask participants about a specific brand that originates from a specific country. The chosen countries are the USA, South Korea, and China as mentioned below:

Table 2.8: The country profiles of selected COO of mobile phones

Country name	the USA	South Korea	China
GDP growth rate ¹	2.00% (quarterly, March 2017)	2.90% (quarterly, March 2017)	6.90% (quarterly, March 2017)
Country status ²	Developed economies (member of G7)	Developed economies (member of ASEAN + 3)	Developing economies (member of ASEAN + 3)
Gross National Income per capita ³	53,245 (PPP\$, 2011)	34,541 (PPP\$, 2011)	13,345 (PPP\$, 2011)
Trade and financial flow ⁴ (includes exports and imports)	28.1% (of GDP)	84.8% (of GDP)	41.2% (of GDP)
Choice of mobile phone brands with country origins	Apple	Samsung	Xiaomi

Note: 1- Source: Report of Trading Economics, 2017

2- Source: Report of World Economic Situation and Prospects (UN, 2014)

3, 4- Source: Report of International Human Development Indicators (UN, 2016)

2.6.3. Choice of mobile phone brands with country origins

The following three mobile phones brands are pre-selected from “YouGov BrandIndex”, which is an Index Rankings chart for various product categories, is to investigate Myanmar consumers’ preferences and perceptions of COO and BO on their product evaluation and willingness-to-buy. Apart from checking its 2015 Index rankings for Mobile phones Industry, the factors including the demand in the research country (Myanmar), the company’s profit margin and competitions amongst brands are also considered.

Apple: In 2015, Apple and Microsoft stood as the world’s most valuable brands (Forbes, 2015). The statistics showed that the brand’s worth increase 17 percent (\$145.3 billion) over 2014. The mobile phones sale of Apple increased 49 percent worldwide in the fourth quarter of 2014. In Myanmar mobile phones market, the ownership of Apple’s iphones became trendy and it gained the competitive position with the current popular brand, Samsung.

Samsung: It has long been established in Myanmar market with their electronics and related devices. After the release of their impressive mobile devices, the brand become the most popular smartphone brand in Myanmar in 2010s. Samsung notably produce various series of both budget and high-end mobile devices for different target consumer segments. The company recently introduced S7 flagships including Galaxy Note 7 in 2016.

Xiaomi: It is the Chinese mobile phones company found in 2010 and their products become widespread throughout in Asia. The brand has widely been regarded as the Apple of China since its popularity around mid-2014 in the neighbouring countries including Myanmar. Xiaomi contributes the remarkable rules for the smartphone market with regard to their pioneering flash sales, the affordable price with good specifications, establishing the excellent rapport with customers including holding fan meetups. Despite its short time of establishment in the market, Xiaomi has created the role of a significant player in Myanmar consumer market. With the release of Redmi Note 3 in Asia Market in 2016, it is one of the most popular brands in Myanmar mobile phones market.

2.7. Conclusion

Many international firms acknowledge the significant contribution of Asian markets for the world’s economic output and their population. Marketers need to understand these markets effectively through alternative consumer behaviour models for Asian countries. These consumers hold different values, beliefs, motivation, perceptions, and attitudes from those of

the West. In this sense, there are many studies on consumer behaviour of developed and developing countries, including China, South Korea, India and Japan. Particularly in Southeast Asian markets, the research spotlight is not adequately covered for newly emerging economies as Myanmar, Lao, or Cambodia. This study contributes to the applicable consumer behaviour model to the newly emerging economy's context, the adjustment of marketing strategies to the robust market environment where there is a need of research attention.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1. Introduction

Main contents

- **A broad range of relevant literature**
- **Overview of focal constructs**
- **Theories underlying the constructs**
- **Theoretical framework**
- **Conceptual model**
- **Hypotheses development**

The literature review section mainly defines by the core concepts of research objectives and the issues intended to address to solve the research question. The background of the research problem described in the previous chapter systematically discusses from the historical perspective and the techniques handled by previous scholars for such similar problems. Since the research aims to investigate the consumers' purchase behaviour of the product by focusing on 'country and brand-related determinants,' the field of country and brand origin, the image perspectives of country and brand primarily focus on the literature, following by the behaviour of consumers' perception and their evaluation on products.

The structure of the literature review organises as *three* main stages. Firstly, the issues and background of knowledge demonstrated on the topic being discussed in a broad sense. After that, an overview of literature relevant to the current research aligns with the narrow focus of this study, aiming to contribute to the international marketing field by the expanded knowledge. Finally, the conceptual model of the study develops based on the resources obtained from prior studies of the literature review section.

3.2. A country of origin

The concept of country of origin (COO) gains the research attention in the 1960s (introduced by scholars such as Ditcher, 1962; Schooler, 1965) and becomes popular in the field (Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2002; Josiassen et al. 2013). Reviewing the literature of COO identifies *three* main eras in the development of COO effects chronologically (Dinnie, 2003; Dobrucali, 2019). The first period started in 1965 when Schooler's research on country-of-origin effects in the US market to 1982 when Bilkey and Nes's study of COO effects on product evaluation. The second era, 1983-1992, shifted the researchers' focus from using only COO effects as a single-cue to using multi-cues such as price and quality in consumers' product evaluation (Johansson et al., 1985; Ettenson et al., 1988). During the third era, 1993-2019 (at present), there is a proliferative diversity in streams of COO research which are reconceptualised by brand origin, product-country image, product-place image and other constructs.

The first notion on COO defines as *the country of manufacture or production* where a product comes. Comprehensively, the COO effect is noted as the 'made-in image' and 'nationality bias' (Kai and Yi, 2002). Companies indicate the COO of their product/service by using the phrase 'made in X,' the COO language, flags or symbols, or quality and origin labels. Consumers, then, use this COO information as one of the product evaluation cues in their purchase.

At present, despite the widely established studies of the country of origin (COO) in the marketing field, the concept of COO remains controversial in different perspectives. Increased globalisation of today's business environment is the primary cause of continuing debates in the COO field and lead to the revived interest in the effect of a product's country of origin on consumer decision-making process (Josiassen et al. 2013).

Vukasovic (2016) lists the previous trends of COO literature and categories as *five* main diverse directions. Scholars in the first category investigate an image of a particular country in foreign consumers' perspectives. The second direction focuses on consumers' ethnocentrism towards domestic and imported products as well as the representation of multinational companies in a local region. The third trend explores consumer perceptions and beliefs towards a product-country image. Meanwhile, other scholars study the influence of a product's origin on a particular brand and pricing strategy. Recently, the research lights on the importance of a national image in buying decisions at an organisational level (Vukasovic, 2016). In this study,

the results from a systematic literature review show the *eleven* diverse directions of studies on COO effects (as shown in Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: The diversity of COO effects studies in literature

Research stream	Main concept
Single-Cue COO effects	The COO image has significant effects on consumer product evaluations.
Multi-Cue COO effects	The use of multiple information cues (i.e., brand, company name, product features, price) can moderate the COO effects.
Multiple COO Cues (hybrid) Effects	The country of manufacturing cue has a more significant effect on evaluations than the country of brand origin cue. By contrast, other studies found that the country of brand origin cue has a more substantial effect on evaluations than the country of manufacturing cue.
Globalisation Effects	Due to globalisation, the availability of foreign products and their product attribute information blurred the importance of the COO image.
Product Type Effects	The COO effects on consumer evaluation differ by product type. The COO image in a particular product category is used as a competitive advantage.
National and Country Stereotypes Effects	The cognitive, affective, and normative factors of national stereotypes and the COO effect influence on product evaluation The political, economic and technological factors of country stereotypes and the COO effect influence on consumer product evaluation
Cultural Orientation Effects	The COO effect on evaluations varies across consuming countries and their cultural orientations.
Consumer Expertise Effects	The COO operates as a 'halo' or 'summary' construct, depending on familiarity. Consumer innovativeness affects consumer intention to adopt a product and moderates the COO effects.

Consumer Involvement Effects	The COO effects differ at the different levels of consumer product involvement.
Consumer Ethnocentrism Effects	The consumer ethnocentrism increases the COO effect on evaluations as well as purchase intentions

It is clear from the above studies that COO information, one of the main contributors in consumers' product evaluation, and the process of decision-making, acts as the extrinsic product cue. Its effect is similar to price or brand name, which are the intangible product attributes. Also, it is different from a product's functional characteristics that are mainly experience-based. On the other hand, the functional attributes such as colour, flavour, appearance regard as intrinsic cues. When consumers are a lack of previous experience or knowledge, they tend to rely on extrinsic cues to generalise the quality of the product before making a purchase decision.

Many scholars (for instance, Herz and Diamantopoulos, 2017; Koschate-Fischer et al. 2012; Godey et al., 2012; Gürhan-Canli and Maheswaran, 2000) accept that COO have an impact on consumers' attitudes towards products and their buying behaviour. Besides, the COO cue supports the evaluation of quality, performance, or specific product attributes. The majority of studies prove the COO information as an important cue that relates to consumers perception of product evaluation (Yasin et al. 2007), quality perception (Papadopoulos, 1993) and purchases intention (El Banna et al. 2018). Also, a product category with a favourable COO can offer a competitive advantage for firms in the market. Aichner (2014) mentioned that many organisations communicate their product's COO to consumers to get benefits from positive COO stereotypes. Table 3.2 illustrates the marketing strategies of COO use used as either implicitly or explicitly.

Table 3.2: The usage of the COO cue as a marketing strategy

Authors	Strategies name of COO cue/effect	Strategy type	Example of usage
Aichner, 2014	“Made in...”	Explicit	Made in UK
Leclerc et al., 1994	Quality and origin labels	Explicit	Originated in a more favourable COO
Josiassen and Harzing, 2008	COO embedded in the company name	Explicit	British American Tobacco (tobacco, United Kingdom), Air France (airline, France),
Aichner, 2014	Typical COO words embedded in the company name	Implicit	Lincoln National (insurance, United States of America), Dollar General (retailing, United States of America)
Hinton, 2000	Use of famous or stereotypical people from the COO	Implicit	Using Italian actors for Italian products' TV commercials in foreign countries
Aichner, 2014	Use of COO flags and symbols	Explicit/ Implicit	Using the Italian flag on pasta or pizza packaging
Aichner, 2014	Use of typical landscapes or famous buildings from the COO	Implicit	Using the Eiffel Tower (France), the Leaning Tower of Pisa (Italy)

Source: Aichner (2014, p. 91)

Despite its enriching literature, the COO effect is arguably one of the complex research fields where the assumptions and focus are diverse and different amongst the marketing scholars (as shown in Table 3.1). In classic literature, the scholars such as Han (1989), Johansson (1989) claim that COO information can serve as a signal of product quality and others (e.g., Hong and Wyer, 1989) state that it is used as a product attribute. Jolibert (1995) also proves that the COO effect has a more significant impact on quality perceptions than on purchase intention. Meanwhile, Klain and Ettenson (1999) claim that COO affects the product evaluation of

consumers via ethnocentrism or animosity. Expanding its knowledge in connection with branding, Peterson, and Koubaa (2008) prove that country of origin has a positive impact on brand image. Then, Norouzi and Hosienabadi (2011) note that country of origin has significant positive impact brand equity, particularly for brand awareness.

The recent constructive debates among the notable scholars such as Samiee (2011) against Magnusson et al., (2011) draw great attention on the concept of COO to address as the primary research question for the current study. Some notable researchers – Balabanis and Diamantopoulos (2008; 2011), Samiee (2010; 2011), Zhou, et al., (2010), Usunier (2011) – initiate to questioning the relevance of country of origin in the contemporary world due to the movement of globalisation. In contrast, Magnusson et al., (2011) dismiss Samiee's (2010) inference of COO's irrelevance and prove in their study that the relevance and usefulness of COO are still appropriate in consumers' evaluation of products and brands. Josiassen (2008; 2011) affirms that the influence of COO has more impact on consumers' attitudes than purchase intention.

Precisely, the justifications for the irrelevance of the COO research include *three* main perspectives. Firstly, Usunier (2006, p.61) and Samiee (2010) argue that "COO effect is no longer a major issue for international marketing operations: multinational production, global branding, and the decline of origin labelling in WTO rules tend to blur the COO issue and lessen its relevance." Secondly, Samiee et al., (2005) and Balabanis and Diamantopoulos (2008) remark that consumers' insensitivity to the true COO (including for popular brands) can be either genuinely unaware of brand origins or intended ignorance of such information based on their priority. Finally, Liefeld (2004, p.91) finds that the majority of respondents in the survey state, "COO is not a relevant attribute for making choices between alternatives." This continuing debate and the void in the COO field encourages the current study to expand the boundary of research knowledge.

In recent papers, the study of COO shows the continual relevance not only in the international marketing field but as the cross-disciplinary topic. For instance, Xie et al., (2018) investigate the neural mechanism of country-of-origin image stereotype in product evaluation by using neuropsychological analysis methods. It is found that consumers view COI stereotype as a relevant information and use it (consciously or unconsciously) in their products evaluation. In addition, Herz and Diamantopoulos's (2017) study found the inconsistencies in the consumer

behaviour of country of origin cue evaluation, stating as the phenomenon of COO cue usage denial. Their study found a significant number of consumers use a COO cue denial as an unconscious defence mechanism when they want to portray or maintain an acceptable self-image. Thus, the notion of the irrelevance of COO information usage in product evaluation is not entirely applicable and the further studies are needed to be done.

3.2.1. Single-cue and multi-cue studies

In literature, the effect of the COO cue practises two main trends in order for investigating its influence on product evaluation and subsequently, purchase intention. Firstly, COO information is used as a single-cue in product evaluation by researchers such as Schooler (1965), Bilkey and Nes (1982). Using COO as a single-cue, Bilkey and Nes evaluate the result of twenty-five COO studies quantitatively in order to achieve generalisability of COO effects. In reality, however, the consideration of single-cue can be overstated the impact of COO on consumer evaluation of products because consumers consider other cues as brand name, price, functions, and quality instead of only COO information. Besides, the use of student samples that can cause a weak generalisability to the whole populations has pointed as a significant weakness of the research by Schooler (1965).

To solve these issues, the research studies (in the 1980s) mainly provide the evidence of COO effects on consumers' perceptions of products from a particular country (Usunier, 2011). The scholars argue that the usage of COO effect as a single-cue is insufficient in the practical sense and thus, other product cues such as price and quality, may more favour on product evaluation than COO effects itself. For example, Johansson et al., (1985) conduct the COO origin on product evaluation of cars originated from Japan, USA, and Germany using thirteen attributes of product (multi-cue). Their study is rather sophisticated despite the use of small convenience sample of students as well as an artificial exercise that could weaken the strength of the research.

In recent years, the recent literature shows that there is considerable diversity in streams of COO research (*The categorisation of studies that practised single-cue and multi-cue effects is presented in Appendix 3.1*). Many scholar attempt to reconceptualise the concept of COO with other constructs including brand origin (Thakor and Kohli, 1996), product-country image (Papadopoulos and Heslop, 1993), product-place image (Askegaard and Ger, 1998), branding cues (Nicholas and Sinha, 2004), consumer/product knowledge (Phau and Suntornond, 2006),

consumer animosity (Funk et al., 2009), consumer ethnocentrism (Josiassen et al., 2011), 'brand globalness' (Riefler, 2012), country of production image (Ar and Kara, 2014), the effect of owned-by (Phau and Cheah, 2015).

In addition, the research interest of COO information expands and frequently focus on the linkage with other variables such as consumer nationalism, demographics, hybrid products, product features, advertising images and country images with the respect to calculating consumer perceptions and purchase intentions (Ahmed et al., 2004; Hamzaoui and Merunka, 2011).

Researchers including Balabanis, Mueller and Memewar (2002), Thakor and Lavack (2003), Sohail (2004) compare the implication of single-cue studies and multi-cue studies in their studies and propose that the multi-cue approach can assure more credibility of the research than the single-cue approach. However, it will be overstated to assume the multi-cue approach as an ideal without the consideration of the brand cue. Meta-analysis research of Liefeld's (1993) evidence that the multiple cue studies still regard as having some methodological problems as 14 out of 22 COO studies has shown no consideration of brand cues in the research. This indicates the major limitation in the generalisation of those studies since the COO information cannot communicate without the brand cue in many product categories, especially for consumer durable goods (Thakor and Kohli, 1996).

3.2.2. The theoretical underpinning of Country of Origin

This section describes some theories practiced as the theoretical linkage with the COO effect. Despite there is a variety of consumer behavior theories, the COO effect draws the perspectives of theories and models including Elaboration Likelihood Model, Cognitive Consistency Theory, Theory of Reasoned Action/Theory of Planned Behaviour, and other theories or models related to consumers' behavioral intention.

The standard foundation of these theories or models relies on the assumption that three dimensions of cognitive, affective and normative can influence perceived product's COO (Papadoupoulos and Heslop, 2003). The cognitive component refers to knowledge about specific products and brands. The affective component refers to favourable and unfavourable attitude towards the COO. The conative component refers to the actual purchase of a foreign brand (Papadoupoulos and Heslop, 2003). According to the authors, the affective component is the predominant component for consumers and cognitive component as the rational

component that they use in determining a foreign or local brand name. As a result, the relationship between cognitive, affective and conative components of COO influence on consumer's intention to buy products and services has gained a significant research attention and examined by many researchers including Cui, Wajda, and Hu, 2012; Li, Monroe, and Chan, 1994; Mowen, 1995; Sharma, 2011; Wang et al., 2012; Zajonc, 1984 (Carter, 2014).

Amongst many studies which deliver a theoretical contribution to COO literature by holding existing theories and models, Samiee (2011) applies the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) in the research. The model processes information in two methods – central routes and peripheral route. According to Samiee (2011), motivated consumers are capable of information procession through the central route wherea inactive consumers process the peripheral route where they evaluate a product based on surface-level characteristics. However, very few empirical studies indicate indicates the frequency of central versus peripheral processing in the context of COO effects, including Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, (2008), Samiee et al., (2005). These scholars suggest that the high rate of brand-country misperceptions found in their studies can be an indication of more peripheral processing. Magnusson et al. (2011) remark that limited cognitive capacity encourages consumers to depend on peripheral processing, hence attitudes developed using the peripheral route.

From the perspective of an information processing of COO effects, on the other hand, consumers use COO cues as the cognitive processes making inferences about quality and other brands/product attributes (Chattalas et al., 2008, Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999). Further, Cognitive Consistency Theory (CCT) claim that consumer tends to balance their psychological need in order to avoid feeling depressed and low esteem. People show a willingness to maintain a balanced status all the time. Obermiller and Spangenberg (1989) suggest that the cognitive process of COO has an impact on brand evaluations or attitudes directly or indirectly. The affective and normative process can consider for inconsistencies in COO influence on brand evaluations and willingness to buy. The effect of COO can be weaker on purchase intentions when the product evaluations act as a mediator, or purchase intentions have more antecedents than brand evaluations (Obermiller and Spangenberg, 1989).

On the other hand, Riefler (2012) describes that Follow, and Jobber (2000) implemented a hierarchy model of “Personal values – Attitude – Purchase Intention – Behaviour” based on the Theory of Reasoned Action. The model testified the product-specific relationship between individual values and attitudes on the purchase intention. Reviewing these successfully

constructed models reveal that many studies underpin the concept of COO with consumer attitude theories. This is because attitudes strongly influence behavior and they are essential to consumer behavior research (Riefler, 2012). Typically, the goal of utilising marketing approach is to identify attitudes about products, brands, and services to adapt marketing strategies to reflect the product image correspondingly (Lee and Lee, 2018).

The role of COO in a product's life cycle

Apart from theoretical assumptions, the role of COO needs to be adjusted with the practical application of COO in the real world. Many scholars have been found the conventional role of COO in general product categories in terms of their product life cycle. According to Niss (1996), COO origin cues are likely to use in the introduction stage of the product lifecycle than in the growth and maturity stages. It is because a favourable country-of-origin image assists in penetrating the market faster than using a brand name strategy in the introduction stage. Subsequently, Lampert and Jaffe (1998) proposed a model of a 'country's product image life cycle' including four stages: pre-introduction, introduction, growth, and maturity. COO's halo effect creates the core product image during the pre-introduction and introduction stages. During the growth phase, the country's product image still influences by the halo effect although brand image becomes more critical and replaces the halo effect. It is because brand image influences the halo effect of the country image by resulting high brand familiarity based on consumers' use and experience among different brands.

3.3. The shift of research interest from COO to other ascendants

Globalisation causes the production of hybrid products produced by the local manufacturer but named as foreign brands, or designated as local brands but produced by the international manufacturer can regard as “hybrid” products. Along with the emergence of hybrid products that include more than one COO, it becomes challenging the issue of accuracy and validity of COO labels. In response, recent studies re-conceptualise the construct into others including Country-of-Design (COD), Country-of-Assembly (COA), Country-of-Party (COP), Country-of-Brand (COB) as well as Country-of-Manufacture (COM) (Aichner, 2014).

Besides, Usunier (2006) states that COO information become ascertain for consumers because the labelling requirements are changeable. As a result, COO is not as vital as before, and consumers assume COO information as an unimportant cue. It is mentioned that “*COO effect is no longer a major issue for international marketing operations: multinational production, global branding, and the decline of origin labelling in WTO rules tend to blur the COO issue and lessen its relevance*” (Usunier, 2006, p. 61). It is noted that consumers might not show the interest and use of COO information for purchase intentions and actual buying behaviour.

3.3.1. Re-defining the COO effect

Defining the COO effect in the literature has long been in constant and caused a significant debate amongst scholars with different perspectives. Initially, the definition of COO is the country where the products' manufacturing or assembling occurred and described as the use of ‘made in’ label on products (Nagashima, 1970; 1977, Chasin and Jaffe, 1979, Bilkey and Nes, 1982). This definition is reconceptualised to some extent by many scholars including Han and Terpstra (1988), Papadopoulos and Heslop (1993) and Ahmed and d'Astous (2004), continuously regarding Country of Manufacture (COM) and Country of Assembly (COA) as the main pillars of COO effects. On the other hand, Saeed (1994) proposes that a product's COO can be beneficial from considering as Country of Association (COA) which means that the country where a manufacturer's product or brand is associated.

With the explosion of cross-border business in the 1990s, the globalisation movement becomes an influence on manufacturing process of goods that involve more than one countries to reduce costs. To solve the COO confusion of definition, the scholars including Wall et al., (1991), Thakor and Kohli (1996) advocate the alternative definition of product's country of origin as the country where the headquarters of that product or brand's company placed. The term, brand

origin (BO), introduces as a result and consider having an important impact on consumer's attitudes towards the products. The implication of brand origin information as a product's origin is likely to have a positive impact on products with symbolic meaning. The main advantage of brand origin implication is that BO has more excellent stability over more extended periods, associated with a single country that means offering clarity.

Subsequently, Papadopoulos (1993) indicate that the 'made in' label concept of COO became narrow since products nowadays could manufacture in one country but designed, assembled, and branded in other countries. On the other hand, using COO as a single-cue in the research can also be the issue of internal validity whereas conducting COO research with simulated case scenarios, and student participants can be the issue of external validity (Papadopoulos and Heslop, 1993). Liefeld (2004) also points out that COO "is not a relevant attribute for making choices between alternatives" (p. 91). Samiee et al. (2005) propose that there are three reasons for consumers who are lack of using the COO cue. Firstly, consumers do not consider COO cue as essential to preserve in memory; secondly, consumers' lack of intention to use COO information in product judgement although consumer recognise it, and finally, the actual knowledge and accuracy of a product's COO under non-laboratory conditions is low.

Meanwhile, other scholars insisted on the relevance of COO in consumers' product evaluation and purchase intentions. According to research, when the product complexity and risk become higher, the purchase frequency of the product becomes lower; for this reason, COO effects become more important (Paswan and Sharma, 2004). As new perspectives in the COO field, Javalgi, Cutler, and Winans (2001) contributed COO literature from services marketing perceptions rather than tangible products. Kim and Chung (1997) explored how brand- and country- related intangible assets impact the market share of brands and the effectiveness of marketing. One significant finding is that a brand can create positive brand-specific assets, such as brand popularity, with the absence of a positive country name equity. A country name generated positive value to the brands from particular countries (for example, Japan, Germany).

Apart from these debates on the irrelevance (or relevance) of COO in consumer purchase decision-making process, there still have some limitations in the COO research field. Ashraf and Merunka (2017) reported that the sampling techniques had been criticised for using non-probability convenience methods by using a typical (university students) population. The spread of geographical areas is also limited in COO research field because the research focus

on least developed countries has not received enough attention from scholars although many developed countries, developing economies and industrialised countries are well-researched. Due to the use of different product category in the sample, the effect of COO and the reputation of COO is more significant in some research findings than on others, leading to the scarcity of specific product studies.

In this study, the definition of COO construct introduces from a new perspective of considering brand origin as a product's COO origin. Simply put, the dimension of COO decomposes into Country of Brand (i.e., brand origin) and propose that having an influential relationship on consumers' product evaluation and purchase intention of hybrid products. In this sense, COO is defined as *the country which a consumer associates with a particular product or brand as being its source, regardless of where the product is actually produced* (Thakor and Kohli, 1996, Jaffe and Nebenzahl, 2006; Koschate-Fischer et al., 2012). In the modern world, the classic definition of COO as 'made in' label becomes less relevant when considering the more complex process of multi-national or hybrid products. It is difficult to trace the origins when a product's brand developed in home country where the head office is located, designed in one country and manufactured or assembled in another country. This phenomenon can negatively affect consumers to clarify the exact origin of a product or brand.

The consideration of brand origin as the reconceptualization of the COO effect becomes increasingly focus by recent studies. Andéhn and L'Espoir Decosta (2016) suggest that defining the product's COO should shift from the country of manufacture (COM)/ 'made in' label to brand origin (BO). In other words, 'Country of Brand' concept is more worthy of exploring than other concepts such as COM, COD which are supposedly mature in the literature. Moreover, taking brand origin as a new perspective to determine the product's COO origin is advantageous because it is contemporary and has high stability and clarity. Researchers including Josiassen (2008; 2011), Magnusson et al. (2011), Eng et al. (2016) embrace the fact that brand origin could act as the dominate information cue for consumers in evaluating the brands, products and buying intention.

3.3.2. The dimension of COO effect in the study

Methodologically, the critical positions of country of origin include three main components: the place, the origin (association) and the 'effect' itself (Andehn and Decosta, 2018). This study takes the perception of the 'commodity-place' dimension of the COO effect. Andehn and

Decosta (2018) described the properties of the commodity-place as “provenance as a particular form of association is particularly potent for inferring meaning. Provenance is completely decoupled from any spatial criterion in determining origin (Magnusson et al., 2011). Attitude about the place can affect evaluation even without the consumer being explicitly aware of the attitude (Herz and Diamantopoulos, 2013” (p. 886).

In many instances, this research discovers the relevance of COO information is still valid. In the situations as such whether the COO attribute of a product is revealed or set an assumption, whether the COO information is correct or not, it has influence to some extent on how consumers perceive, connect and evaluate the information cue. It becomes important, especially in nowadays' situation, as consumers' perception of COO can indicate the emergence of significant message. Despite the phenomenon of global supply chain, the COO is still considered as a relevance as long as consumers perceive commodities to correlated with places (Andehn and Decosta, 2018).

Numerous studies, as mentioned in the previous section, have explored various dimensions of origin and parts of value chain to regard as the most efficient representation of origin identification, such as country of parts, of assembly, of manufacture and of brand origin and of design. Reviews show that country-of-brand origin supposes to be the most precise predictor of the origin in the case of commodities.

Recent study by Herz and Diamantopoulos (2017) found that consumers can be hesitant to admit the use of COO cue but COO still shows its relevancy in even broader category such as services (Javalgi et al., 2001). In some cases, either consumers lack knowledge about the product origin (Samiee et al., 2005) or they deliberately ignore to check the origin (Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2008). Associating a product's origin in the form of brand (Thakor and Kholi, 1996) could be connected to the increasing importance of origins. For example, consumers buy Louis Vuitton for its association with French brand origin instead of its manufacturing locations in different countries. In addition, Andehn and L'Espoir Decosta (2016) testified that the strength of association between a place and a brand can increase the applicability of COO impact on consumers' evaluation.

3.4. A Country-related Product Image effects on products

It has long been accepted that the constructs of Country of Origin and Country Image are interchangeable or inter-dependent in the literature due to some similar properties of each construct. However, this study considers these two constructs separately as an individual variable that can influence the evaluation of products and consumers' purchase intention. This section of literature devotes to provide the clear stance of 'country-related product image' from the construct of the COO effect mentioned in the previous section.

Similar to the case of the COO effect, the definitional domain of country image construct is largely debatable. Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009) distinguish the construct into *three* specific groups –general image of countries (or country image), the image of countries and their products (or product-country image), the images of products from a country (or product image). Further, they list all available definitions of country image domain in the literature as in *Appendix 3.2*.

This study takes a stance from the last group – Product Image (i.e., country-related product image). Amongst the various definitions of PI, Roth and Romeo (1992) define the country-related product image as *“the overall perception consumers' form of products from a particular country, based on their prior perceptions of the country's production and marketing strength and weakness”* (p.480). The choice of the definitional domain of country image is mainly dependent on the objective of study which aimed to re-evaluate the construct of the country of origin and product's country image as separate and independent constructs in consumers' product evaluation and their purchase intention. This definition of PCI is focused on consumers' perception of product-origin for a specific category, whereas the COO effect is viewed from the perspective of brand-origin for general product categories.

One of the studies similar to the current research by approaching country image and country of origin construct as separated constructs is Ahmed and d'Astous (1995). They evaluated the importance of country images in consumer product evaluation and the effect of country-of-origin perceptions on consumer brand evaluation. In Ahmed and d'Astous's research, amongst a set of attributes (brand, price, and warranty), participants ranked COO as the least important attribute whereas brand reputation as the most crucial attribute for a video cassette recorder. Participants in their study firstly prioritised price, then followed by brand reputation and warranty. In addition, the importance of country image to the customer buying decisions has

significantly studied by considering the connection between country evolution and manufacturing dimensions of a product (Ahmed et al., 2002). Unlike Ahmed and d'Astous (1995) study, this study proposes the image cues of country and brand as influential factors on consumers' product evaluation and willingness to buy. Besides, other similar studies are conducted by Kim and Li (2016) in the context of China; Yunus and Rashid (2016) in the context of Malaysia; Murtaza (2016) in the context of Pakistan; Sevanandee and Damar-Ladkoo (2018) in Mauritius.

There are *two* debatable views on the country image of a product. One view emphasizes on the perceptiveness of the country image effect as 'product category-specific' whereas some scholars (e.g., Knight and Calantone, 2000) do not align with the assumption that the image of a country is changeable. Nagashima (1977) conducted the longitudinal study examining 'made in' product-country image and found out the dynamic nature of the country image. Also, Papadopoulos et al., (1987) stated that country image, or 'made in' stereotype, is changeable over time in consumers' perceptions of foreign goods. From the product-country image perceptiveness, the product class and type can be an influence on consumers' mindset. For example, a mechanical product 'made in France' could possibly be formed neutral perceptions in consumers' mind although consumers develop a positive attitude towards a drink product such as wine 'made in France.'

However, Knight and Calantone (2000) argued that the boundaries of a specific country image are not limited to specific product categories. Chaney (2002) conducted the influence of overall country image on a particular product produced from that country, especially for the wine industry. In that study, although Switzerland exports very little wine into the global market, there is a possibility of perceiving Swiss wine as a high-quality beverage due to the positive connection with an overall country image of Switzerland. Thus, the image of country of origin can influence product image, meanwhile the country image affects consumers' uncertainty level (Souiden et al., 2011).

In the marketing literature, it has been found that a product's brand image and 'made in' country image and perceived COO of the brand have interactive influences. For example, when well-known brand products produce in the weak-country image, the image of the manufacturing can improve whereas the image of the brand can damage and negatively affect in its product evaluation (Nebenzahl and Jaffe, 1991; Kim and Bamber, 2008). It is found that the brand

image of (products made in Japan) Sony and Sanyo's higher image decrease when the product is made in USA, China, Indonesia (Hui and Zhou, 2003). It is assumed that when the well-known brands produce in the less developing countries, the products still evaluate in a negative perception.

Empirically, the country image can directly and positively impact on brand image and purchase intentions (Hsieh et al. 2004; Laroche et al. 2005). Consumers are willing to pay a price premium for branded products from an origin with the favourable country image (Koschate-Fischer et al., 2012). According to Papadopoulos and Heslop (2005), country image is pervasive and can have a significant influence on buyers of all types. Similarly, Diamantopoulos et al., (2011) researched over 300 UK consumers are interviewed on their intentions of buying the specific US and Chinese brands. The analysis showed that country image has an impact on purchase intentions indirectly while brand image acts as a mediator. In their study, Diamantopoulos et al., (2011) approach the impact of COI and brand image in two perspectives; the relative impact of COI and brand image as causally-linked drivers ("irradiation" perspective) and as independent drivers ("orthogonality" perspective) on consumers' intentions to buy the specific US and Chinese brands.

According to Diamantopoulos et al., (2011), an 'irradiation' perspective for conceptual direction assumes that "a subjective interlinkage of perceptions whereby the evaluation of specific property transfers to the evaluation of another property and influences the latter" (Florack et al., 2007, p. 347). An image of a particular country perceived by consumers can shape their perceptions of the image of a brand from that country. In the irradiation perspective of PCI, it holds the assumption that a consumer's favourable (unfavourable) perception of a given country may impact the consumer's perception of the product concerned with that country. The identification of the origin of a product influences the perception of one or more other attributes of the product (Weiss-Richard, 2003, p. 42; cited in Diamantopoulos et al., (2011).

On the other hand, an 'orthogonality' perspective of country image effect is based on the assumption that CI and brand image have direct and possibly compensatory effects on outcome variables, such as purchase intention (Diamantopoulos et al., 2011). This perspective for conceptual assumes that a positive CI can recompense a weak brand, but the reverse effect has not occurred. Instead, consumers' perceptions of countries and brand images are developed

independently of each other. This **orthogonality** approach shows the less significant use in the literature and needs to investigate knowledge contribution in the mainstream COO research. In the light of cross-sectional nature of the research, the scenario of conceptual model is assumed as – a) a products' country image and brand image are not causally related under 'orthogonality' perspective, b) the relationship between PCI and consumers' purchase intention is significant, or product's country image has influence on consumers' willingness to buy. Thus, *the strength of the influence of PCI on consumers' willingness to buy is comparable with the impact of a brand image while the general country origin effect still remains as another relevant factor on consumers' attitudes and intentional behavior.* The backbone of this concept is initially described as Scenario 2 in Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch, Palihawadana's (2011) study.

3.4.1. Micro- and Macro- level images

There are *two* different conceptualisations of the country image - the country (macro) level and the product (micro) level (Martin and Eroglu, 1993; Agarwal and Sikri, 1996). Country of origin image (macro-level) is different from the product country image (micro-level). Product country image (PCI) represents the image that consumers have of products from a specific country. Both country image of products is considered as an influential external cue in product evaluation. Unlike brand or corporate images, however, the country image is not directly under the marketer's control. Hence, understanding the consumers' perception of product's country image is beneficial for scholars and marketers.

Pappu et al. (2007) state that a combination of macro and micro country images can deliver a more comprehensive understanding of COO effects. It is found that a robust favourable match between country and product image can assist the positive influence of COO on product evaluation and willingness to buy (Dagger and Raciti, 2011). These scholars propose that the country image effects are manageable but not controllable by the firm; for instance, the British Telecom transformed its name to BT after research demonstrated the negative stereotype effect on many people towards Great Britain (Stone, 2002). Alternatively, the relationship between a product and its origin can be bridged based on either a positive or a negative country image. For instance, Roth and Romeo (1992) found the consistency between the product category and the country image due to a higher purchase intention of products from a particular country by participants.

3.4.2. Empirical practices of country image

Laroche et al. (2005) state that the country image has three-dimensional concepts, including cognitive, affective, and conative components. Scholars such as Papadopoulos et al., (2011) suggested a three-factor model of a multi-dimensional construct, reflecting country beliefs (the cognitive component), people affect (affective component), and desired interaction (conative component) instead of a single-factor model. Formal trademarks such as their flags and currencies, in music and landmarks, people and personalities, cultural and product exports are images that are an integral part of people's cognitive beliefs structures. It evokes strong emotions; for example, Italian arias, Persian carpets, the Rio Carnival and New Orleans Mardi Gras, Russian roulette, German engineering, a stalemate, and TexMex food (Papadopoulos et al., 2011).

As practical implications, the scholars measure the dimension of country image in diverse techniques. Han (1990) evaluated the effect of the country image on consumers' perceptions of various products and their purchase intention of brands from different countries. According to Han (1990), the country image can be measured by five items: technical advancement, prestige value, workmanship, price, and serviceability. Subsequently, Roth and Romeo (1992) developed a framework that matches the product category and country image perceptions. Four dimensions were used to measure country image: innovativeness, design, prestige, and workmanship. Product categories included beers, cars, leather shoes, crystal, bicycles and watches. The countries evaluated were the UK, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Japan, South Korea, Mexico, Spain and the USA. Their findings showed that consumers from the USA, Mexico and Ireland have high willingness-to-buy towards products produced in countries with high dimensions for that particular product (for example, Car from Japan, Germany or the USA) (Roth and Romeo, 1992).

Knight and Calantone (2000) argued that Han's model has weaknesses as it does not consider the simultaneous processing of country image and product beliefs that can build consumer attitudes. As a result, Knight and Calantone introduce an adapted model which considers the simultaneous processing of country image and product beliefs which comes from direct or indirect experience (Gurhan-Canli and Maheswaran, 2000). Country image, in their model, is considered to have an additional indirect effect on attitudes through consumers' product beliefs. It is also found that a country's image includes affective components. It shows a direct influence and a stronger impact on product evaluation than on product beliefs. Alternatively,

Li et al., (2009) argue that the cognitive components of a country's image show a stronger influence on product beliefs than on product evaluation. Regardless of country image is based on affective or cognitive components, the total effect of it on product evaluation is equally crucial. However, Li et al. (2009) find that the effect of the country image on purchase intention of products with affection is higher than that of cognition.

Li et al., (2009) applied the Fishbein's model in their study on the influence of country image concerning the purchase intention of Chinese consumers. The result showed that the country image does not directly influence purchase intention, but the effects on functional appraisal, symbolic appraisal, brand attitudes and subjective norm act as mediators that country image have an indirect impact on the consumers' purchase intention. Similarly, Lee and Chen (2008) explore the relationships between country image, product beliefs, affect, familiarity and willingness to buy of products from four countries in the context of Taiwan. They argue that a country image has no direct influence on Taiwanese consumers' willingness to buy but has an indirect influence on consumers through products beliefs. Meanwhile, the 'affect' variable has both direct and indirect influence on consumers' willingness to buy but shows a stronger on product beliefs than on willingness to buy.

Furthermore, the study by Maher and Carter (2011) examined the linkage of country effect between country cognitions and a willingness to buy by applying valid measures of country effect. According to Maher and Carter, the affective and cognitive country components do not contribute to a similar effect on purchase intention. They found that the 'affective' country attitudes (contempt and admiration) influence Kuwaitis' willingness to buy American products. Hence, the 'affective' dimensions of country image play a crucial role in consumer decision making. It is recommended that the model should be tested across culture samples in order to gain generalisability.

The role of country image in product evaluations can be either a halo or a summary construct Han (1989) stated that consumer's belief and brand attitude would be affected by country image via halo effect when the consumers are not familiar. The brand attitude will directly be affected by country image via summary effect when the consumers are familiar with the product. The country image is more likely to affect belief about products than consumer's attitude. According to Li et al., (2009), the country image does not have a direct effect on consumers' purchase intention but have an indirect effect via functional appraisal, symbolic appraisal, brand attitudes and subjective norm.

3.4.3. Country stereotyping

The above section shows a clear indication of the impact of country image on both product evaluation and purchase intention. However, the level of impact varies from country to country, mainly due to the effect of stereotypes. These stereotypical associations mainly involve national stereotypes, knowledge, beliefs, experiences, which lead to specific country imagery and they also affect in the brand image of a product (Chattalas et al., 2008). Haubl (1996) states that attitudes towards a particular country can affect the product from that country; for example, French products are more hedonic.

Roth and Romeo (1992) introduce the term called 'product-country matches', meaning consumers match stereotypical associations of a country with its generic products. Roth and Romeo proposed that product-country match acts as an indicator for the willingness to buy foreign products, resulting in that consumers prefer product categories from one country rather than another. When Dagger and Raciti (2011) research on matching consumers' country and product image perception, there is no significant impact of demographic data (including age, gender, marital status, and income levels) on the country image, product category and willingness to buy. However, the effect occurs unconsciously among consumers and it influences consumers' product evaluation (Dagger and Raciti, 2011). The occurrence of unfavourable mismatch relationship shows a negative influence on consumers' product evaluations and willingness to buy. The main product features need to portray the perceived strengths of a country to avoid a negative product-country match

Besides, Ahmad and d'Astous (2001) state that country stereotypes significantly affect not only in evaluations of products from foreign countries but also the cognitive processing of other product-related cues. In particular, consumers stereotype the origin of products by using either experience with similar products (*summary effect*) or a general impression of the country (*halo effect*) (Diamantopoulos et al., 2011) The country image of the 'halo effect' influences product evaluation through 'beliefs.' These country stereotypical beliefs emerge from the direct experience with national groups or indirectly through art, media exposure or education (Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999).

However, Usunier (2007) pointed out that country familiarity such as visits to other countries does not necessarily evaluate positive attitudes toward those countries and their products. Instead, Usunier and Cestre (2007) research on product ethnicity and found that the ethnic

congruency of products leads to a higher willingness-to-buy. Certain countries have particular product categories that are assumed by consumers as a favourable image due to their capabilities or reputation in these specific product categories, for example, France has an excellent reputation for perfumes and Germany for automobiles, and Turkey for carpets (Diamantopoulos et al., 2011). These stereotypical association can impact on consumers' preference in one country positively or negatively based on the product category. For example, Japanese electronics manufacturers would achieve credibility by using Japanese COO whereas this strategy could not be applied to the Japanese Wine Market.

Hence, the different individual has a different country image in their mind. For example, some consumers regard Samsung as an image of Japan is favourable due to Japanese high-technology innovation and high quality whereas Korea as "emerging market, low price and below-average quality" gain less favourable image (Anholt, 2010). However, participants in one research take South Korea as a newly industrialised country with a highly educated workforce and advanced engineering capabilities and consequently have a very favourable PCI of South Korean high-tech electronics (Magnusson et al., 2011, p. 459). This fact indicates that there is a need for and cross-culture investigation on consumers' perception of product's country image and its influence on their behaviour in a broader context of knowledge.

In addition to linking country image as the product-category level precisely, scholars such as Cengiz and Kirkbir (2007) attempts to take the perspective of the country image from the influence of a country's general attributes. In this sense, COO can be a source of country stereotyping and more influence on consumers' attitudes towards the brand of a country than product attribute ratings (Cengiz and Kirkbir, 2007). Scholars such as Lotz and Hu (2001), Anholt (2003) researched the role of country-of-origin and stereotyping country image in consumers' mind. It is suggested that a negative country image could be diminished by exposing consumers to disconfirming product information through country-level policies. Before that, Agarwal and Sikri's (1996) study focused on the different dimensions (living standard, technology standard, educational level, political stability, and economic level) of the country image for a well-established product category and the influence on perceptions of new products. Countries, cities, and regions with a good reputation are likely to receive positive reputations, including "opening doors, creating trust, generating respect and raising the expectation of quality, competence and integrity" (Agarwal and Sikri's, 1996, p.207).

From the manufacturing point of view, the products are still evaluated in a negative perception when the well-known brand is produced in less developing countries. Balabanis and Diamantopoulos (2011) found a significant negative effect of origin in the situation of misclassification for a global brand with a weak country image. Consumers' willingness to pay a price premium for branded products from the favourable country image is significantly high; for example, the USA and South Korea (Koschte-Fischer et al., 2012; Aybeniz et al., 2014). Consumers in Europe and America willing to pay more for the product with “made in Japan” rather than the identical products “Made in Vietnam.”

Culture closeness and biased perception

Consumers favour products from countries that they find culturally, politically or economically closer to their own (Koubaa et al., 2011). According to Ryu et al. (2006), psychological experiments findings prove that consumers are more likely to favour toward the products of the same ethnicity. Hsieh (2004) also investigated the geographical closeness in product evaluation, particularly for the automobiles industry. The findings showed that consumers showed a willingness to buy not only domestic products but products that originated from the same geographic trading bloc. Balabanis and Diamantopoulos (2004) name it as ‘domestic country biases’ while Shimp and Sharma (1987) perceive it as ‘consumer ethnocentrism.’

According to Batra et al. (2000), previous research findings pointed out that the level of development influences consumer product/brand origin evaluation, socio-economic factors of a product’s originated country and the level of customisation to cultural needs (Winit et al. 2014). They suggested that different cultural characteristics nationalistic can be explored in more realistic decision making setting and diverse sample by using incorporate brands from countries with positive/negative COO images (Winit et al., 2014). Moreover, consumers’ product belief can be moderated by socio-demographic and national cultural characteristics (Hsieh et al., 2004).

Similarly, Chasin and Jaffe’s findings highlighted that the construct of ethnocentrism since American industrial buyers ranked products from Eastern Europe countries are lower than their domestic products. Olsen, Nowak, and Clarke (2002) investigated the application of COO as an extrinsic product cue at a trade-based level rather than a consumer-based level. Findings show that Mexican restaurants remarkably showed purchase intentions for Mexican wine compared to general non-Mexican restaurants.

Since Han's (1990) study only considered the product category dimensions instead of the cultural dimension in determining the impact of the country image, there is a potential weakness of standardising country-of-origin image (COI) scales to measure the country image of products in different countries. In order to fill this gap, Haubl (1996) pointed out that the implication of theories and models across countries and cultures should be cautiously approached due to the risk of making invalid cross-national inferences. This is because models that are developed and tested in one country have the issue of validating model constructs while applying them in another country. This study fills this void by practicing the country image of a product in under-researched Southeast Asian country.

3.5. Brand origin

In the COO research, the brand origin is presumed to be a transparent information cue and a supporting actor of COO (Josiassen et al., 2008). Van Ittersum et al. (2003) also states that the influence of brand origin on a product evaluation has derived from a country of origin perceptible. Zdravkovic (2013) indicates the brand origin as the form of 'supporting actor' of country of origin. The main difference is that the perception of brand origin is different from the location of product manufacturing for that brand, or the perceived manufacturing location by consumers. Instead, *it is referred to the place, region or country to which the brand is perceived to belong by its target consumers* (Thakor and Kohli, 1996).

The brand origin definition is identified based on consumer perceptions because consumers' choice of one brand or another can be the outcome of perceptions on the brand origin. This definition is diverse from the traditional COO definition in two features. Firstly, it highlights on consumer perception of a brand concerning with its origin instead of where a product is produced. Secondly, this definition assists in connecting the concept of brand origin as part of brand image and thus, the concept creates the theoretical foundation and an integral component of branding literature rather than as a simple purchase intention cue (Liefeld, 2004; Samiee et al., 2005; Kim and Li, 2016; Won and Kim, 2017; Coffey and Kabadayi, 2019).

Besides, the concept of brand origin is stated as a construct of emotional and cognitive components. Traditionally, cognitive components are 'knowledge' about physical attributes, where affective components are 'feelings' towards the attributes. Consumers apply cognitive components to evaluate the products based on its brand origin when consumers are motivated (Karunaratna and Quester 2007); however, individuals use emotional cues to shape attitudes when the motivation is low (Gurhan-Canli and Maheswaran 2000).

According to Wu and Fu (2007), the country of manufacture or country of assembling has less influence on the effect of brand origin cues. Made-in cues have impacts on quality evaluation whereas brand origin cues impact on purchase intention significantly. Product quality perceives unfavourable perception when a brand from a developed country is manufactured in developing countries, although this may not affect consumers' purchase intentions (Eng et al., 2016). This study investigates the purchase intention of consumer, and the quality evaluation does not consider in the integrated model. Applying this reasoning into the current research, the COO

information of the research product is considered from the perspective of brand origin country (i.e., Apple as a US origin, Samsung as a South Korean origin and Xiaomi as a Chinese origin).

The brand origin is an inclusive concept which is embedded as cues in many popular brand names. Consumers acquire brand origin knowledge or information through their product experience and word-of-mouth (Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2008). Generally, consumers assume the brand name of a product as an indicator of the real origin of that product (Liefeld 2004, Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2008). Consumers use brand origin information for a number of reasons – a) to interest from an intrinsic orientation to an extrinsic orientation, b) to identify themselves a socially acceptable person, c) to be identifiable by peers or defined groups of society (Paswan and Sharma, 2004). However, consumers' association with brand origin becomes less significant when social desire or motivation is less necessary or the brand is unable to provide positive competence information.

Based on these assumptions, there are *two* complementary views on the brand origin – its effect on stereotyping the perception of products, and its associations as the outcome of popular brand names of a specific product. The origin cues are one important characteristic related to many brands. Although some luxury products are manufactured in multiple locations, they symbolise the single image and home country identity (Samiee, Shimp and Sharma, 2005). European brand origins offer the opportunity of gaining trust and premium prices for luxury brands (Oetzel and Doh, 2009).

Moreover, brand origin stresses consumer perceptions of brand relation to its origin, and it also acts as part of the brand image. Consumers consider the information of brand origin and brand image because both are the indicator of perceived quality and social status (Shukla, 2010). For example, it has been tested that the brand image and brand origin play essential roles as moderators than direct influencers in the interaction effects between the normative and informational interpersonal impacts on the (luxury) purchase intentions (Shukla, 2011). Although it cannot be affirmed that origin-based brand positioning is always related to luxury, using brand origin-based positioning create a significant impact on consumers' perception.

In branding literature, consumers' perceptions on many components of brand equity such as brand image, brand personality, brand affinity, brand relationships, brand charisma and brand attitude have been well-established, apart from the brand origin (Thakor and Kohli, 1996). According to Samiee et al., (2005), brand origin encourages the country influences on choice

behaviour in an accurate and realistic approach as well as assist in developing an international marketing strategy. However, there is a need to conduct the concept of brand origin, which has the potential to contribute to the insight understanding of how consumers perceive brands. Previous studies have found that the level of brand origin confusion among consumers is high, especially in developing countries where the consumers' product knowledge is low. Hence, it is worthy of exploring the brand origin field to gain insightful knowledge about consumer perceptions on it.

Table 3.3: notable studies in the brand origin literature

Constructs and findings	Studies
<p><u>Brand origin associations on price and quality perception</u></p> <p>Country of manufacture does not affect product quality evaluations when the country of corporate ownership is present.</p>	<p>Thakor and Lavack (2003), Krupka, Ozretic-Dosen, and Previsic (2013), Saridakis and Baltas (2014), Smaoui, Kilami and Touzani (2016)</p>
<p><u>Brand origin recognition</u></p> <p>Differentiated routes of consumer perceptions of foreign brands and local brands are researched. A long history of brand 'localisation' can cause a low level of recognition.</p>	<p>Jin, Chansarkar and Kondap (2006), Tjiptono, Arli and Rosari (2015), Mandler, Won and Kim (2017)</p>
<p><u>Brand origin effect on brand/product evaluation and purchase intention</u></p> <p>Brand origin information is more influential on purchase intention than quality evaluation</p>	<p>Wu and Fu (2007), Lee, Johnson and He (2009), O'Cass and Siahtiri (2013), Diamantopoulos, Herz and Koschate-Fischer (2017), Coffey and Kabadayi (2019)</p>
<p><u>Brand origin and country of production congruity</u></p> <p>The COO effect can be different between the brand origin (BO) and country of production (COP). The findings show that consumers from developed countries use BO and COP cue for product evaluation while developing countries counterparts prioritise on brand image and price</p>	<p>Eng, Ozdemir and Michelson (2016), Kim and Li (2016),</p>

3.5.1. The issue of brand origin confusion

Due to the production of hybrid products caused by the effect of globalisation, brand origin where the country is perceived to belong by its target consumers has experienced confusion in the consumer minds (Yamen and Koubaa, 2008). One example is that Ettenson (1993) explored the emergence of 'bi-national' products (manufactured in one country and branded by a company from another country) in Eastern Europe area; for example, American brand Levis jeans are manufactured in Hungary, and German automobiles brand Opel are assembled in Hungary. The research explored the effect of brand name and country of origin information on the decision-making behaviour of Russia, Polish and Hungarian consumers and found that bi-national products make the place of manufacture vague as well as the product's brand name ambiguity (Ettenson, 1993).

Consumers rely on cue from other sources to decide brand origin, such as perceived languages of the brand name, and this could lead to incorrect brand origin perceptions. In some cases, when an existing brand is already well-established in a specific product category, new entrants are likely to choose the "mimic" the origin of the established brands (Thakor and Kohli, 1993). The challenges in learning brands' origin perception include -

- a) the spelling or pronunciation of the brand name which are not necessarily same with the brand's home country (Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2008),
- b) product price point with low quality (Brouthers and Xu, 2002),
- c) the lack of origin information, marketers' usage of a foreign brand strategy which intend to obfuscate a brand's actual origin is replaced with a more favourable association.

For example, Chinese brand such as Seagull, Jasonwood, Easton, Bird and Draft have applied this strategy. These barriers interrupt consumers to obtain incorrect or misleading information about the brand origin, and it attracts the researchers' attention in the international marketing field.

Alternatively, Samiee et al. (2005) indicate that the low level of brand origin recognition (including popular brands) is due to either genuinely limited knowledge or intentionally neglect of information based on their priority. To address these issues, Balabanis and Diamantopoulos (2011) explore the consequences of brand origin misclassification and non-classification on

consumers' brand image evaluations and purchase intentions. The results showed that a famous brand's actual origin is more recognisable than other infamous brands in consumer mind. Consumers being unable to associate a brand with any origin can show adverse outcomes on brand image perceptions and purchase intention, and the phenomenon is called 'brand origin non-classification. Similarly, misclassification also harms consumers' evaluation and purchase intention. Zhuang et al., (2008) suggest that consumer's cognition processes (including the cognitive ability, their interest in the brand and its origin, memory) are factors that can influence the degree of confusion.

Consumers' brand origin knowledge is significantly poor according to previous research findings. Liefeld's (2004) research found that only 1.4 percent of consumers are willing to know the origin of a product, only 6 percent know the origin before purchasing and 88.8 percent report that they did not know the origin of a product as well as not willing to find out. Therefore, it is clear that consumer' knowledge of brand origin is restricted. Studies by Samiee et al. (2005) found that US respondents identify the correct origin of 35 percent of the brands. Balabanis and Diamantopoulos (2008) found that UK consumers can only identify correctly 27 percent of the brand origins for microwave ovens. Since consumers are often unfamiliar with brands' exact origin, COO which is the core driver of brand origin reconceptualization, cannot be an essential factor affecting consumers' attitudes and behaviour.

In order to minimise the degree of brand origin confusion, Kotler (2000) suggests that when a consumer has more knowledge about brands, they can distinguish among other brands. Brand knowledge consists of beliefs and attitudes with different strength levels. Esch et al. (2006) stated that more favourable consumer attitudes toward a brand could be formed when consumers have more brand knowledge.

Besides, Magnusson et al., (2011) suggested that education can afford consumers by informing correct brand origin, which can also result in changing attitude. Their research focused on the influence of brand origin perceptions on actual buying behaviour, separately from brand attitude. It is found that less than 10 percent of participants in their study identifies Philips as a Dutch origin, while 75 percent of respondents believed that Philips is a US origin. Thakor and Kohli (1996) stated that perceived brand origin influences brand attitude when consumers can correctly identify a product's correct origin based on their knowledge.

Although researchers control the product category and confounding factors such as consumer demographics, ethnocentrism, the level of involvement, they find that the brand origin misclassification has unfavourable results due to the image losses for brands (Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2011). Brands lose their image when they cannot be identified to the exact origin of the brand. However, this assumption is not generalisable as some brands can be advantageous over the origin confusion. For example, Daewoo gains the favourable image when it is misclassified as the UK or Japanese brand whereas it loses the image when it is misclassified as a Taiwanese, Chinese or German brand.

Usunier (2011) suggested that the origin favourability of the brand can be applied as the promotional strategy by focusing on the brand name. Contradictory to the previous assumption, Magnusson et al., (2011) argued that a brand's perceived origin significantly influences on brand attitude regardless of the accuracy of brand origin perceptions. Reviewing these studies indicate that the literature pool of brand origin is the complex area with different assumptions and constructive argument which still need further research for clarification and extensive knowledge.

Particularly in a developing country context, Zhuang et al., (2004) investigated the brand origin confusion on consumer preference and the purchase of local and foreign brands in China. The respondents in this study are measured their perspectives on brand origin, brand awareness, brand value, brand preference and brand purchase by using hierarchical regression analysis. The result showed that local brands tend to be in an advantageous position when the level of brand origin confusion for foreign brands is high. Also, when consumers' preference and willingness to purchase local brands with foreign-sounding names increase, the market share of foreign brands will decrease (Zhuang et al., 2008). The younger people tend to be more brand knowledgeable than other age groups, resulting in a misperception of the brand can also be higher in elder counterparts. Moreover, the effect of consumers' demographic characteristics on their buying intention has been influenced directly or indirectly in many research works.

3.6. The effects of brand image

In general, a brand is a fundamental concept in defining the perceptions in consumers' mind. According to Aaker's (1996), a brand can be identified as a product, as an organisation, as a person, and as a symbol. Veloutsou (2001) introduces the concept of brand expression, in terms of the brand as a symbol, the brand as a person, and the brand as a product. Kotler (2003) describes the brand as an intricate image which includes specific attributes, functional/emotional benefits, the creator's values, cultural representation, and the user's personality.

On the other hand, Dong and Helms (2001) mention that the brand has many elements including brand name, logo, signs and so on. A branded product can conceptualise both extrinsic and intrinsic cues of the product categories. The dimensions of a brand construct such as reliability and quality show a more substantial impact on a branded product than a no-brand product. A brand's influence on its users by delivering social and emotional value to users and personality of buyers as well as the perceived utility and desirability of the product itself which can add as a product value (Kotler and Gertner, 2002).

In the marketing industry, it has been widely accepted that brand has a significant impact on the evaluation of a product by consumers regardless of being low or high-involvement products (Tse and Gorn, 1993). Consumers' prior experience and association with a certain brand have an essential impact on product evaluation. In a similar vein, Ozretic-Dosen et al. (2007) indicate that brand knowledge (both subjective and objective) is a significant motivator in purchase intention. Marketers need to understand the effect of branding related variables on consumers' perception so that they can implement suitable strategies in the market. In order for a brand to be successful in a long term, the markets need to correctly deliver the meaning of brand (i.e., brand name) before the market entry, deliberately implement their meaning through a brand image, and preserve the image (Dong and Helms, 2001).

The significance of brand names in consumer product evaluation is well-researched in the marketing literature (Tse and Gorn, 1993). Consumers consider the name of a brand as an indicator of product judgements in terms of its image, price, values and quality that are perceived in their mind. Fan (2002) describe that a brand name is beneficial for both user and producer because the former can expect a specific set of attributes and benefits from revealing

the brand name as well as the producers can deliver the values and position for targeted customers of their product in the market.

3.6.1. Components of brand image

Different scholars define the various attributes of the brand image. Gordon (1993) mentioned that brand image consists of five facts, which are user image, occasion image, product image, brand personality and salience. Foxall and Goldsmith (1998) state that brand image consists of several dimensions such as personality, connotations, advantages users, and situations. Keller (1993), on the other hand, state that there are three components of brand image - content, favourability and strength and this can be measured through the use of either Likert scales or semantic differential scales. The favourability of a brand image can take on two values – negative or positive in terms of the direction of the ‘feeling.’

Faircloth et al. (2001) prove that consumers' attitudes about a brand are directly connected to brand image in the form of the brand name's contribution to its image. In some cases, a brand name has sometimes defeated the effect of COO when it becomes significantly popular. Akshay and Monroe (1989) encounter that a brand name is an important cue in the buying decision process of consumers, especially for high-involvement purchases such as cars. Similarly, Dong and Helms (2001) the brand name has an impact on Chinese consumers' attitudes towards its image and encourage their purchasing decision, regardless of differences in quality and features of a product.

The name of a brand can show the different effect on the value of brand image from the perspective of consumers' mind. For example, the study by Leclerc et al. (1994) found that consumers' perceptions and evaluations on products change when the brand name of a product is pronounced in French or English. French named brands are more advantageous than English named brands. However, this concept is not generalizable for all product categories. Some product categories can be more beneficial of having a foreign-sounding brand name whereas other categories are better perceived of having a local-sounding brand name. Dong and Helms (2001) suggested that brand name and its image are dependent upon the cultural context. Commonly, consumers from developing countries prefer brands from developed countries. This perception of a brand is regarded as an image of that brand.

Brand image is the set of beliefs held about a particular brand (Kotler et al., 2003). The diverse definitions of brand image are shown in Table 3.4. The concepts of the brand image can be

represented as symbolic, functional, and usage situation based. A brand image consists of two factors – internal factors refer to consumers' characteristics whereas external factors represent to product features and country image perceptions (Koubaa, 2006). Hui and Zhou (2003) argued that both brand and country reputation moderate the effect of country image and brand image.

Table 3.4: Diverse definitions of brand image

Authors	Definitions of Brand image
(Keller 1998; Dong and Helms, 2001)	consumer perceptions of a brand as reflected by the associations held in consumers' memories
Fan (2002)	a name, logo, symbol or any combination of these definitions that identifies a product or service and differentiates it from other competing products
Kotler and Gertner (2002)	brands differentiate products and represent a promise of value; brands incite beliefs, evoke emotions and prompt behaviours

Consumer culture theory views consumers as brand culture and brand meaning procedures. According to Keller (2000), the power of a brand lies in the mind of consumers, but there could be a difference between what a company wants customers to the brand and what a consumer sees that brand. Low and Lamb (2000) suggest that a brand should be a combination of functional and psychological attributes to portray an image of the brand. Consumers' attachment to a specific brand derives from emotional perceptions and include both functional and symbolic brand beliefs. Since, brand image determines the emotional impact that a brand has on consumers as a result of their perceptions of brand attributes, its content refers to the associations that a brand name may invoke (Keller, 2000). The contribution of brand associations is also different between brands. Associations can be related to both cognition (knowledge) and feelings.

The brand image represents both rational and emotional perceptions that consumers connect with specific brands (Low and Lamb, 2000). Brand image can induce the cognitive, affective and sensory association of consumers toward a particular brand. In marketing practice, a positive brand image favours on both cognitive and affective brand experience and other elements of the brand such as brand trust, attachment, engagement and loyalty (Broyles et al., 2009).

Thus, a brand image can be regarded as a subjective mental picture of a brand shared by a group of consumers (Riezebos, 2003, p. 63). It is defined as a set of perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumers' memory (Hsieh and Lindridge, 2005; cited in Rosengren et al., 2010). The brand image of a product is vital in delivering a perceived value because consumers decide to buy a product with the expectation that specific attributes of the product help to achieve the desired values as a consequence of using that product (Nguyen et al., 2013). Consumers distinguish one brand from another by using that mental representation, leading to their purchasing behaviour.

Similar to COO cue, the concept of a brand is also multidimensional. Brand image is the reasoned or emotional perceptions consumers attach to a specific brand and also have multidimensional attributes (Yamen and Koubaa, 2008, p.141). Veloutsou (2007) described that the brand has two main dimensions: the brand organisation and brand expression. This study mainly concerns with the dimension of brand expression as the brand image of products come from particular countries will be testified. Aaker (1996) classified that the identity of a brand includes the following dimensions: brand as a product, brand as an organisation, brand as a person and brand as a symbol. In line with Veloutsou's (2007) research, the concepts of brand as a symbol, brand as a product and brand as a person can be categorised as the brand expression.

3.6.2. Roles of brand image on products

According to Aaker (1991), brand image has five significant roles – a) allow consumers to retrieve and process information, b) provide a ground to differentiate and position of a product, c) offer a compelling reason to buy, d) produce both a favourable attitude and feeling about the brand, and e), examine brand extendibility. The brand image is not always consistent, for example, Hugo Boss global brands are portrayed the fashion brands for both men and women, apart from Australia where the brand stands as the high-quality fashion brands for men (Matthiesen and Phau, 2005; Roy and Banerjee, 2014).

Marketers have a great interest in the power of consumers to dispense; that is, the purchase of one brand or another (Thakor and Kohli, 1996). Brand image perceptions and purchase intentions have negative consequences when consumers cannot associate a brand with any origin (Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2011). Additionally, quality perceptions, image, and trust showed a high correlation with purchase intentions. Similarly, it has been found that

brand origin and its stereotypes can influence consumers' quality perception, brand-related attitudes, and purchase intentions.

In perspectives of the country-of-origin field, a brand image shows the close link with COO as it is associated with price, quality, and product warranty. Yamen and Koubaa (2008) reported that COO information has a significant direct effect on the brand image as well as an indirect effect on brand image perception due to the moderating effect of brand and country reputation. When some global brands produce their products in China, it shows the significant adverse effect on brand image, brand trust and perceived quality of the global brands (Aybeniz et al., 2014). However, the type of product is also influential in forming either a positive or negative perception of brand image. Favourability of a brand image can be either positive values or negative values and then, create positive publicity or negative publicity.

Moreover, Stone (2002) mentioned that there is a connection between the brand image and COO information. Stone tested the mediation roles of brand image and brand equity constructs as in the relationship between COO and product evaluation, following by purchase intentions. The positive effect on the brand image indicates that country of origin plays a vital role in affecting the perceptions of customers and their overall evaluation toward a brand (Hanaysha, and Hilman, 2015). On the other hand, based on the research in Germany and France, Haubl (1996) found that brand name and country of origin have a significant impact on consumers' attitudes towards new automobiles. However, a brand name come out to be a stronger criterion (Chawla, Smith and Derakshan, 1995), particularly in young consumers.

More importantly, the brand image can also drive the purchase intentions regardless of its association with countries. It is believed that brand can change the product image, which originated from countries with an unfavourable reputation. Reiersen (1966) pointed out that American consumers' attitudes towards products made in other countries can be positive when those products show a quality brand image and high level of services. Some researchers argued that the positive country image is used with a brand regardless of the actual relationship with that country. Papadopoulos (1993) acclaimed that there is a phenomenon of borrowing of active origin images for building better brand image although there has little or no relation to the actual origin which leads some of the new companies to falsely claim a favourable origin intentionally and misinform the actual product information. Besides, Walley et al. (2007) found

that brand shows a more favourable impact on purchase decision than other extrinsic cues such as price and services.

However, this study aligns with the approach of Thakor and Pacheco (1997). They took the contradictive perspective with the previous studies and proved that the interactions between country-of-origin and brand name do not exist and that information contribute independently to product evaluations. Tse and Gorn (1993), similarly, found that there is no significant interaction between brand and COO in product categories. The construct of brand image is taken as the independent construct that is impactful on product evaluation and purchase intention.

3.7. Consumers' perceptions

According to Kotler (2003), consumer perception is defined as “the process by which an individual selects, organises, and interprets information inputs to create a meaningful picture of the world.” Boulding (1956) stated that people’s reaction is more dependent upon their perception of reality than a reaction to reality, which highlights the importance of consumer perception. The subject of consumer perceptions is not generalizable for all consumers as a homogenous group, and there is no doubt that the buying behaviour of western and eastern consumers are different. Likewise, their perception of products from developing countries is not as same as those originated in developed counterparts. This section explores the contemporary situations in the consumers market and how their perceptions are shaped.

3.7.1. Consumer attitudes on foreign brands

The COO or branding could affect the perception, but not the attitude of the consumer because attitude is not influenced by single-cue but influenced by different cues (Foxall and Goldsmith, 1998). The concept of attitude is a central position in both social psychology and consumer behaviour studies. Attitude is an integral part of consumer theory, and marketing practice and researchers use the attitudes to predict behaviour. It combines three elements termed ‘beliefs, affects and intentions.’ The cognitive element concerns knowing and believing, the "affective" element is liking or disliking and the conative or behavioural intentions element (Foxall and Goldsmith, 1998). Various direct and indirect sources shape the consumer attitudes, including the influence of contemporary global events or obtaining indirect knowledge from foreign countries and cultures from family, peer groups and media.

In literature, the theory of attitudes consists of the affective reactions, beliefs about the attributes of products, and intentions to behave towards them. Attitudes are presented as being positive or negative, favourable or unfavourable to an object. Hughes (1971) defines attitudes as “an individual’s favourable or unfavourable inclination towards an attribute of an object” (p.102). Attitudes are learned or acquired as a result of personal experience, reasoning or information, the communicated experience of others (Fishbein 1975, Lutz 1991).

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) state the three types of human beliefs – descriptive, informational and inferential. Descriptive belief is the direct experience. Informative belief is influenced by outside information such as advertisements, friends, and family. Inferential belief performs inferences (correctly or incorrectly) based on past experience as this experience related to

current stimuli. Then, consumers develop the images based on the information gained and their previous experience (Verlegh, 2007).

On the other hand, foreign brands have an influence on individual perception and evaluation via stereotypes. Negative stereotypes about some foreign goods and patriotic feelings about domestic goods have caused consumers to have negative stereotypes on some foreign goods. Sharma (2011) proved that consumers in the UK and the US are more likely to buy their home countries products than products from emerging markets such as India and China. Similarly, Laforet and Chen (2010) British consumers prefer brands originated from the West, Japan, South Korea, to Chinese brands. Products from developing countries are more favourable on commodities and consumer goods than luxury goods such as an automobile.

As Dagger and Raciti (2011) suggested, consumers in different countries have a different way of using specific products. It is because the buying behaviour of western consumers are more individualistic and impulsive and influenced by personal factors (Schette and Ciarlante, 1998). As eastern societies are strong collectivist orientation and family, the most important influence that shapes people behaviour (Kim and Bamber, 2008). The family purchase is emotional and interacts the relationship among family members (Schette and Ciarlante, 1998).

For western consumers, Marcoux et al. (1997) research on Polish dimension of conspicuous consumption, is related to preference for Western products, whereas patriotism, a dimension of ethnocentrism, is related to preference for Polish products. Leonidou, Hadjimarcou, Kaleka and Stamenova (1999) studied on Bulgarian consumers' of products made in Asia Pacific – Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Indonesia and India – for food products, household cleaning products, personal care items, clothing/footwear, furnishings, electronics and electrical appliances. The results showed that Bulgarian consumers are dependent upon experiential knowledge in buying Asian Pacific products. In eastern world, consumers are more likely to practice conspicuous consumption since imported products carry the meaning of high fashion and social status.

3.7.2. The phenomenon of global branding

Consumers have positive perceptions of brands with global availability and reach. Perceived brand globalness refers to the extent to which “consumers believe that the brand is marketed in multiple countries and is generally recognised as global in these countries” (Steenkamp et al. 2003, p. 54) and has been found to positively impact a brand's credibility, prestige, and quality

(Özsomer2012; Özsomer and Altaras2008). Winit et al. (2014) define the global brands based on geographical aspect – the level of distribution and local brands on both geographical distribution and ownership. Global brands have advantages of brand quality, brand prestige, esteem image, and intention.

Global branding strategy can be described as an approach “in which firms market their products on a global basis with only limited adaptation to local markets” (Ozsomer et al. 2012, p. 2). Besides, globalisation attitude is positively related to global brand evaluation. Consumers with strong globalisation attitude use brand globalness as a quality signal, and this leads to the quick decision-making process, especially for low involvement categories. It is because decision-time pressure is high and the financial risk of making a wrong choice is low (Erdem and Swait, 2004).

Being global brands is beneficial due to its globally consistent brand image with the same quality for consumers around the world, for example, Coca-Cola, Disney, Microsoft, Nike and Sony. Strong international brands have the advantage of creating brand awareness and brand associations when they create brand extensions. For example, Unilever extends the Dove brand from its core product (beauty soap) into other product categories such as body washes, body lotions, deodorants and shampoo (Sichtmann and Diamantopoulos, 2013). In the marketing point of view, the main advantage of being the global brand is the reduction of costs due to economies of scale in R&D manufacturing, logistics, and marketing (Douglas and Craig 2011).

The brand provides consumers with information about the products quality and self-identity characteristics (Erdem and Swait, 1998; Özsomerand Altaras, 2008; Strizhakova, Coulter, and Price, 2008a). This belief in the power of global brands can provide a sense of global belongingness as belief in global citizenship through global brands. Consumers favour on global brands based on two perspectives; *utilitarian* perspectives include the perceptions of higher quality and price whereas *hedonic* perspectives include the perceptions of higher self-esteem and status due to the motivational benefits and prestige of global brands (Ozsomer, 2012). Winit et al. (2014) explored the interaction effect of brand globalness and ownership on Thai consumers' brand quality attitudes and purchase intentions in four product categories – fruit juice, jeans, coffee shop and airlines. The research found that brand evaluation of global brands is more favourable than non-global brands (Winit et al. 2014).

Global consumption orientation (GCO) is a phenomenon consisting of consumer groups who are more favour on global brands than local brands (Alden, Steenkamp, and Batra, 2006; Steenkamp and de Jong, 2010). Global brand such as Coca-Cola, McDonald's or Nike can be regarded as a symbol of globalised lifestyles or symbols of cultural homogenisation, resulting in consumers; positive globalisation attitudes (Thompson and Arsel, 2004). Many international marketing researchers attempt to clarify the influence of global/local brands on consumer preferences along with COO associations.

Practically, firms use global branding strategy to market their products on a global basis with limited adoption to local markets (Ozsomer et al. 2012). The implication of global branding strategy can create brand globalness. Steenkamp et al. (2003) define the term, 'perceived brand globalness' as the extent to which "consumers believe that the brand is marketed in multiple countries and is generally recognised as global in these countries" (p.54). Notably, the brand origin image and perceived globalness effects are likely to be much stronger in developing than developed countries (Batra et al. 2000).

Ozsomer (2012), Ozsomer and Altaras (2008) found the positive impact of perceived brand globalness on brand credibility, prestige, and quality. Similarly, Akdenniz, Ar and Kara (2014) stated that quality perceptions, image, and trust were found to be highly correlatable with purchase intentions of a product. However, consumer perceptions could not be undoubtedly comprehensive in reality for three reasons; ignorance, lack of salience of origin information for a particular brand, or deliberate obfuscation by companies concerned about consumer reactions to an unfavourable origin (Thakor and Kohli, 1996).

Although it is remarked that brands or products perceived to be foreign are favourable by consumers from developing countries, however, this generalisation is not the same all the time but rather specific on the product category. For example, Iran is famous for its good quality carpets, and Iranian may be more likely to buy local carpets than elsewhere (Zhuang et al., 2008). Taking these situations of consumers' perception into categorisation, Riefler (2012) defined the four attitudinal response to brands; homogenisation (consumers' conscious preference of global alternatives), localisation (consumers' avoidance of global brands and preference of local alternatives), glocalisation (consumers' purchase of both local and global brands), and alienation (consumers with no interest in the cultural themes of products).

Despite these positive qualities of being global brands, well-known or recognised brands are not immune to the negative influences of the country of production impact on brand image, quality and purchase intentions when they are manufactured in a country with unfavourable perceptions, (Akdeniz, Ar and Kara, 2014). Similarly, when consumers related the global brands with the weak country image, the significant negative country of origin effects are found (Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2011). When a foreign brand is recognised as a local brand, consumers' attitudes toward that brand become less favourable, but it does not affect purchase intention (Zhuang et al., 2007).

3.7.3. The emerging dominance of Chinese brand names

Consumers have been experienced with 'made in China' products since a few decades ago. The literature showed that Chinese brands in the western markets use more extrinsic cues due to its history of the negative COO image. However, the rise of Chinese brands is seen as a global phenomenon (Vence, 2005; Kwok et al., 2006). Frequently, China is the target of international media criticism due to its product quality and safety issues with a less favourable image (Enderwick, 2008, 2009). As Ahmed et al., (2004) mentioned, a halo effect operates in the product evaluation process when consumers are not familiar with a product. Therefore, "Made in China" products received the image of "safety concerns, copycat image, and poor environmental practices" (Aybeniz et al. 2014, p. 493). Demirbag, Sahadev, and Mellahi (2010) stated that Chinese products are more linked to the inferior image than products from Malaysia, the US, Japan, Thailand, and the UK.

Kreppel and Holtbrugge (2012) researched the perceptions of Germans on Chinese products by underpinning social identity theory and social learning theory. According to Kreppel and Holtbrugge (2012), the consumers' age, education level, occupation, and international experience have an impact on Germans' perceived attractiveness towards Chinese products although these perceptions can vary among different product categories. For example, Chinese household appliances brand, 'Haier' introduced the refrigerator in the German market, it was less favour among consumers due to its Chinese origin (Yi and Ye, 2003).

Amine, Chao and Arnold (2005) found that country of origin information influence on Taiwanese products in China. Wang and Gao (2010) researched Irish consumers' perception of the Chinese brand. A research conducted by Wang and Gao (2010) showed that the COO effect is an essential factor in the buying process since 52 percent of Irish respondents agreed

that the COO affects their purchasing decisions. Zhou, Yang, and Hui (2010) remarked that Chinese brands attempt to overcome perceived adverse COO effects by creating Western country images, such as using foreign-sound brand names or foreign symbols in advertising and foreign languages on product labels (Kreppel and Holtbrugge, 2012).

Moreover, the category of product is also influential in consumers' perception. As an example, for technological products, the newly industrialised countries perceived negative as a country of design (Ahmed et al., 2012). Kreppel and Holtbrugge (2012) researched about consumers' perceived attractiveness of Chinese brands within three markets – automobiles, IT/electronic equipment, and consumer goods. Consumers showed lower attractiveness to Chinese automobiles brand than those in the other two categories.

Besides, it is mentioned that the brand name is more important than the COO label. Wang and Gao (2010) also suggested that Chinese brands should focus on 'trust factor' than emotion and passion factors. The success of Chinese companies largely relies on outstanding manufacturing, low cost, and high economies of scale, although it does not depend on the brand image (Wang and Gao, 2010). Their frequency analysis showed that Irish consumers more reply on the brand name than the "Made in China" label (especially for the under 29 age group).

In recent years, many Chinese products have an advantage of familiarity over other countries since many products nowadays are mainly produced in China. Fetcherin and Toncer (2009) said that US consumers favour Chinese products over Indians due to their familiarity with Chinese products. "Made in China" label is a powerful brand image in consumers' minds regardless of the positive or negative way (Zeng and Williamson, 2003). In the long term, Chinese brands are expected to step upon the situation of Japan brands in the past. Japan received a negative country image and the products "Made in Japan" in around 1960s, 1970s. However, it becomes one of the most influential countries of origin at this moment (Kreppel and Holtbrugge, 2012).

3.8. Consumers' product evaluation

3.8.1. Brand preferences

A brand is associated with a particular value, both conscious and unconscious elements which can be enhanced by brand name, brand logo, or brand representation (Ramsøy and Skov, 2014). Hence, a brand needs to engage positively in consumers' mindsets, including perception and awareness, memory and recognition, and emotion. According to Ramsøy and Skov (2014), "Brand preference could influence how brands themselves or objects associated with the brand are consciously perceived" (p.2).

There are considerable research works in brand preferences of consumers. Kwok et al. (2006) investigated brand preferences and brand choices among Chinese consumers. Although consumers show interest in local Chinese grocery brands, it is not reflected in actual purchase behaviour (Kwok et al., 2006). Alternatively, Ramsøy and Skov's (2014) research focused on conscious and unconscious feelings and found that consciousness is more likely to affect behaviour in consumers' preference and decision-making. When consumers have a better understanding of the products via product attributes information, they can have a stable preference for the brand.

According to Schultz, Block, and Viswanathan (2014), consumers in their research stated that the space of brand competition becomes smaller; thus, the differentiation among various brands becomes more difficult for consumers. In other words, there is a high risk of brand 'commoditization' in the market resulting in the irrelevance of traditional methods of understanding and measuring brands (Schultz, Block and Viswanathan, 2014).

Along with the possible cause of the globalisation effect and the popularity of hybrid products, Schultz et al. (2014) found that the emergence of 'no brand preference' concept among consumers. Brands and their preferences have unstable fluctuations in the market over time, leading to losing their preference and disappearing from the marketplace (e.g. Nokia mobile phones). Consumers tend to have favourable perception when a brand has salient and unique associations linked to brand equity (Schultz, Block and Viswanathan, 2014). According to their research, consumers show 'No Brand Preference' option become popular in many product categories which can be a severe risk for the credibility of marketing and branding.

One possible reason is that consumers cannot choose their preferred brands when their knowledge of the actual origin of brands is incorrect. For example, Uncles and Saurazas (2000) found that only 51 percent of participants can correctly identify the brand origin of their favourite products. However, it can depend on the type of product categories. For example, 80 percent of participants answer the right brand origin of the water brands whereas only 55 percent of those can correctly identify the brand origin of soy sauce (Kwok, Uncles and Haung, 2006). Notwithstanding these findings, further research needs to extend knowledge for a better understanding of why consumers evaluate all brands in a category similarly.

3.8.2. The influence of country information

Consumer evaluations of products have been obtaining a research interest since the 1960s (Niss, 1995). It is also proved that COO effects occur unconsciously among consumers, and it influences consumers' product evaluation, product perceptions, and on the buying behaviour (Khan and Bamber, 2008). Theoretically, COO influences on product evaluations and purchase behaviour have proposed consumer decision making as a cognitive process (Bloemer et al. 2009). According to this perceptive, a product consists of informational cues which can be both intrinsic and extrinsic. Consumers slowly reply to extrinsic cues, which also serve as stimuli when they do product judgement (Bredahl, 2004). COO affects product evaluations through its effects on beliefs. When people do not know the COO of the brand, they pay less attention to the brand.

In terms of consumer's psychology or consumer's need for cognition, the COO effect becomes more influential in product evaluation when consumer's need for cognition is low (Zhang, 1997). Consumer's need for cognition refers to individuals who show interest in analysing and processing information and like to consider product-related information based on strengths of product attributes. However, Zhang (1997) limited the generalisability of the study by the use of the student sample, the artificial stimuli, and the fictional brand names in the study.

However, the use of country information is dependent on the level of product involvement in consumers' mind and the country status itself. Rosenbloom and Haefner (2009) claim that the purchase of perceived global brand for low-involvement products is not as necessary as those for high-involvement for consumers. It is proposed that when the involvement of a product is higher, the likelihood of considering COO information in product evaluation is higher (Ahmed et al., 2012). Alternately, Pisharodi and Parameswaran (1992) state that the impact of the COO

information on consumption behavior is linked with producing country characteristics. For example, consumer willingness to purchase products is mostly dependent on the political, economic and cultural characteristics of the product's COO.

It is proposed that 'made in' country information is related to a country's economic or technological development level, which is essential in quality product evaluation. COO can influence as a quality indicator of a product, and then consumers describe place references by developing a preference for products from specific regions according to different concepts such as consumer ethnocentrism, self-image and status (Lee and Chen, 2008).

However, the COO effect is a less important element in the decision-making process than product quality because consumers collect product information before they buy (Agrawal and Kamakura, 1999). Kwon and Oh (2008) measure the perceived product quality, perceived risk in purchasing the brand, perceived relative price and the consumers' perception of value and overall willingness to buy for breakfast cereal brands in South Africa. Their study found that consumer perception of value has a direct effect on their willingness to buy; meanwhile, these values are formed by quality, price and the level of risk (Kwon and Oh, 2008; Beneke and Carter, 2014).

Although the country of origin has contributed theoretically and practically, the role of country of origin information in product evaluation shows datable results in the literature. Researchers such as Kim and Bamber (2008) find that COO effects become less influential in consumer preference and their buying decision. The impact of country information effects become higher in particular conditions when consumers buy expensive products as gifts for family and friends in Pakistan (Kim and Bamber, 2008). Apart from COO or country information, other factors such as the brand, quality, the level of ethnocentrism, product familiarity also influence the product evaluation of consumers.

3.8.3. The influence of brand information

Previous researchers show that brand cue can affect in consumers' perception of product evaluation (Yasin et al., 2007), quality perception (Papadopoulos, 1993) and purchase intention (Heslop and Papadopoulos, 1993). A product/brand's tangible or intangible characteristics such as quality, price, function, service, image and awareness create an attitude in a consumer's mind (Zhuang et al., 2006). Later, consumers use these extrinsic cues as information to interpret the quality of a product and to reduce perceived risk.

Consumer generates their own beliefs in terms of both controlled signalling and uncontrollable information in creating a brand evaluation and brand reputation. “The signalling function of perceived brand foreignness (PBF) increases its diagnostic value for brand evaluations when consumers are more confident in their attributions of a brand’s origin” (Zhou, Yang and Hui, 2010, p. 203). For example, consumers can rely on the brand name as an implicit for product evaluation. According to King and Balasubramanian (1994), consumers with high knowledge are more likely to rely on objective knowledge than low-knowledge consumers who focus on recommendation and subjective information.

Practically, consumers evaluate the brands by accessing different tangible and intangible attributes of that brand. In branding literature, it is noted that brand can be related not only to a product but also as a person. The brand image and the brand reputation lie in the core part of the brand evaluation. Veloutsou (2015) mentioned that “brand image is the assessment of interaction with the brand, while the brand reputation is an overall evaluation of the brand” (p.407). Besides, consumers’ choice of products and brands are influenced by the quality, convenience, value, personal health concerns and individual responses to social and institutional norms (Barber et al., 2012).

A product can express the character in meeting the need of the consumer in either psychological (for example, cars can show the owner's status). The reason for buying branded products is to classify the reference group which the consumers belong or want to belong. Branded products can not only refer to status but also refer to simplicity. In addition, consumers tend to avoid the tendency of perceived risk from buying unfamiliar brands or products. Perceive risk consists of two factors - the amount of uncertainty in the information that consumer receive. Lack of information or knowledge can increase the perceived risk. Secondly, if the ‘consequences of purchase’ become adverse outcomes, the purchase risk may be increased as well (Foxall and Goldsmith, 1998).

Similarly, it is assumed that the higher the use of global brands as quality signals, the greater the likelihood of purchasing global brands. Consumers believe in brands which are marketed in multiple countries and recognise as global brands. Consumers in developing countries also assume that those global brands are more likely to have both quality evaluations and self-identity signals than domestic products, resulting in increasing the purchase intention.

However, consumers in developed countries perceive global brands as an indicator of quality signals and the use of branded products as self-identity signals (Riefler, 2010).

3.8.4. The level of product involvement

Previous studies have shown that the country of origin has an influence on product evaluation in terms of two context-specific factors – product familiarity and product involvement (Basfirinci, 2014). It is suggested that consumers' levels of involvement with the products can vary in different countries. According to 'cue utilisation theory,' the difficulty in judging or the lack of assessing in intrinsic cues or the low level of consumer expertise can lead to relying heavily on extrinsic cues (Maheswaran, 1994; Zeithaml et al., 1988). It is particularly true for low involvement products since searching and evaluating intrinsic cues in product evaluation is costlier than the benefits. Zafar et al. (2004) considered COO effects in low involvement products and revealed that COO is essential in evaluating low-involvement products in the presence of other extrinsic cues such as price and brand, meaning that the impact of COO is weaker than the brand origin. When consumers purchase low-involvement products, they choose simple purchase tactics such as price, performance, and normative influences by making quick decisions (Hoyer, 1984).

Rosenbloom and Haefner (2009) claim that the purchase of perceived global brand for low-involvement products is not as necessary as those for high-involvement for consumers. It is proposed that when the involvement of a product is higher, the likelihood of considering brand origin information in product evaluation is higher. Therefore, Papadopoulos and Heslop, (2005) also hypothesised that country of origin, brand name, price, and quality assurance are more critical for high-involvement products, relative to low-involvement products. On the other hand, the country of origin, price and brand effects on Lebanese consumers' attitudes towards US products in the context of a low-involvement product such as chocolate. It is found that brand price was more important than the origin of the product in the case of low product involvement. For example, Lebanese consumers prioritise the importance of taste when they purchase chocolate followed by the brand name as a second priority (Ahmed et al., 2012).

In contrast, purchasing a high-involvement product consume more time by researching information in order to avoid negative perceived quality (Celsi and Olsen 1988; Gemunden, 1985; Sridhar, 2007). It is regarded that "while the relative influence of brand personality is stronger than that of product attributes for low-involvement products, product attributes had a

much stronger influence on consumers' brand choices for high-involvement products" (Gordon, 1993; Lim et al., 2003, p. 464). Similarly, Li and Wyer (1994) used COO as a product evaluation cue and the extrinsic cue for purchasing high-involvement products such as automobiles and electronics. Nevertheless, the development of psychological attachment with consumers regardless of the level of product involvement is important for brand commitment and consumers' switching behaviour (Quester, Karunaratna & Lim, 2003).

3.9. Purchase intention

The purchase activity is dependent upon an individual's satisfaction, in terms of convenience or the impact on their image. When the purchase activity is negatively impacting on their image, the articulated purchase intention will be decreased (Barber et al., 2012). Fitzsimons and Morwitz (1996) proposed a three-stage model of choice. In the first stage, consumers will develop alternatives along with a stimulus-based manner or a memory-based manner or a combination of both. Then, consumers will consider the possibly best alternative for selecting and finally, they will select the alternative.

Purchase intention can be measured in various ways, including the measurement of the expressed intention to purchase applying scales (Barber et al., 2012). However, it can have "a halo-effect" that encourages respondents to over-report behaviour even though they may not follow through (Barber et al., 2012, p.283). Concluding the findings from previous researchers, there are three main gaps between the buying intention and the actual buying behaviour. The relationship between purchase intention and buying behaviour is different because of a) the type of products such as durable and nondurable products (Jamieson and Bass, 1989), b) the different demographic characteristics of consumers and different usage-based segments of products (Morwitz and Schmittlein, 1992), c) the level of effectiveness of measuring purchase intention (Morwitz et al., 1993). Also, the demographic profile of consumers influences their buying decision (Beneke and Carter, 2014).

3.9.1. The importance of demographic characteristics

Consumers have differences in beliefs, mindsets, risk profiles and purchasing behaviour at the demographic level due to their differences in gender, age, education level as well as socio-economic status (Kotler and Keller, 2011; Beneke and Catar, 2014). Notably, the demographic, psychographic and socioeconomic factors have an impact on the consumers' evaluations of product in developing markets. It is widely reported that consumers from developing countries

are keen on materialistic and status-conscious consumption (Sharma, 2011). Consumers in emerging markets attach high social desirability for a well-known foreign brand when the product is produced in its developed countries (Aybeniz et al., 2014).

Age

Solomon (2003) remarked that young generations are willing to be unique, more impulsive, and easy to influence by popular culture and advanced technology. Especially in developing countries, market growth is attributed by young, educated, urban dwellers. Empirically, Insch and McBride (2004) tested the moderating effect of age on the COO effect among American and Mexican consumers. It is proved that young consumers have a flexible attitude towards products from other countries. Since young people have opportunities to explore internet, social media, more open economy, their perceptions on brands especially from newly industrialised countries are different from previous generations (Demirbag et al., 2010; Kreppel and Holtbrugge, 2012). However, older consumers tend to be more ethnocentric and less world-minded due to their conservative perspectives and less exposure to advance technology such as the internet. Lehtonen (2014) also proved that older consumers have a more negative perception of European luxury car brands produced in China compared to younger generations.

Education

The previous study by Good and Huddleston (1995) proved that consumers with high education level show a positive attitude towards foreign products. Those consumers also tend to use many informational cues, such as quality, design, and price, which leads COO effect to be less critical. According to Erdogan and Uz Kurt (2010), highly-educated consumers are more cosmopolitan and therefore less considerable on a country where the product is originated. Due to higher educational qualifications, consumers are less likely to be affected by national stereotypes. However, there is a risk of 'imagined cosmopolitan' which is intentionally created by companies to receive a favour from consumers who show a positive attitude to foreign brands. For example, C'estbon, a Chinese brand of bottled water, is an example of imagined cosmopolitanism which means that using non-Chinese characters and delivering connotation of foreign-sounding pronunciation. However, high-educated people are more careful about negative aspects of Chinese products, such as perceived human right violations and lack of social and environmental responsibility.

Occupation and Income

The occupational status of consumers has an impact on their sense of self which play an essential role in daily life. According to Leonidou et al. (2007), unemployment people tend to have a negative perception of foreign products by assuming “more jobs are being outsourced to this country.” Moreover, the occupation can indicate an individual’s income and their price sensitivity (Kreppel and Holtbrugge, 2012). In a contradictive way, people with lower income can favour on Chinese products due to its lower price. During an economic recession, for example, consumers tend to give up the purchase of luxury products until their economic situation improves (Kreppel and Holtbrugge, 2012).

Gender

Gender plays a vital role in determining the attitudes and purchase intentions of consumers. According to Bymes et al., (1999), men are generally more likely to take the risk than women whereas women are more likely to have social influence and impulsive buying behaviour (which is associated with the hedonic consumption) than men. Similarly, Brannon (1999) found that women’s interaction with others can lead to changing their beliefs and behaviour. It is because women are a) more responsive to the image, experience, and enjoyable aspects of advertisement (Kim and Kim, 2008), b) more likely to perceive shopping as a recreational and hedonic activity (Kruger and Byker, 2009).

3.10. Development of the conceptual model

This research is an approaching reality study which applies the previous studies' findings in constructing the hypotheses and developing the conceptual model. It covers the limitations and weaknesses of previous studies by simulating the product evaluation and consumers' willingness to buy in actual brand names and real users of mobile phones. Other concepts and variables that consumers use in their evaluation and purchase processes are considered in this model.

Based on reviewing previous literature at the author's best knowledge, researchers have not developed to test an integrated model that includes the primary determinates of country and brand into one model. As a contribution, this study develops an integration model that combines the theoretical foundations and the comprehensive model based on previous empirical findings. At the end of the section, a conceptual framework is produced as an alternative stance to the understanding of behaviour in casual relationships to the research context.

3.10.1. Theoretical framework

The purpose of building a theoretical framework is to implement theories as the conceptual basis to understand, analyse, and design the techniques for investigating relationships within social systems (Frodeman, 2010). The structure of the theoretical framework in the current study is entirely relied upon establishing the key variables that can influence a phenomenon of interest and investigating how these variables can differ under specific circumstances. Further, the use of relevant theory will lead to the research hypotheses and the choice of suitable research methods.

The theoretical framework in this study is developing by using the following strategies. Firstly, after identifying the research question or problem of interest, the possible key variables in the study are considered. Secondly, the related literature to the current study is reviewed, and the critical social science theories used in those studies are identified. After defining the gaps emerge from the review process as well as discussing the assumptions or propositions of previous studies, the conceptual model of this study is expanded to build new knowledge by validating theoretical assumptions.

By definition, theories are the predictions of events in a broad, general context and thus, their underlying assumptions are worthy of testing under a specific prediction about a specified set of circumstances in order to develop and grow knowledge in the particular field (Philipsen, 2017). This reason encourages the research interest of the current study to explain the specific factors which the theory could not consider due to its overly generalised behaviour. It is beneficial because the validity of existing theory challenge while borrowing its theoretical constructs to develop an effective engagement in the research topic.

The field of attitude theory provides the fundamental for the theoretical development of the proposed framework. The selection of this theory is based on its appropriateness, ease of application and explanatory power. As mentioned in the above sections, the definitions of country of origin construct are considerably confused concerning its conceptual specification. In previous literature, the researchers define the country of origin and its image as “perceptions.” Other scholars use the terms as “impressions” or “associations”, meanwhile many scholars refer to “stereotypes”, “schemas”. Finally, some authors specify country of origin and its image as “beliefs” which represent one component of attitudes. Theoretically, using the terms of impressions, associations, stereotypes, schemas, or beliefs are correct in association with the underlying concepts of country of origin and its related ascendants. However, they are not capable of full comprehension for the construct of country of origin for some reasons (Roth and Diamantopoulos, 2009).

Firstly, perceptions are the representation of the process which consumers select, organise, and interpret intrinsic (such as sights, sounds, smells, tastes) or extrinsic stimuli (such as brand, price, COO) (Solomon et al., 2006). In the COO research field, the scholars such as Brijs (2006) suggest that the implication of perceptual process can explain how consumers select, organise and interpret the COO information more than other cues such as brand, price or warranty do. The meaning of COO information in this context refers to the ‘made in’ label tagged on the product. According to the theoretical framework of COO based on the perception theory, the importance of COO is comparable to other extrinsic or intrinsic cues. However, the limitation is the concept of perception cannot be able to perform a consequent evaluation and therefore, the interpretation cannot include the consumers’ reaction (Brijs, 2006).

Secondly, the other concepts, ‘schemas’ and ‘stereotypes,’ that are frequently used in the COO research cannot apprehend both COO and its related image constructs. By definition, stereotypes are “stored beliefs about characteristics of a group of people” (Bar-Tal, 1997, p.

491) whereas schemas are “cognitive structures of organized prior knowledge, abstracted from experience with specific instances” (Fiske and Linville, 1980, p. 543). From the perspective of social psychology literature, the schemas and stereotypes can be classified as cognitive aspect of attitudes (Roth and Diamantopoulos, 2009). Similarly, Fiske et al. (1980) mention that the cognitive component of attitudes is closely linked to schemas in many aspects. Thus, it is clear that both concepts are beneficial aspects for conceptualising the construct of COO. However, the robustness of the concepts can be achieved by considering both cognitive and affective components (Diamantopoulos et al. 2012). The previous studies, especially in the advertising field and service-centered industry, have been proved that consumers’ emotions are relatively important compared to cognitive factors (Balabanis et al. 2019).

Table 3.5: Diverse definitions of attitudes theory

Scholars	Definition of attitudes
Thurstone (1931)	the amount of effect a person has for or against an object
Allport (1935, p198)	a mental and neural state of readiness to respond, organized through experience and exerting a directive and /or dynamic influence upon the individual, responding to all objects and situations with which it is related
Assael (1987)	“attitude towards a brand” is the consumer tendency to evaluate the brand, based on past experiences, available information and environment influences
Triandis (1971)	conceptualised as cognition (knowledge about the object), affect (positive or negative evaluation of the object), and conation (intentions or actual behaviour towards the object)
Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975, p 6)	A learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favourable or unfavourable manner concerning a given object
Campbell (1980)	Linked with the degree of consistency in a person’s response to a situation or subject

Finally, after justifying existing theories to underpin the amplification of the knowledge in the COO and its image field, the attitude theory of Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) is taken a compatible theoretical underpinning that does not have the limitations as previously mentioned concepts. According to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), attitudes are “a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favourable or unfavourable manner with respect to a given object” (p.6). On principle, Ajzen (1985) modifies the attitude theory and introduces as Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) – an extended concept of the Theory of Reasoned Action, by adding a third

predicting cognitive variable to intention (perceived behavioural control). It is the theory of attitude-behaviour relationships that associate with attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (See Figure 3.1). The model is used as a forecast of an individual's willingness to engage a particular behaviour at a particular time and place. According to TBP theory, a person's behaviour is influenced by his/her attitude through the evaluation of risks and benefits of the expected outcome.

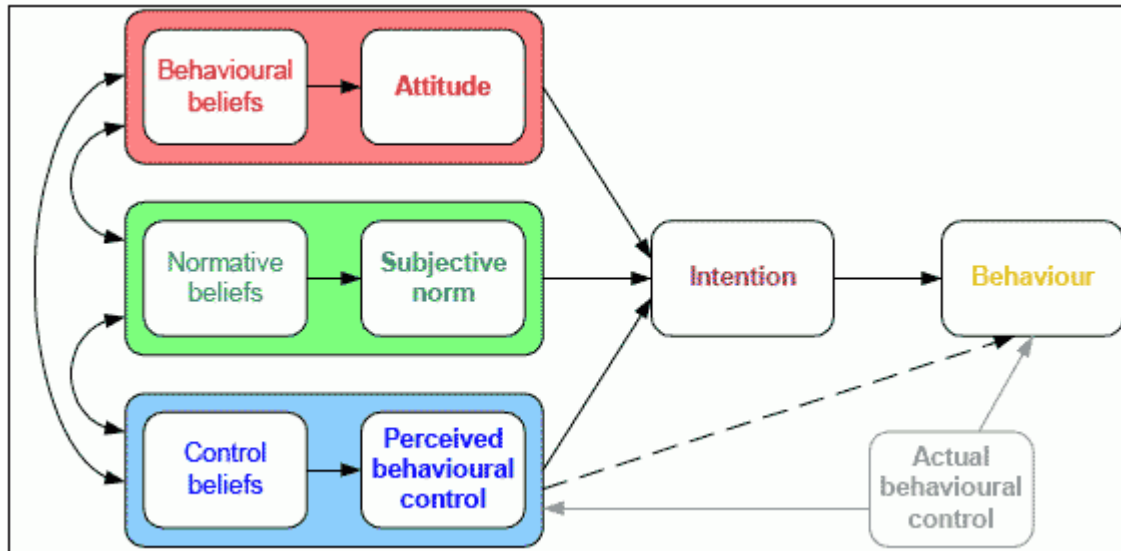


Figure 3.1 Theory of Planned Behaviour by Ajzen (1985)

This definition holds not only the assumption that attitude can be learned or acquired but also influenced by marketing messages. Further, attitudes consist of not only cognitive aspects but also affective (specific feeling or emotions) and conative (intended behaviour) consideration. Considering these facets, the use of attitude theory is believed to explain both favourable and unfavourable country and brand evaluations.

The usage of the attitude theory is also aligned with the favour from scholars including Heslop and Papadopoulos (1993), Parameswaran and Pisharodi (1994), Laroche et al., (2005), Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009), Balabanis et al. (2019). Similar work to the current study, Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009), Yunus and Rashid (2016) research, which focus on an understanding of the function of the country of origin image construct, apply the attitude theory in their study. The intention of underpinning it into this study is threefold - a) to learn consumers' attitudes toward origins and images of targeted country and brand, b) to explore consumers' intention of buying a particular product over another, c) to assist in understanding the influences of their mobile phones shopping/buying behaviour. To fulfill these research

objectives, TBP framework, amongst the concept attitude and its related theories, is one of the most widely applied foundations for understanding the impulses of consumer behaviour in marketing research.

Limitation of attitude theory

Despite this, some critics, such as Shaw (2003), Kaiser, Hubner and Bogner (2006) pointed out the limitations of the theory by stating that it does not consider a threat or previous experience, environmental or economic factors or the likelihood of impulsive decision making over time. Similarly, TPB does not consider the full range of non-attitudinal personal and situational variables that can enhance the attitude-behaviour relationship (Brown and Stayman, 1992; Olson and Zanna, 1993). The nature of attitudes, nevertheless, is not directly observable but inferred from what consumers claim. Besides, the concept of the theory can indicate rigid compatibility of measures of the target behaviour (in this study, it refers to consumers' product evaluation and their willingness to buy) and measures of its antecedent cognitive predictors (refers to origin and images cues of brand and country).

3.10.2. Integrative framework

To develop an integrative framework to describe how country of origin and its ascendants' influence on consumer behaviour, the core framework of the conceptual model is adapted from the work of Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009). Based on their original model, this section reflects the county of origin and its related image measurement instruments and evaluate them based on the conceptual foundation of attitude-theory-based framework.

The original conceptualisations of attitudes consist of the 'tripartite' or 'three-component' considerations which translate as three dimensions of attitude – namely cognitive, affective, and conative (Roth and Diamantopoulos, 2009). Significant scholars widely follow this concept of attitudes theory in the marketing field such as Laroche et al., (2005), Parameswaran and Pisharodi (1994). However, one significant drawback of the 'tripartite' consideration is that cognitive, affective and conative dimensions of attitudes are not separate but rather causally related (Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999).

Alternatively, other authors report the use of two-component view (Engel et al., 1995) or a hierarchy-of-effects (or ABC) sequence. The ABC sequence model based on the assumption that "self-reported behaviour and stated intentions to response [...] are treated as dependent effects of affective and/or cognitive variables. Intentions seem to be at a lower level of

abstraction (i.e., closer to observable behaviour) than cognitions or affect” (Roth and Diamantopoulos, 2009, p. 734).

As mentioned above, the foundation of the current study’s conceptual framework is borrowed from one of four integrative frameworks of the country of origin concept developed by Roth and Diamantopoulos, (2009). The four frameworks are – two-component view (Model A), high-involvement hierarchy (Model B), low-involvement hierarchy (Model C) and, experiential hierarchy (Model D) (As shown in Figure – 3.2).

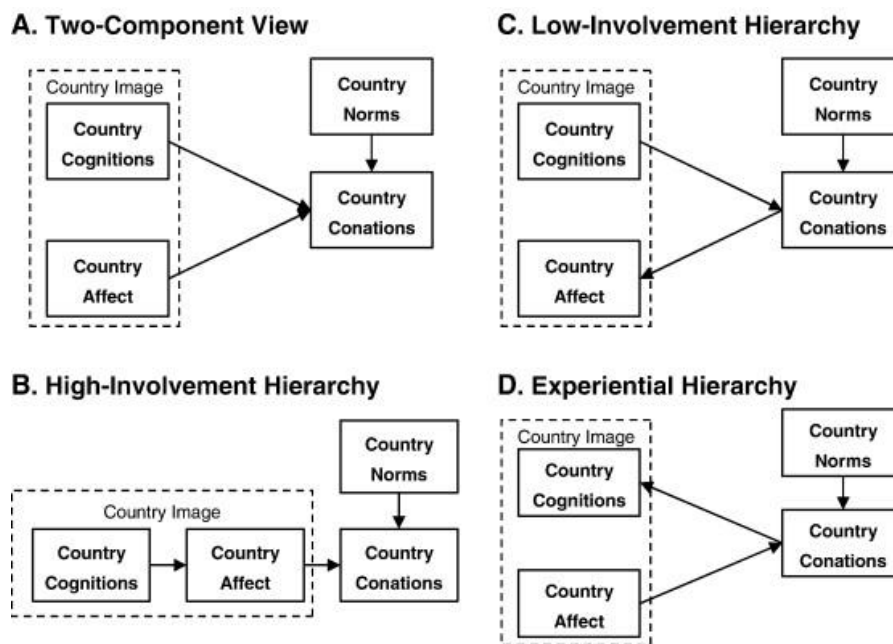


Figure 3.2: Conceptual models of country image

Source: Roth and Diamantopoulos, (2009)

Amongst them, Model B, *high-involvement hierarchy* is chosen as an underpinning for this study. Notable marketing scholars such as Solomon et al., (2006) focus on the interrelationships among “knowing, feeling, doing” and propose that “a fixed sequence of steps occurs en route to an attitude” (p.237). The concept of three models (Model B, C, and D) is based on the hierarchy-of-effects by following the unidimensional view of attitudes. It is assumed that the level of favourability or unfavourability concerning with the attitude object is mainly associated with one component, which is ‘affect’; meanwhile the other components, which are ‘beliefs and conations’ are seen as antecedents and consequences rather than as a part of attitudes (Roth and Diamantopoulos, 2009). In contrast, the two-component view of attitudes (Model A) does not consider the equation of a behavioural component.

The concepts of Model C and Model D are also not suitable for the purpose of the research. The low-involvement hierarchy of Model C assumes that an individual does not have a strong preference (i.e., affect) on objects in the beginning. Instead, the decision is dependent on their limited knowledge (beliefs), following an evaluation of objects created by their actual behaviour. The consequences of a cognitive → conative → affective components is particularly applicable for functional products. On the other hand, the experiential hierarchy of Model D is suitable for the hedonic consumption by which consumers buy or consume the products entirely based on their emotional reactions (Solomon et al., 2006). In real-world, the consumer behaviour of product choices is somewhat subjective based on their preferences. For example, a skincare product can represent the hedonic consumption for a woman, whereas it can be functional for a man. Similarly, buying a car can lead the hedonic consumption for someone who cares about his status, whereas it can be the functional choice for a rational buyer.

In this study, the Model B (standard learning hierarchy), which follows the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980) is selected to use the foundation of the conceptual framework. The reasoning of this concept is that “individual first forms beliefs about a certain country by accumulating knowledge regarding relevant attributes such as country political system or climate [...] Finally, the person engages in relevant behaviour, such as visiting the country of buying products from that country” (Roth and Diamantopoulos, 2009, p. 375).

In literature, three different types of hierarchy-of-effects are described as the standard learning hierarchy (Model B), the low-involvement hierarchy (Model C) and, the experiential hierarchy (Model D) (Solomon et al., 2006; cited in Roth and Diamantopoulos, 2009). Obermiller and Spangenberg (1989) find that consumers mostly process country of origin information through the *standard learning hierarchy model*. Other scholars including De Pelsmacker et al., (2001) and Solomon et al., (2006) hold the similar view due to a) the model includes the process by which most attitudes are constructed and b) its assumption of consumers' likelihood of high-involvement in making decision, leading to most of variables outcomes leading to COO research.

Scholars such as Ittersum et al., (2003), Knight and Calantone (2000), and Parameswaran and Pisharodi (1994) have previously used these models to investigate the sole impact of country beliefs on product evaluation and purchase intention as the outcome variables. As a conceptual contribution, Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009) suggest that future studies could enhance these models by introducing additional (non-country related) cognitive and affective factors. For this reason, other brand-related factors are considered to enhance the knowledge contribution.

On the other hand, the core definition of COO in this study (i.e., the country which a consumer associates with a particular product or brand as being its source, regardless of where the product produced) is adapted from the work of Thakor and Kohli (1996). Thakor and Kohli suggest that the effect of brand image and country image on developing consumer attitude on products is difficult to delineate and the future work should be focused on it. Due to the nature of the research being a theory-testing concept, Table 3.9 illustrates the studies influenced in establishing the paths in the conceptual model, in a partial way by considering their further research directions and the proven relationships in their models. After that, the integrative model of the current study (Figure 3.3) is developed as a result.

3.10.3. Hypothesis development

3.10.3.1 *The influence of country of origin on consumers' attitude and intention*

The COO cue can generate a global evaluation of quality, performance, or specific product attributes. Consumers evaluate these product attributes with the perceptions of country stereotype and their previous experiences with products from a particular country. "Stereotyping is a psychological process that is generally used to explain how consumers react to COO information" (Cilingir and Basfirinci, 2014, p.286) In existing literature, COO studies have focused on various marketing issues, such as consumer nationalism, hybrid products, brand effects, product quality, price, consumer attitudes, advertising images, country images, in order to explore consumer perceptions and purchasing.

Consumers evaluate COO effects in a cognitive way of processing which considers as the halo effect and summary construct. COO cues act as a 'halo' which have a direct effect on consumers' beliefs about a product when they are not familiar with it (Ahmed et al., 2004). A summary constructs indirectly influence brand attitudes through a country's image from product information when consumers are familiar with it.

Recently, the effects of COO has become a complex construct and regarded to have three components (Laroche et al., 2005; Maher and Carter, 2011; Papadopoulos et al., 1990; Roth and Papadopoulos, 2009; Verlegh and Steenkemp, 1999). According to Cilingir and Basfirinci (2014), a cognitive component delivers a quality sign of the product, an "affective" component represents as the emotional and symbolic values of a product for consumers and a normative component serves as a social and personal relationship between consumers and COO. This study will mainly focus on COO effects relating to product evaluation and consumers' willingness to buy. Sharma (2011), Cilingir and Basfirinci (2014) recommended that further studies can examine the effect of COO information on consumers' attitude and behaviour using other contextual variables. Hence, it is hypothesised that:

H1a: COO information will affect significantly on Myanmar consumers' product evaluation of mobile phones brands

H1b: COO information will affect significantly on Myanmar consumers' willingness to buy mobile phones

H1c: Product evaluation construct can mediate the relationship between COO and willingness to buy

3.10.3.2 The influence of product country image of a product on consumers' intention and behaviour

The country image is an influential factor in determining a general perception about the quality of a product and its originated country (Han, 2019). During the past decades, the country image and country-of-origin effects have been examined in many studies by scholars including Bilkey and Nes (1982), Samiee (1994), Peterson and Jolibert (1995), Pharr (2006).

According to Rosenbloom and Haefner (2009), the country image can be described as three levels a) overall country image, b) aggregate product-country image, and c) specific product-country image (Hsieh et al., 2004). Amongst, the aggregate product-country image is associated with either perceived quality of the products from a specific country or the cognitive 'feeling' on a specific country's products (Rosenbloom and Haefner, 2009). That country image plays a crucial role in consumers' evaluation of products from different countries due to the influence of country image on product beliefs (Laroche et al., 2005).

Schooler (1971) proposed the positive relationship between consumers' product evaluations from a country and the level of economic development of a country. This concept is called "hierarchy of biases," which means that consumers show a positive attitude on products from developed countries rather than those from developing countries. Hence, the geographical origin of a product offers a cognitive cue for evaluation of product quality.

However, consumers in some countries tend to more favour on their home country products than others, for example, in Germany, Finland, Japan, US and Netherlands (Hooley et al., 1988). Generally, consumers in developed countries prioritise products from their home country firstly, then products from emerging economies and developing countries (Ahmed et al., 2004). In contrast, consumers from developing countries are more favourable on products from developing countries than from their own, developing country (Gao and Knight, 2007). However, the literature identifies a counter argument and the tendency of the influence of product categories and their levels of involvement. The following hypothesis emerges from this discussion.

H2a: The Country image of a product (PCI) has a direct positive impact on product evaluation of Myanmar consumers in buying their mobile phones.

H2b: County image of a product shows a direct impact on Myanmar consumers' willingness to buy mobile phones

H2c: Product evaluation construct can mediate the relationship between PCI and willingness to buy

3.10.3.3 The influence of brand image on consumers' attitudes and intention

In branding literature, there are diverse brand image models, both conceptual and operational (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2001). The operational models are established to apply to different types of products (Netemeyer et al., 2004). It is recommended that there is a need for more quantitative analyses to determine the causal relationships between different brand image and other elements.

Brand image has both functional and symbolic dimensions which include physical aspects, including the reliability of companies' products or psychological brand attributes. The existing literature indicates that consumers have stereotyping perceptions of brands; for instance, Asian

brands versus Western brands. General perceptions of Asian brands are cheap, imitative, uncomplicated and unreliable, whereas those of western brands are a prestigious, affluent, stylish, luxurious and high-status symbol (Ghodeswar, 2008). Based on this consideration, the following hypothesis is concluded.

H3a: Brand image has a direct positive impact on the positive evaluation of Myanmar consumers on foreign mobile phones brands.

H3b: The brand image of a product shows a direct impact on Myanmar consumers' willingness to buy mobile phones

H3c: Product evaluation construct can mediate the relationship between brand image and willingness to buy

3.10.3.4 *The relationship between product evaluation and consumers' willingness to buy*

Consumers choose products and make a judgement on products based on information provided by marketers and other sources of information about product characteristics. In literature, product evaluation has been measured using different factors, including the perceived economy, perceived worth, attitude toward a product, and perceived risk, perceived quality, and other relevant evaluation cues. Generally, these cues used to evaluate products can be intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic cues are tangible physical attributes, and extrinsic cues are intangible attributes such as COO.

Previous research by Lockshin and Corsi (2012) is conducted the extrinsic and intrinsic cues on consumers' evaluation of wine products' quality and their willingness to pay a price premium and found that extrinsic cues are more influential than intrinsic cues. According to the behavioural decision-making theory, normative and descriptive are two interconnected aspects of behavioural decision making. The normative decision making represents the prescribing decisions that conform to actual belief and values, leading to a consumer's tendency of behaviour, in particular, situations (Cheah and Phau, 2015). Therefore, when consumers show a favourable evaluation of a product or a brand, their willingness to buy of that product will be significantly higher than a product/brand that is negatively evaluated in their perceptions. This leads to the following hypothesis.

H4: Product evaluation will have a significant, positive relationship with consumers' willingness to buy foreign brands in Myanmar mobile phones market

3.10.3.5 The influence of brand origin on consumers' attitudes and behaviour

Thakor and Kohli (1996) note that although consumers evaluation to brand-related cues including brand image, brand personality, brand affinity, brand relationships, brand charisma and brand attitude have been identified, there is a need to contribute a generally accepted model of how consumers perceived brands and their origins. Thakor and Kohli define 'brand origin' as the place, region or country to which the brand is perceived to belong by its target consumers but not by the location where products carrying the brand name are manufactured or are perceived by consumers to be manufactured (1996, p. 27).

Many country-of-origin studies have not considered the brand cue entirely, leading to a weakness in generalisability of those studies (Thakor and Kohli, 1996). Papadopoulos (1993) stated that country-of-origin cue in particular and origin information, in general, can communicate to consumers as product evaluation cues in their purchasing. Also, the brand origin is considered to be an influential determinant of consumers' quality perceptions. In product evaluation, Park et al. (1991) stated that brands could have either functional attributes or conceptual attributes such as luxury brands. The use of brand origin cue is particularly beneficial in the positioning of concept-based product attributes although an origin-based position does not necessarily synonymous with luxury.

As the study's aim and objectives, the research intends to investigate Myanmar consumers' preferences and perceptions of Country of Origin and Brand Origin on their product evaluation and willingness-to-buy towards foreign brands, and to determine the influence of country image and brand image of a product on Myanmar consumers' evaluation of mobile phones brands and their intention to buy. Using the mixed-method research design, each hypothesis proposition is tested and explored to achieve the six objectives of the research. Those objectives are:

- a) to identify influential factors of brand and country of origin in product evaluation and consumers willingness to buy
- b) to examine the effect product country image, country of origin and brand image on Myanmar young professionals' product evaluation of foreign mobile brands

- c) to understand whether origin, image cues of country and brand can influence on Myanmar consumers' buying intention
- d) to determine the role of product evaluation on the relationships between origins-images ascendants and consumers' willingness to buy
- e) to investigate Myanmar young professionals' preferences and perceptions on foreign branded products
- f) to explore how Myanmar young professionals evaluate mobile phones in their buying decision

The findings are expected to support/modify the theory or cause its assumptions to be questioned.

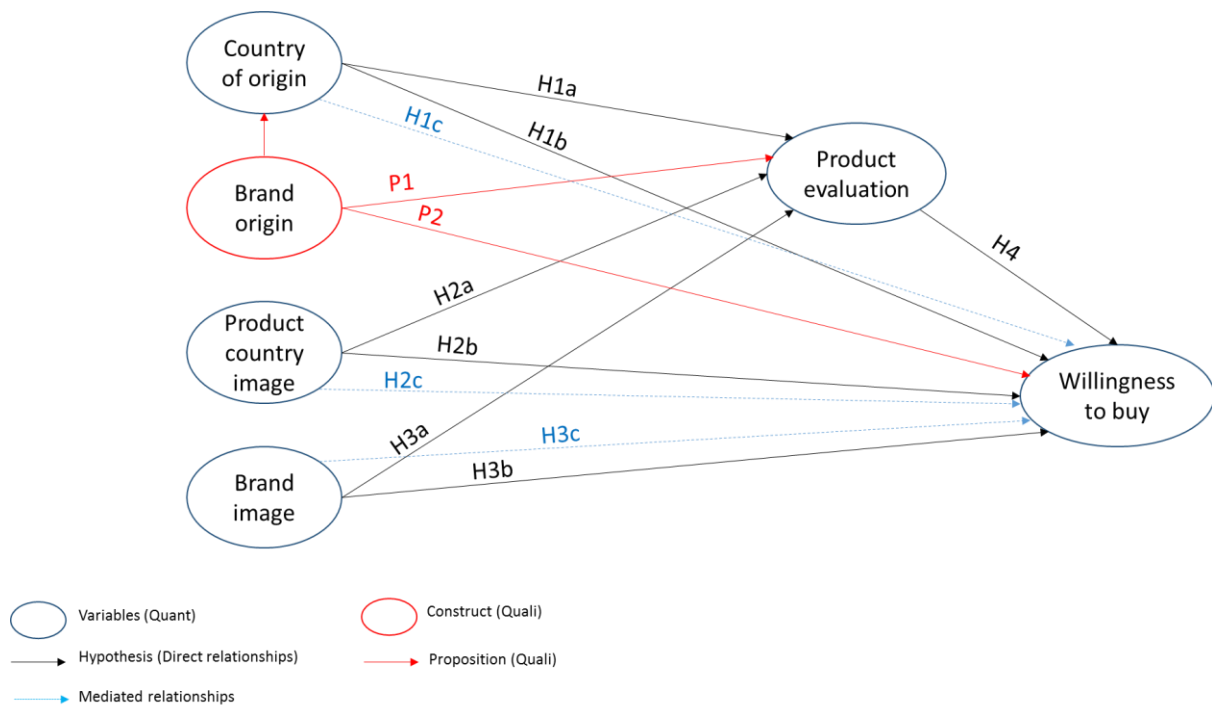


Figure 3. 3. The conceptual model with an illustration of the hypothesis

3.11. Conclusion

This chapter provides the critical discussion of concepts of Country of Origin, Brand Origin (Country of Brand), Product-related Country Image and Brand Image by bringing previous literature, applied theories in order to expose the constructive arguments and debates of ideologies and gaps in the field. Also, this chapter conceptualises the framework of the research from extant academic literature in order for primary constructs and other relevant variables. The main topics of the literature include – the explained sections of primary constructs (COO,

BO, PCI, BI), consumers' perception and brand preferences, consumers' product evaluation on brands and subsequently their buying intention. Since the research paradigm is the pragmatism approach, the research hypotheses are developed from theories and assumptions from the literature review. Many relevant studies assist in underpinning robust relationships of the primary conceptual model, although the chapter is lengthy with the explanation from various perspectives. The next chapter leads to the research methods intended to test the validity, reliability and applicability of the proposed conceptual model.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Main contents

- **Research philosophy**
- **Research design**
- **Data collection methods**
- **The choice of research context and settings**
- **Measurement of applied variables**

4.1. Introduction

The chapter explains a broad view of the philosophy of social science and substantiates the stance of the current study. Based on the philosophical foundation, an appropriate research strategy is proposed, following by the research designs such as sampling, pilot study procedures and scale validation are discussed. Finally, methods of data analysis (i.e. structural equation modelling) are introduced.

4.2. Philosophical considerations

There are different schools of thoughts in the philosophy of social science. Although there are many different streams of defining the research philosophy, the philosophical consideration in this study mainly follows the guidelines of Bryman and Bell (2018), and Saunders et al., (2016). These scholars practise two primary philosophical considerations; ontology and epistemology (as shown in Figure 4.1). Under two main philosophical views of ontology and epistemology, the study considers two paradigms; *constructionism* (of ontology) and *positivism* (of epistemology) which will be explained in this chapter.

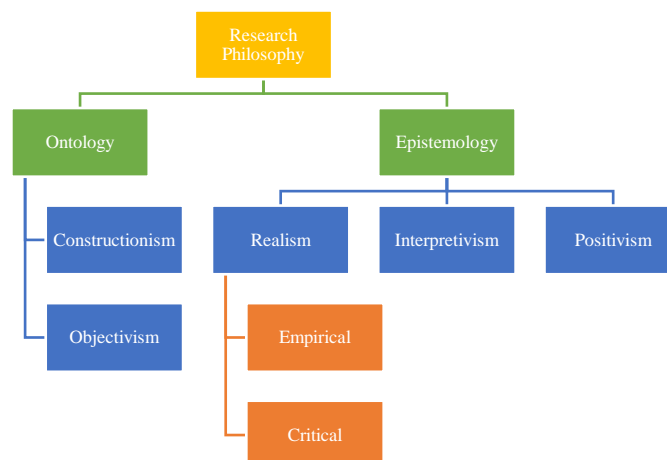


Figure 4.1: Types of research philosophy, Adapted from Bryman and Bell (2018); Saunders et al. (2016)

Many new paradigms have emerged in recent years, along with different approaches. Paradigms are interpretative frameworks that are guided by a set of beliefs and perceptions about reality and how it should be studied (Saunders et al. 2016). On the other hand, a paradigm is perceived as a worldview which represents a common perspective and a way of clarifying the complexity of the real world. Bryman and Bell (2011, p.24) state that “a paradigm is a cluster of beliefs and dictates which for scientists in particular discipline influence what should be studied, how research should be done and how results should be interpreted”.

According to Yvonne Feilzer (2010), paradigm should be useable at three different levels – the philosophical level (by reflecting basic levels about the world), the social level (by providing guidelines about how the research should be conducted) and the technical level (by determining the methods and techniques). Using an appropriate research paradigm, theories can be built or modified through a framework as well as a researcher can take the position to represent the worldview of research philosophy, determine the research perspective, shape the understanding of how entities are associated, and determine people behaviour and professional practice (Henning et al., 2004).

There are five philosophical assumptions which underpinned the main paradigms, namely, ontological assumption, epistemological assumption, axiological assumption, rhetorical assumption, and methodological assumption. According to Saunders et al., (2016, p.129), ontology worldview depends on the nature of reality by examining what the world look-alike is. Epistemology focuses on the consideration of adequate knowledge and the role of knowledge contribution by the human in society. Meanwhile, axiology searches for the role of values in research through the researchers' treatment of their values and the values of participants.

Despite their different and more extensive terminology and definition, it is based on two common research paradigms which are the philosophical frameworks of guiding one's research are namely, positivism and interpretivism (Collis and Hussey, 2014). These two paradigms are different in their views of ontology and epistemology. Under *positivism*, the researchers hold the belief that reality is independent of them, and the purpose of research is to discover theories based on empirical results such as observation and experiment. Positivists assume the act of investing social reality does not affect reality (Bryman and Bell, 2018). Since positivism practises local reasoning, its approach more focuses on precision, objectivity, and rigour than subjectivity and intuitive interpretation (Collis and Hussey, 2014).

In contrast, *interpretivism* is constructed by the belief that people's perceptions shape social reality and hence, it is subjective and has a high level of the researcher's involvement. Under interpretivism, the researchers receive interpretive understanding by exploring the complexity of social phenomena with a range of techniques that 'seek to describe, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning (Van Maanen, 1983, p.9). Unlike positivism, interpretive research cannot be produced findings from the statistical analysis of data (Corbin and Stauss, 2008).

To add more, positivists believe that there is only one reality since social reality is objective and external to the researcher. Hence, the observer can investigate reality objectively and free from judgement. On the other hand, interpretivism accepts that everyone has their sense of reality which means there are multiple realities which are subjective and socially constructed in the social reality (Collis and Hussey, 2014). Researchers need to determine what research objects and phenomena are focused on and approached.

4.2.1. Ontological considerations

The ontological assumption is related to the nature of the world and reality. As mentioned in the ontological questions, it considers the form and nature of reality whether social entities can/should be recognised social constructions developed from the perceptions and actions of social actors, or they can/should be recognised objective which has a reality external to social actors (Bryman and Bell, 2018). An objective entity indicates the social reality that is a real and objective world, existing outside the human mind and it is also independent of interpretation (Corbetta, 2003, p.12). Ontology stands for two positions, commonly referred to as constructionism and objectivism (explained in *Appendix 4.1.*).

From this standpoint, the paradigm of *social constructionism* is adopted for this study due to its relevancy. Cunliffe (2008) expresses constructionism as "the idea that social reality is not separate from us, but that social reality and ourselves are intimately interwoven as each shape and is shaped by the other in everyday interactions" (p.124). This paradigm does not explore universal facts and laws within social behaviour; instead, it intends to discover a coherent multiple reality through theories which are constructed and reconstructed over interactions (Saunders et al., 2016). These reasons encourage the current study to stand for a more critical stance upon presupposed a conventional view of knowledge to call for the impartial observation about the world (Chen et al., 2011).

4.2.2. Epistemological considerations

The epistemological assumption is related to what people accept as valid knowledge by examining the relationship between the researcher and the research itself. The main concern in this context is whether or not the social world can be viewed as the same principles, precedes, and ethos as the natural sciences (Bryman and Bell, 2018). Regarding epistemology, there are three different perspectives on the research literature – realism, interpretivism and positivism (Saunders et al., 2016) (explained in *Appendix 4.2.*).

The paradigm of *positivism and critical realism* is adopted as the standpoint of epistemology due to the following reasons. This study uses an existing theory to develop hypotheses in exploring the casual relationship in the data. Positivists believe that social reality can be only explored through sense data, including experience, observation or experience (Benton and Craib, 2001). The data collection process in positivism research starts after developing hypotheses based on existing theory, which can later be modified/developed after testing the proposed hypotheses.

Positivism is primarily well-known for the fact that the researcher's involvement is neutral and detached from data, and thus, there is no influence of them on the research, leading to undertaking value-free research. Despite being value-free, researchers such as Smith (1983) point out that the relationship between the researchers and their research is difficult to separate. Saunders et al., (2016) argue that the situations in business and management cannot always be explored by generalisations because limiting in a series of law can sometimes fail to achieve the great insights into the business field. Besides, Creswell (2013) states that positivism is not the same as science and the scientific since the philosophy of science and that of social sciences practise the different characteristics.

On the other hand, critical realism acknowledges the ignorance of positivists' assumption of social reality and redefines it by assuming that the social world does not exist beyond people's perceptions and interpretations. The philosophy of critical realism focuses on people's experience to explain the underlying structures of reality that shape the observable events. Under critical realism, there are two steps into understanding the world, firstly – there are sensations and events that people experience, and secondly, there is mental processing that follows after the experience. This philosophy aims to observe the bigger picture of a small event that the researcher participated (Easton, 2010). In this study, the data collection process starts after developing hypotheses based on the existing theory by using survey method and

then, the in-depth interview technique follows to provide the necessary explanations for the theory.

4.3. Pragmatism

In recent decades, a new philosophical assumption, called 'pragmatism', has been developed by philosophers who assumed that positivism and interpretivism are not entirely incompatible but could coincide with benefiting the social research. Researchers such as Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010) mainly support the practice of pragmatism with the association of 'mixed methods' research strategy. Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested 'pragmatism' as a separate research paradigm which holds the quantitative and qualitative inquiries in harmony. Both methodologies accept the value-based inquiries and agree that the theory originated from facts and reality is multiple and constructed (Reichardt and Rallis, 1994). Due to these similarities in fundamental values, it is reasonable to form a realistic and coherent relationship between two methodologies. However, pragmatists do not agree that knowledge can be determined once and for all (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010).

Pragmatism argues that concepts are only relevant when they support action (Kelemen and Rumens, 2008). It combines both objectivism and subjectivism, facts and values, accurate and rigorous knowledge. The benefits of practising pragmatism are that it recognises the importance of understanding and improving human conditions and accepts the complexity of the nature of the world and social phenomena.

For pragmatists, the reality is as important in the same way as practical effects of ideas and knowledge are essential in enabling actions to be conducted successfully. Pragmatic research introduces a problem and aims to contribute practical solutions for future practices. The process of triangulation in mixed methods can maximise the cross-validate research results in central areas and assist in the contribution of a strong understanding of the social phenomenon.

In the research terminology, the term "triangulation methodology" is called for a procedure that collects and analyses both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study (Creswell, 2013; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010). The triangulation methodology involves the evaluation of the research question from several viewpoints. For this reason, researchers recommend the mixed-method design as a reasonable way of conducting social and behavioural works (Venkatesh, 2014).

4.3.1. The practice of pragmatism in the current study

According to Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2007), mixed methods in the social science are a technique that ‘mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study (p.17).

Creswell and Creswell (2018) mention the five rationales to practise mixed methods as following:

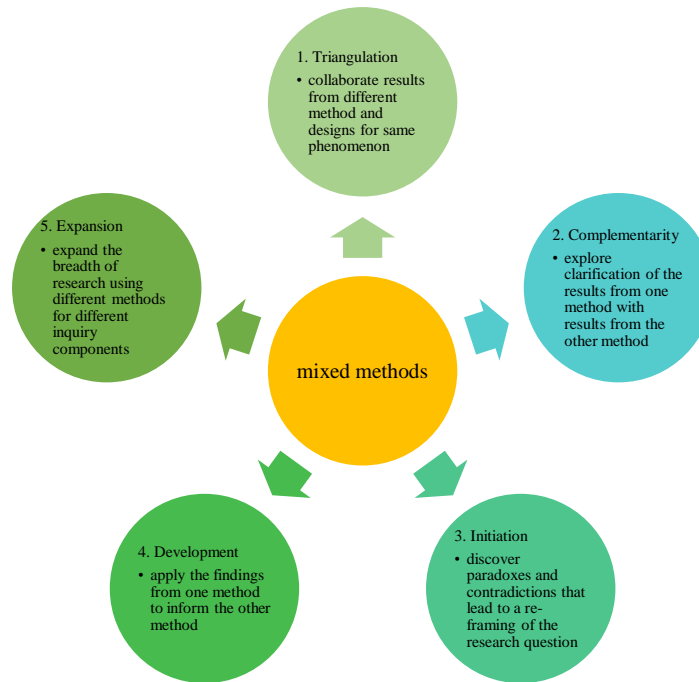


Figure 4.2: Five rationales of mixed methods

Based on the patterns from previous papers, it is uncommon to find cases in initiation, development or expansion (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010). Hence, this study contributes to practising the mixed method of ‘*complementarity*.’ The research questions of the study are designed for complementary to provide the insightful knowledge on a particular case – investigation of consumer perception and evaluation of mobile phones products and subsequently their buying intention – by applying different methods such as survey and interviews.

The research objectives of exploring the relationship between country of origin and other variables are conducted by using quantitative techniques whereas the research question about consumers’ perception, evaluation and purchase intention on brand origin is answered by using qualitative techniques.

The reason of becoming different inquiry components for country and brand origin is due to two main reasons; firstly, the results from the pilot study which indicated that the brand origin scale is not appropriate to use in the main study. Avoiding from developing a new scale which is significantly demanding test considering time, people, money, and experience, it is advised to conduct the qualitative approach for this particular research question and objectives. Secondly, the qualitative interviews also provoke the data related to consumer perception on other constructs from the conceptual model in order to provide a better understanding of results from the quantitative survey. The detailed process will be well explained in the section of the pilot study as well as in the main study.

4.3.2. Different mixed-methods typologies

Typologies can facilitate the explanation of complex concepts, instruct practice (Plano Clark and Creswell, 2008). By exposing the typologies of mixed methods and their purposes, this section intends to discuss the importance of using mixed methods and its applied strategy for the current study. In literature, there are a few notable scholars including Creswell, Plano Clark, Tashakkori and Teddlie, who explicitly describe the rationales for the classification in the mixed methods field. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) summarise the five reasons why the researchers should emphasis in mixed methods designs and their classifications (as seen in Figure 4.3). Moreover, other contemporary classifications by Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2009), Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) and Onwuegbuzie and Turner (2007) on mixed methods are explained.

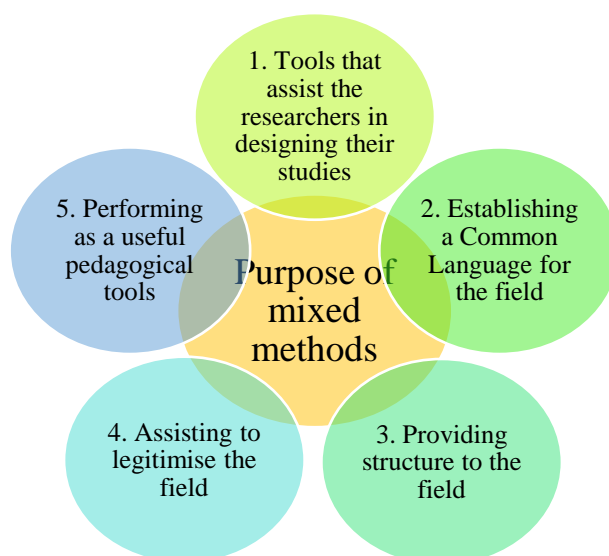


Figure 4.3: Mixed method typologies

Source: Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009)

Recently, the key typological dimensions have been summarized by a few scholars in order to create more understandable and comprehensive typologies or frameworks. For instance, Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2009) suggest a *three-dimensional framework* which is extracted mixed-method research designs as a three-dimensional framework: a) level of mixing (partially or fully mixed), b) time orientation (concurrent vs. sequential), c) emphasis of approaches (equal status vs. dominant status). The crucial focus on conducting mixed methods is describing the process of 'point of interface' which as an illustration of where, how and why datasets are connected and mixed (Ivankova, Creswell and Stick, 2006).

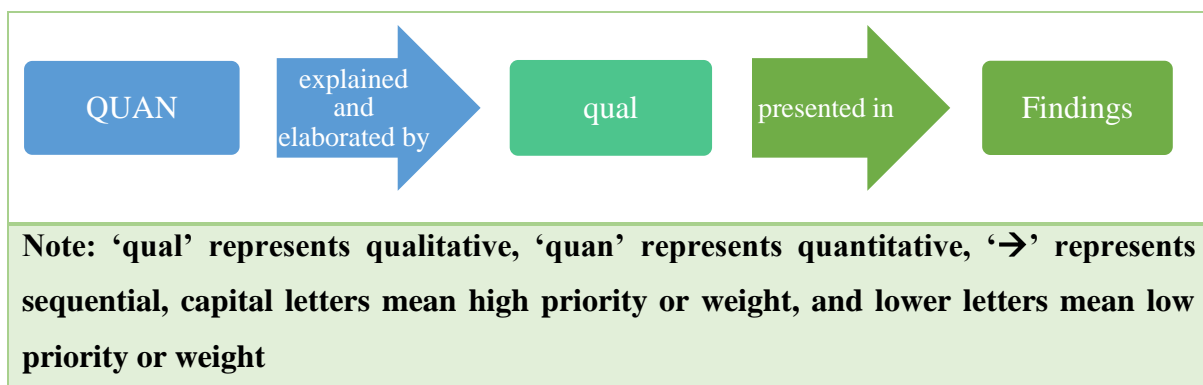
On the other hand, Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) summarise the *six descriptive dimensions* that are common in the field as follows: a) timing of the interface between data sets (e.g., simultaneous or successive) b) purpose of the interface between data sets (e.g., inform, explain, triangulate), c) theoretical orientation (e.g., inductive vs deductive, interpretive, feminist), d) purpose of the research (e.g., advocacy, applied, theoretical), e) number of points of interface/degree of integration (e.g., fully or partially integrated/mixed, single or multi-strand), and f) relative importance of qualitative data and quantitative data (weighting) (cited in Guest, 2012, p. 146). These dimensions are considered standard for the classification of the mixed methods research designs as it describes clear categories with labels. Despite the importance of each dimension for designing the whole study, Guest (2013) argues that the description of only two dimension – the timing and purpose of integration – is sufficient due to its descriptive power to illustrate the variety of mixed methods designs.

Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner (2007) describe three popular designs of mixed methods research namely, a) quantitatively driven approaches/designs, b) qualitatively driven approaches/designs, and c) interactive or equal status designs. Similar to mono-method that quantitative or qualitative research conducts separately, mixed methodologies require to maintain the focus of original purpose following the choice of methodology. As one advantage of using mixed-method as a research strategy over the single method, the researchers can enhance the **construct validity** gained from the use of multiple strategies (Creswell, 2009) and it can indicate as a feature of valuable research.

In addition, conducting mixed methods can a) offer a holistic or truthful worldview by approaching the study from different paradigms, b) gain clearer picture of the social world and more sufficient explanations by using multimethod, c) solve a particular problem which has not been theorised, and d) be suitable with the philosophy of pragmatism. In particular, this study follows the research design of *explanatory mixed methods* study (as shown in *Figure 4.4*). In spite of considering the requirements of the additional resources, time, and expertise, the perceived value of connecting two distinct methodologies is valuable since it is useful in assisting with knowledge creation as well as prominent in the field of business, marketing and social sciences based on the review of published studies (McKim, 2015).

O’Cathain, Murphy and Nicholl (2007) note that the popularity of mixed methods is apparent as a result of deficit of quantitative methods. Nevertheless, Molina-Azorin (2011) states that mixed methods papers received more citations than single method ones which are also a value-added point of conducting mixed methods. One of the reasons could be that mixed methods are capable of assurance of research findings and interpretation when it is systematically conducted (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010). Choosing the research design of *sequential explanatory mixed methods* (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011) can convey the added value of research’s intention such as to enhance confidence in findings, to increase accuracy and completeness, as well as to contribute to the overall validity of the current study.

Figure 4.4: The research design of the current study



Adapted from Creswell and Plano Clark (2011)

4.4. Research approach

According to Crowther and Lancaster (2008), there is little consent in the representation of theories in the social sciences. A theory, in this sense, means “a set of interrelated constructs definitions, and the propositions that represent a rational view of phenomena by explaining or predicting relationships among those elements” (Rocco et al., 2003, p. 23). Theory plays a crucial role in planning the research process whether it is quantitative research (deductive approach) or a qualitative one (inductive approach).

There are three contemporary outlooks of researchers, namely deduction, induction, and abduction – the first group believes that theories are the foundations of research because they support useful guidelines in the data collection and analysis procedures (Bryman and Bell, 2018). The second group believes that theory develops after the data collection and analysis process by verifying the theoretical explanation of the reality (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Meanwhile, abductive approach practises both deduction and induction to generate better testable conclusions (Saunders et al., 2016). These three research approaches are associated with different research philosophies, for instance – induction practises its reasoning from the general to particular whereas deduction practises its reasoning from the particular to the general. The overview of deductive and inductive approach is mentioned in *Appendix 4.3*.

4.4.1. The use of abduction

Saunders et al., (2007) suggest that it is crucial to choose a suitable research approach while designing a research study since from the beginning there is a need to clarify the researcher's standpoint in the relationship between the theory and the research. According to Easterby-Smith et al., (2012), a suitable research approach can lead to a more informed decision about the research design, choose those research strategies and methodologies that are suitable for particular research. Since this study uses the research design of sequential explanatory mixed methods (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011), the contemporary approach of abduction is adapted for it (*Figure 4.4*).

The abduction approach is the combination of deduction and induction, meaning that from theory to data (as in deduction) or data to theory (as in induction). An abduction starts with the observation of a ‘surprising fact’ and then calculates a plausible theory of how this could have found. Objectivism relates to the assumptions of the natural sciences, whereas subjectivism relates to the assumptions of the arts and humanities. Linking both quantitative and qualitative methods are considered for the following reasons – 1) the type of research aim and objectives

demand to combine both approaches; applying mixed methods approach can "promise a simplification of a proliferating field" (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003).

It is useful to consider the relationship between the theory and the research using deductive, inductive and abductive strategies. As Bryman and Bell (2007) suggested, these strategies should more be considered as tendencies than as a hard and fast distinction. A combination of two methods means that ideas from qualitative research are tested empirically through quantitative studies, which in turn, the findings can have high validity and reliability. Patton (2002) indicate that when studies use only one method, there are more susceptible to errors that related to the particular method than studies with mixed-method due to its cross-data validity checks.

From the perspective of theory building, an abductive approach is taken to realise back-and-forth relationships with social actors (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Based on the above explanation on deduction and induction, both approaches are considered as irrelevant for a) deduction is entirely rely on a rigid theory-testing logic, b) induction is challenging to obtain the sufficient empirical data for theory development. Choosing abduction can enhance the understanding between the observation and conceptual work to provide more advantages to the real-world practices, ability to fill the void between theory and practice (Nenonen et al., 2017).

4.5. Research strategy

Setting the research methodology assists the researchers to answer the research questions by guiding a proper data collection process and then, discussing their research findings and results (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). The selection of research methodology relies on the research questions and objectives, the extent of existing knowledge, the available amount of time and resources and the philosophical underpinnings (Saunders et al., 2007). Different types of research strategies based on the researcher's choice of research methodology are described in *Appendix 4.4*.

On the other hand, Oppenheim (2000) mentions two conditions that are applied by researchers; research techniques and research design/methodology. Research techniques are methods that use for data generation and collection, whereas a research design is used for the basic plan or strategy of the research. Precisely the purposes of setting a research design are: a) to build the overall structure of the study, b) to provide a logical framework for the data collection and analysis process and c) to be able to answer the research questions unambiguously (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Bryman and Bell also mention the four categories of research designs – experimental designs, longitudinal designs, cross-sectional designs and case-study designs.

Since a research design is a strategic method that can influence the researchers' entire projects, it is important to consider an appropriate research design at the early stage based on the research questions (Hussey and Hussey, 1997; Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Creswell, 2003). Also, Oppenheim (2000) states that it cannot be assumed that one approach is more advantageous than another approach. Similarly, Malhotra and Birks (2003) notion that a researcher cannot identify the perfect research design for any marketing research task. The current study applies the ***cross-sectional design*** of using the *survey* method following by *in-depth interviews*. The empirical data is collected within a time frame of two months and based on the questionnaire survey and interviews which is fit with the type of cross-sectional study. However, the method is limited to non-response bias as a result of the unrepresentative sample of the population.

4.5.1. Instrumentation

By definition, the 'instrument' is the generic term that represents a measurement device (such as survey, test, and questionnaire) whereas the 'instrumentation' is the course of action including the process of developing, testing and using that device. There are two categories of the instrument – researcher-completed (also known as researchers administer) and subject-completed (completed by participants). The instrumentation process of this current study considers three concerns – usability, validity, and reliability. Usability of the study includes factors such as the administration of contented instrument, the acceptable interpretation by both participants and researchers.

Maintaining these criteria, the study is carefully considered to avoid the complication of administration and interpretation. The items (questions) in the questionnaire are focused on being less complicated and the descriptions to be less confusing. Each question is worded rigorously to increase the participants' level of understanding and decrease low completion rates. Questionnaires are left with participants for a reasonable amount of time before the collection time so that they have more time to complete willingly. Moreover, both internal validity and external validity is carefully considered to prevent possible threatening factors. Research design and research instrument (i.e., data collection) are clearly mentioned for the sake of internal validity while the generalisability of findings can apply to other newly emerging economy contexts as Myanmar. The details of conducting research reliability are also explained in the next section of the chapter (section 4.6).

4.5.2. Designing the questionnaires

The questionnaire design is carefully considered since it is critical for collecting precise data. As Saunders et al. (2016) recommend, many criteria are adopted as applicable in designing a questionnaire, and these include arranging the questions and the structure, wording of questions, format, layout, spacing position of questions and numbering them.

Pilot research is conducted for the preliminary design of the survey, aiming to obtain insights about Myanmar consumers' general perceptions on foreign brands and their origins. It also aims to enhance the researcher's boldness of the potentially influential factors on consumers' product evaluation and willingness to buy towards foreign brands. In order to get an extensive background, the previous literature survey is reviewed and identified the limitations.

Mainly, the items in the questionnaire are adapted from a review of country of origin and branding literature. The relationships of the conceptual model are integrative from the previous research conducted by different scholars. Thus, the scales used in this study are adopted from previous studies as the nature of the study is theory-testing. The variables of the model are as following:

- Country of origin scales are adapted from Pisharodi and Parameswaran (1992)
- Product country image scales are adapted from Roth and Romeo (1992)
- Brand image scales are adapted from Hanaysh and Hilman (2015)
- Product evaluation scales are adapted from Cilingir and Basfirinci (2014)
- Willingness to buy scales are adapted from Josiassen et al., (2011)

The justification for using these variables are further explained in details in the 'measure of variables' section (section 4.9). Meanwhile, this section mainly focuses on designing the questionnaire in terms of wording and translation.

The wording of the questions is an integral part of developing the questionnaires. The suggestions and recommendations followed by basic rules and issues are paid attention to this designing stage. It includes a) questions should be clear using ordinary and unambiguous words, b) not using technical words, c) trying to coordinate with the vocabulary level of the participants, d) avoiding leading or biasing questions, e) avoiding implicate alternative and connected assumptions as well as generalisation and estimations (Aaker et al., 2001; Malhotra and Birks, 2003). Moreover, it is carefully considered the relation between the questions and the conceptual framework of this study.

The questionnaires are produced into two steps; the pilot test distributed online is in bi-language (English- Burmese) version, and the results are analysed before producing the final version of main study which is in the Burmese language to be used by respondents living in Myanmar. The first study of survey fieldwork is conducted in Myanmar. Since the Burmese language is widely spoken in Myanmar and also regarded as the official language of the country, the questionnaires are decided to translate into it, aiming to facilitate the mother tongue of the participants. Translation into mother tongue helps obtain large numbers of responses from the participants' sub-group (Malhotra and Birks, 2003).

There are two conventional methods for translation techniques, namely 'back translation' and 'parallel translation' (*The definitions can be seen in Appendix 4.5.*). All translation procedures for both the questionnaire and interviews (in qualitative data of chapter 6) follow the guidelines of Hall et al. (2018). The 'back translation' is chosen for this study in the translation process of the questionnaire for the following reasons. Firstly, the back translation technique is widely used in reaching translation equivalence in cross-cultural research (Usunier, 2000). Secondly, translation errors and inadequacies can be easily discovered by using this method. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), the back-translation method, which means the content is translated into English and then back-translated into the original language, is commonly used in many studies.

After deciding an appropriate technique for the questionnaire, the questionnaire in the English version is produced and then translated into the Burmese language by the researcher, who is the native speaker. Then, the questionnaire in the Burmese version is checked by a lecturer who specialised in Burmese language and literature. Furthermore, the Burmese version of it is interpreted back into the English language by another interpreter who is teaching English language in a private language school. Later, the two versions of the questionnaire are compared; some amendments in the meaning of the questions have been corrected to produce the best version of it. Each process is given precise attention not to alter the actual meaning of the questionnaire in its original language while translating so that the measures can result in the accuracy of the research findings.

4.6. Reliability and Validity

In general, the credibility of the research findings can be measured in terms of validity and reliability so that these measures play important roles in the study (Saunders et al., 2016). The concepts of reliability and validity are different but related. For example, a scale with good validity can be an indicator of acceptable reliability. For a scale validation, validity test shows a sufficient condition than reliability.

The purpose of reliability is to provide consistent findings in the process of data collection techniques and analysis procedures. The reliability can be measured in terms of three elements a) the consistency of measurements in producing the same results, b) the relevance of observations for future researchers, and c) the transparency in how the raw data was interpreted into findings.

In the evaluation of reliability, the *internal consistency reliability* is the crucial one which is typically tested by Cronbach's coefficient alpha (Peterson, 1994; cited in Hair et al., 2017). A Cronbach's alpha value of .70 is considered as acceptable, of .80 as desirable and an alpha value above .90 should be avoided (Hair et al., 2017). Despite the fact that the high alpha value shows the high consistency, a very high alpha value should not consider due to its implication of a high level of item redundancy (Boyle, 1991; cited in Hair et al., 2017).

However, the use of Cronbach's alpha test for scale reliability has two drawbacks: a) it does not consider measurement error, b) it assumes all items have equal reliabilities (Hair et al., 2017). To improve these issues, the use of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) can provide three additional reliability measures namely, *individual item reliability* (also called squared multiple correlation or R^2), *composite reliability* and *average variance extracted (AVE)* (Bagozzi and Yi 1988; Fornell and Larcker 1981; cited in Hair et al., 2017).

Both the *internal and external validity* of the data collection instrument are maximised before implementing the main data collection. Factors such as subject variability, size of subject population and time allowance of the data collection are considered for the purpose of internal validity. The findings can be applied to other contexts and the external validity can be observed in this study through the data collection methodology, the effect of the research environment, and the interaction of participant selection and research. On the other hand, the validity and reliability of collected data are mentioned in Chapter 5 (*Analysis and findings of quantitative data*) and Chapter 6 (*Analysis and findings of qualitative data*).

By definition, validity is the agreement between a test score or measure and the quality it is believed to measure (Solimun and Fernandes, 2017). There are three types of evidence for inferences made about the test score – construct-related, criterion-related and content-related (Raykov, 2008). Although there are many other types for various aspects of validity, these three pieces of evidence can cover for the most aspects (Mohamad et al., 2015).

Content validity is achieved by conducting a rational analysis of the instrument by 3 to 5 raters who are familiar with the constructs in the conceptual framework. The raters assist in reviewing the items for readability, clarity and comprehensiveness and deciding for the inclusion of each item in the final instrument. **Face validity** is also confirmed when an individual reviews the instrument and decides that the questions measure the trait of interest. Also, criterion validity can be concluded the relationship between score of a test and specific criterion.

Construct validity is secured by conducting a factor analysis. The purpose of scale validity or construct validity is to measure whether it measures what it proposes to measure. In a similar vein, Solimun and Fernandes (2017, p.1207) claim that “construct validation is necessary to help researchers establish that the survey items actually measure the construct proposed to measure. The steps of construct validation follow the development of content validation and include the steps of factorial validity and criterion-related validity”.

According to Hair et al., (2010 cited in Solimun and Fernandes, 2017), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) help the researchers in testing how adequately the measured variables represent the latent variables. Combining the results of CFA with the construct validity tests can provide a better understanding of the quality of the measures. The test of the validity of measurement model using CFA is called unidimensional measures, which is a set of measured variables (indicators) with only one underlying latent variables.

In CFA analysis, any item with low factor loading and does not fit in the measurement model is suggested to remove from the model. Unidimensionality is obtained after all measuring items can confirm acceptable factor loadings for the specific latent variable. Theoretically, the level of ‘too low’ factor loadings should be considered as – a) the factor loading for every item should exceed 0.5 for newly developed items, b) the factor loading for every item should be 0.6 or higher for established items. In practice, however, it is difficult to find a validity

coefficient higher than 0.60, and thus, validity coefficients between 0.30 and 0.40 are commonly considered (Kaplan and Saccuzoo, 2009).

Sekaran (2003) states that the unidimensional measure can be similar to a unidimensional validity because the indicator variables load on only one construct. Based on the findings from Solimun and Fernandes (2017), their results indicated that the unidimensional validity test is more sensitive than the criterion validity test. Conducting the unidimensional validity can prevent factor indeterminacy in SEM data analysis, which occurs when the result of factor analysis is more than one factor (not valid unidimensionality). Since this current study uses SEM as an analysis tool, the credible unidimensionality is expected to be achieved as the SEM has factor indeterminacy as the limitation.

A latent construct is measured by applying three types of validity which are needed for each measurement model. They are convergent validity, construct validity and discriminant validity. In analysis, convergent validity can be verified by calculating the average variance extracted (AVE) for every construct. The value of AVE should be 0.5 or higher to obtain this validity and removing the low factor loading items can enhance the validity in the model. Secondly, construct validity is obtained when the fitness indexes for a construct reach the required level. Finally, discriminant validity can confirm that the measurement model of a latent variable is free of unnecessary items. Another necessity of discriminant validity is that the correlation between exogenous constructs should not exceed 0.85. It is because the correlation value with higher 0.85 is the indicator of either being redundant between two exogenous constructs or having serious multicollinearity issues.

4.6.1. Research ethics

It is commonly accepted that market research should be conducted honestly, objectively and without intrusion or disadvantage to its participants (Saunders et al., 2016). The role of ethics is vital in any research to enhance other significant moral and social values including social responsibility, human rights, and animal welfare, compliance with the law and public health and safety. The researcher is knowledgeable about the various ethical principles and codes, indicating carefulness, openness, respect for intellectual property, confidentiality and so on. Also, this study will follow ethical and legal guidelines and codes ruled by both the University of Huddersfield and the research country (Myanmar).

The ethical consent forms instructed by the business school's research ethics committee for data collection was submitted in June 2017 before the research conduct. The forms include the project outlines including research aims, objectives, research methodology, access to participants, confidentiality which are needed to illustrate by the researcher strictly. After following the guidance of the supervisory team and the committee, the study is approved to continue the data collection in July 2017.

In this empirical study, each individual is provided with a) participant information sheet, b) participant consent form and other necessary information before he/she agree to take part in the research (both the pilot test and the main study). The participants are identified as codes in order to keep their anonymity. In information sheet, all participants are provided with the information about the study, the reasons why they have been approached, the disclosure of confidentiality and anonymity as well as the contacts of the supervisory team and the researcher. The main sections of questionnaire start only when a participant willingly agree to take part in.

4.7. Data collection methods

It is critical to comprehend both the strength and weakness of the alternative research approach by providing the researchers with helpful insights in choosing the most beneficial method to achieve the research objectives. The strengths and weaknesses of the two approaches can be viewed in *Appendix 4.6*.

As for marketing researchers, the information sources can be obtained in two types, primary and secondary data collection methods. This research applies *secondary data* archived from a) library resources – including previously and recently journal articles, books, newspaper and magazines that are linked to branding and marketing research, b) all relevant information to this research and resources over the internet or web pages.

The primary data are mainly derived from the researcher to address the research issues or problems. The self-administered questionnaire and face-to-face interviews are used to evaluate consumers' perceptions of brands and their origins.

4.7.1. Choice of method: Survey (Questionnaire)

A survey (questionnaire) is selected as an appropriate research strategy for the current study because it can alter research objectives into specific questions and later, the answers can provide related data needed for testing the proposed hypotheses. Secondly, the questionnaire is the valuable research tool for collecting information about a participant's beliefs, attitudes, and self-reported behaviour and it can also provide the researcher with a quick response rate in an expensive way (Mitchell and Jolly, 2012).

Further, it is recommended that questionnaires can use when the researcher requires quantitative information from a large number of sample in limited time, and then, it can be statistically analysed to answer the research questions. According to Cargan (2007), Gratton and Jones (2010), using questionnaires as data collection tool have some advantages as well as disadvantages.

Both advantages and disadvantages of using questionnaire method are considered, and then, selected as the suitable one for the current research because of being standardised and easy to administer and analyse (Burns and Bush, 2006). This study designs to collect data about consumers' product evaluation and willingness to buy toward different mobile phones brands for statistical analysis. Most of the country-of-origin (COO) and brand origin (BO) studies

commonly used the survey as data collection method (Roth and Diamantopoulos, 2008; Chuin and Mohamad, 2012; Saeed et al., 2013).

Table 4.1: Rationale for using survey method

Advantages of using questionnaire	Why is it thoughtful to apply this strategy in the research?
Accessibility	<p>-the data can be collected from a geographically spread sample group</p> <p>-questionnaires can be distributed in a large-scale sample at a lower investigating-cost than interviewing in a similar sample since questionnaires do not need the researchers' presence to ask questions.</p>
Administered to a random sample	<p>-using questionnaires can offer a comprehensive view of the attitudes, beliefs and values of the large-scale population and the sampling-range error is small.</p>
Anonymity	<p>-due to the lack of researchers' presence, questionnaires favour on anonymity to enhance the validity of the responses.</p> <p>-especially in expressing the respondents' feelings on personal or sensitive topics, it is comfortable for them to have feelings of anonymity.</p>
Potential unbiased results	<p>-using well-designed questionnaires can minimise the potential bias in research findings which can be the case in interviews.</p>
Convenient response-time for participants	<p>-the respondents can manage their time to answer the questionnaire without having pressure to respond immediately as in interviews.</p>
Consistent results	<p>-standardised instructions and the order of questions produce more valid uniform results.</p>
Structured data	<p>-the quantitative data by questionnaires can provide an easy comparison between subject groups or between the behaviour seen in the same group over some time.</p> <p>-the data can also be presented by charts, graphs, tables in analysing statistically.</p>

(Sources: Cargan, 2007; Gratton and Jones, 2010)

In this study, questionnaires will be distributed in face-to-face settings, rather than mail or telephone interviews. According to Kerlinger (1980), the face-to-face questionnaire can have better response rates and better quality of response than mail questionnaire or telephone questionnaire. Similarly, Stover and Stone (1974) state that a face-to-face questionnaire makes participants reflect his/her own opinion. Besides, the face-to-face survey method is commonly used in market research and marketing communications research. According to Malhotra and Birks (2003), this technique is useful because the setting environment is neutral and the respondents have right to answer the survey or reject to answer willingly. However, using mail questionnaire and telephone questionnaire is appropriate for an extensive sample and very wide geographical area (Roberts, 1999).

4.7.2. Sampling Techniques

The use of sample assists the researchers to have precise information about the population while it is unable to access the whole population for data collection (Yu and Cooper, 1983). Besides, a constructive sample can be a representation of the population and offer generalisable results of the study (Saunders et al., 2016). Therefore, sampling is the core of the process of the research design. Practically, conducting a census – a research strategy which collects and analyse data from the entire population – is generally uncommon to use in social research due to the budget and time constraints. However, the governments or financially powerful organisations can conduct a census with a great time, budget and labour commitments. Hence, social researchers, in general, practise other possible choices of sampling strategies.

There are two types of sampling – probability and non-probability sampling. The choice of researchers among these two types of sampling is dependent upon considerations including the nature of the research, relative magnitude of non-sampling, and degree of error tolerance (Saunders et al., 2016). There are four types of probability sampling: simple random, systematic random, stratified random and random cluster sampling. On the other hand, using non-probability sampling cannot offer the chance of each case being equally selected from the population, resulting in the issues with the generalisability of research findings. Nevertheless, non-probability sampling can use in a research project for some reasons.

Saunders et al., (2009) argue that probability sampling might not be appropriate to answer research questions in some cases that focused within business and management research field. For instance, some research questions can only answer by conducting an in-depth analysis with the focus on small cases for a specific purpose. The small sample can also provide rich

information, have theoretical insights and answer research questions. Moreover, in some circumstances, either the lack of sufficient information about the population or a large number of cases makes the researchers challenging to carry out probability sampling (Denscombe, 2007). There are also four types of non-probability sampling: quota, purposive, volunteer (including snowball and self-selection) and haphazard (convenience) sampling.

4.7.3. The use of Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling is the type of non-probability sampling which can use either in research with small samples such as case study research or in selected cases that are particularly informative (Saunders et al., 2016). According to Cresswell and Plano Clark (2011), purposive sampling can identify and select individuals or group of individuals who are knowledgeable about or experienced with a paradox of interest. Saunders et al. (2016) mention that purposive sampling allows the researchers to use their judgement in cases (participants) selection in order to effectively answer the research questions. Although the usage of purposive sampling is being criticized for being unable to represent the whole population, this cannot be considered as a weakness for the studies conducting qualitative or mixed methods research designs (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010).

In recent years, the implication in mixed methods studies become well-received due to the challenge of using a single methodological approach is frequently insufficient for handling the sophisticated and innovative practices (Palinkas et al., 2015). Mixed method designs have the advantage of providing a greater understanding of research problems than either qualitative or quantitative techniques (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010).

Fundamentally, qualitative methods focus on reaching to the 'point of saturation' whereas quantitative methods emphasis on obtaining generalisability (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In terms of expectations and standards, quantitative methods attempt to present formulae for preventing the occurrence of Type I and Type II error meanwhile quantitative methods considers the standards such as determining number of participants according to proposed analysis and focusing on either homogeneity or heterogeneity (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson, 2006).

4.7.4. Types of purposive sampling designs

There are six different types of purposive sampling – extreme case purposive, heterogeneous purposive, homogeneous purposive, critical case purposive, typical case purposive and theoretical sampling– which can choose according to the research questions and objectives. The essence of each strategy has its purposes, such as to compare and contrast, to determine similarities and difference in the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Amongst, *homogeneous* type of purposive sampling is chosen because the sample needs to have strict, specific characteristics in the explanation of key research themes that can be observed. Although homogeneous purposive sampling has the limitation of minimum variation with the sample and low representative sampling compared to other purposive samplings, the study intends to focus on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest and to give the best possible answers to the proposed research questions.

Limitations of purposive sampling

Although the purposive sampling is widely used method, some challenges can lead to limitations for the studies that practise its method. First, the range of variation in a sample from which purposive sample is to be taken is frequently unknown at the outset of a study (Palinkas et al., 2015). Consequently, it is suggested to calculate an appropriate sample when the theoretical saturation takes place (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Second, it is common to find the qualitative methods that resist the type of systematic sampling and dismiss the limiting nature of realist, systematic or positive approaches. Patton (2002; cited in Palinkas et al., 2015) indicates that although systematic sampling could be associated with a post-positivist form of qualitative data collection and analysis, it should not be limited to such analyses and should be applicable for other qualitative approaches.

4.7.5. Implementation of purposive sampling in the research

The population characteristics for this research are young professionals in the metropolitan area. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the workforce of young office workers is thriving with a significantly large youth population. Over 55 percent of population is under the age of 30 and create a valuable opportunity for the country's economic growth and purchasing power (The Economists, 2015). From the marketing perspectives, the research on the segment of young professionals is practical and introspective in the long run. From the market research perspectives, this population has a great potential as the growth of young educated workforce and skillful labour market plays an essential role in the country's level of development. The

detailed procedures of sample choice and implementation in the data collection are mentioned in chapter 5 (section 5.3 and 5.5) and chapter 6 (section 6.2).

As the research implementation, qualitative and quantitative methods are essential, either simultaneously or sequentially, to answer the research questions by using one set of methods to expand or explain the results gathered from the use of another set of methods (Palinkas et al., 2011). Their review of mixed methods designs found that there are seven different sequential and simultaneous structural arrangements, five different functions of mixed methods and three different ways of connecting quantitative and qualitative data.

As the research using *sequential mixed* method designs, the most pivotal challenge is that the limitations of the initial method can be influential on the following method. For instance, the usage of qualitative methods initially might cause the sample with small and lack randomisation to fulfil the assumptions of the following quantitative analysis. Similarly, the usage of quantitative methods initially can occur the large sample for each individual to participate in qualitative inquiry and lack purposeful selection.

Amongst the use of different purposeful sampling strategies in mixed methods studies, a *criterion of inclusion* in a specified category (criterion-i) sampling is periodically used in the implementation of mixed methods studies that practised a simultaneous design. It uses the quantitative method as primary followed by the qualitative method, or studies that followed a structure which used the equal priority of both qualitative and quantitative methods (Aarons et al., 2012). Besides, the implication of criterion-i sampling as a purposive sampling strategy can offer the similar characteristics of random probability sampling, regardless of having different aims and procedures for classifying and choosing potential respondents (Palinkas et al., 2015).

One limitation is that the selection of individuals who meet the particular criteria regarded by their role in the implementation process or who have a particular experience can cause the failure for the acquisition of the experiences of other individuals or groups with other roles in the process. To address this potential limitation, a narrowly focused purposive sampling strategy for qualitative analysis which counterparts with a broader focused probability sample for quantitative analysis can assist in boosting inference quality/trustworthiness (internal validity) and generalisability/transferability (external validity) (Palinkas et al., 2015).

A single-stage purposeful sampling strategy is applied in this study, considering the specific nature of implementation procedure. According to Kemper et al. (2003), a single-stage purposeful strategy should be considered based on seven principles. These include a) stemming logically from the conceptual framework and the research questions being addressed by the study; b) ability to generate a thorough database on the type of phenomenon under the study; c) allowing the possibility of deducing clear inferences and reasonable explanations from the data; d) the sampling strategy needs to be ethical; e) the sampling strategy needs to be feasible; f) the ability of the study to transfer/generalise the conclusions to other settings; and g) the sampling strategy needs to be competent practically.

On the other hand, some studies practise a multistage purposive sampling in order to search the optimal balance between internal and external validity (Palinkas et al., 2015). Principally, Multistage I includes two stages, Multistage II needs a minimum of 3 stages (changing from sampling for the variation to sampling for similarity), Multistage III consists of one more intervening stages of sampling for variation or similarity, typically starting with sampling for variation and finishing with sampling for similarity. However, these multistage samplings are suitable with innovations in experimental designs.

4.8. Measurement of variables

This research is conducted in Myanmar where there are a few numbers of studies in the country of origin and brand areas. The development of research instruments in this research mainly based on research practices that are successfully conducted in western markets. Therefore, the validation of the constructs and variables used in this model are importantly needed to be valid (Al-Rajhi, 2008). The best instrument for this study is decided based on the review of the literature. The scale to measure the different variables of the research is taken from the previous studies (Pisharodi and Parameswaran, 1992; Roth and Romeo, 1992; Hanaysh and Hilman, 2015; Cilingir and Basfirinci, 2014; Lim et al., 1994) with the intention of verifying the reliability and validity of the instrument.

4.8.1. Scale Selection

In terms of the scale used, the Likert scale and semantic differential scales are the most available scales to measure the attitudes of people (Proctor, 2000). It is because these scales, including Likert scales, the semantic differential scales, and rating scale, can be easily self-administrated and close-ended questions. The Likert scales are mainly used in this study due to its common-used. Also, it is convenient for respondents to answer the questionnaire along with the consistent use of question and items, that is, the relation to one scale; a five-point scale.

As shown in Table 4.2, there are different ways of measuring data numerically which are known as the *scales of measurement* (Brown, 2011). There are different features, specifications, assumptions and constraints for using each scale (nominal, ordinal, interval and ratio scales) and using one or more scales needs to consider many factors, such as the nature of the research problem, research objectives and design, research population, the nature of required data and research constructs, research hypothesis and proposed statistical analysis (Malhotra and Birks, 2003).

Scales based on Likert items are frequently regarded as interval scales (Brown, 2011). This is due to its involvement of descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations as well as inferential statistics such as correlation coefficient, factor analysis, analysis of variance, and so on. Allen and Seaman (1997) encourage the use of Likert scale as interval data, containing the scale item of from 3 to 10 categories. Preferably, the 5 points and 7 points Likert scale is standardised, considering their values of Cronbach's Alpha or the test of Kappa test of intercorrelation and validity. Researchers such as Hagquist and Andrich (2004) suggest that

Rasch analysis can also be used to analyse and enhance Likert scales. However, this study preferably uses the analysis of Cronbach's Alpha as this method is commonly used in the business management and marketing field whereas other methods such as Rasch analysis are mainly used in the areas of language research.

Table 4.2: Scales of measurement

Four types of scales	The usage of the scales
Nominal scale (categorical scales or dichotomous scales)	natural categories such as gender, artificial categories such as proficiency
Ordinal scale (ranked scales)	order but not the distances between the rankings (e.g., satisfaction, happiness)
Interval scale	the order of things, along with equal intervals between the points on the scales (e.g., temperature).
Ratio	a zero value which can be pointed as ratios (e.g., weight, height, duration)

Moreover, Losby and Wetmore (2012) discuss traditional Likert scales and variations of these scales (also known as Likert-type scales, odd-numbered response categories, even-numbered response categories). A Likert scale is an ordered scale and the respondents need to decide on one option which best aligns with their view. It is popularly used in the studies that measure respondents' attitudes, beliefs or behaviour based on their agreement or disagreement with a specific question or statement. Typical sales are described as 'strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree' and thus, the 5-point scale is the most common.

Alternatively, there is another term called 'Likert-type' scales which share similar characteristics with the traditional ones. A difference is that Likert-type scales use other ordered continuum response categories such as 'never, sometimes, often, always', or 'mild, moderate, severe', or 'not at all, only a little, some, a lot'. It is because a Likert-type scales are not always declarative statement (Losby and Wetmore, 2012). All scales in this study use the *traditional scales* without changing the guidelines of previous studies for scales consistency. Moreover, the differentiation between the word usage of Likert items and Likert scales has shown in *Appendix 4.7*.

4.8.2. Using 5-point Likert scales

The researchers can be able to choose either odd number (such as 5-point, 7-point Likert) or even number (such as 4-point, 6-point Likert) response categories. The main difference is that odd number category have the 'middle value' which allows respondents to fill the neutral answer whereas even number categories are called 'forced-choice' method since the neutral option is removed. It has been debated for decades whether the use of odd number or the use of even number categories is suitable. Likert (1932) claims that there is no definite rule and the comparison of the overall difference between a 4-point and 5-point Likert scale is negligible. Instead, it should be determined by the research purpose, the topic of the questionnaire, the intention of asking each question, the consideration of the characteristics of respondents.

In this point, it is considerate whether to use 5-point, 7-point, or 10-point scales which are commonly practised in this marketing field. Dawes (2012) investigate the impact of scale format on data characteristics, by examining the use of Likert-type scales with different numbers of response categories and their effects on the data characteristics including mean scores, coefficient of variation, skewness, and kurtosis.

The questionnaire items were extracted from existing 'price consciousness' scales by Bruner and Hensel (1992). By comparing data extracted from using 5-point, 7-point and 10-point scale formats, it is found that "the five and seven-point formats tended to produce more instances of higher mean (rescaled) scores compared to the ten-point format", at the 10-point format produced a 0.3 point lower score ($p < 0.05$) (Dawes, 2012, p.9). Further, the study found that the 5-point and 7-point scales generated the same mean scores as each other. More importantly, there are no appreciable differences in the other data characteristics of three different scale formats.

The Likert scales applied in this study are borrowed from the previous research studies, and some are rescaled from their original response category to the 5-point Likert items. Dawes (2012) proves that changing scale format cannot sabotage the comparability of historical data. In comparison the 5-point with 11-point scales, the 11-point scale generated slight more dispersion in the data as measured by the coefficient of variation, yet there was no difference in skewness or kurtosis amongst two scales. When either 7-point to 10-point or 5-point to 7-point data is compared, the differences in standard deviation for the individual scale items significantly small (zero to 0.2) with an average difference of -0.1. One limitation of Dawes's

study is that the issues of reliability and validity were not included in the analysis. Besides, Dawes (2002) found that re-scale means from 5-point to 11-point scales were similar.

By considering this evidence, the current study is decided to practise the odd number response category, the 5-point Likert items. Malhotra and Peterson (2006) suggest that 5-point or 7-point formats as the most common. 10-point or 11-point scales are frequently used (Loken, Pirie et al., 1987) although most human's reasoning ability works the best up to 9-point scales.

Thus, Dawes (2012) suggests that the 5-point scales are simple to complete list of scale descriptors. Further, either 5 or 7 or 10-point scales are comparable and desirable for analytical tools including regression analysis, confirmatory factor analysis or structural equation models. More importantly, these sophisticated analytical methods are conscious to the data characteristics including variance, kurtosis, and skewness (Bentler, 1995).

In addition, a five-point Likert scale is used to identify the degree of agreement or disagreement on the statements relating to each evaluation on a scale range from either 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree', or 'very appropriate' to 'very inappropriate', or 'very good' to 'very poor', or 'very high' or 'very low', 'very likely' to 'very unlikely'. In essence, the reasons for using the Likert scale in this study for the following reasons –

- it is commonly and widely used perception scale in marketing research,
- it assists researchers in using various statistical methods and analysis,
- it provides reliable research results,
- it allows respondents to express the intensity of their feelings accurately,
- the respondents can avoid confusion from many choices on its continuum scale.

However, the usage of Likert scale has some limitations like other methods. The location of zero points which is fixed arbitrarily, meaning the interpretation of the results needs to handle with extra attention. Researchers with the statistical perspective argue that Likert scale should be used as an interval scale. Some respondents have difficulty in reflecting their perceptions within a fixed number of choices. It is reasonably time-consuming.

4.8.3. The original description scales

4.8.3.1. Country-of-origin

The county of origin scale is adapted from Pisharodi and Parameswaran (1992) who examined the nature and dimensionality of the country origin (CO) construct using confirmatory factor analysis. The influence of CO information on consumption behaviour is closely related to country characteristics of a product, including the economic, political and cultural characteristics of the product's country of origin. Hence, the components of scales are formed as – General Country Attribute (GCA), General Product Attribute (GPA) and Specific Product Attribute (SPA).

Pisharodi and Parameswaran (1992) modified the scales used by Parameswaran and Yaprak (1987). The predictors' variables – GCAs, GPAs and SPAs – are measured by 10-points Likert scales (1=not at all appropriate, 10=most appropriate), and it consists of 40 indicators initially. The model is tested in three stages – the initial model, the intermediate model and the adjusted model using LISREL and ITAN analysis. In final model, the numbers of items are reduced from 40 to 24 items with the values of coefficient alpha of the factors in the model (0.872, 0.849, 0.918, 0.735, 0.796, and 0.819). The most significant within-factor residuals have a value of 6.57 (absolute), and 31.58 percent exceed a cut-off point of 2.58. The largest within factor modification indices have a value of 30.16 and 34.21 percent exceeding the cut-off point of 3.84.

Table 4.3: The COO scale in Pisharodi and Parameswaran (1992) study

Constructs(unobservable variables)	Indicators (observable variables)
GCA1 (general country attributes)	C3- well educated C4- hard working C6- achieving high standards C7- raised standard of living C8- technical skills
GCA2	C9- similar political views C10- economically similar C11- culturally similar
GPA1 (general product attributes)	P1- unreasonably expensive P4- limitations P7- not attractive P9- frequent repairs P14- cheaply put together
GPA2	P6- sold in many countries P8- intensely advertised P12- advertising informative P17- easily available
GPA3	P11- long lasting P16- good value P18- prestigious products
SPA (specific product attributes) Note: Car is their research product	S1- good fuel economy S2- exterior styling attractive S3- workmanship good S4- handles well S5- little maintenance S6- very comfortable S7- difficult to get parts S8- quality service S9- made to last S10- overall excellent

4.8.3.2. Brand Origin

Samiee et al. (2005) advise that brand origin allows investigating country influences on choice behaviour more accurately and realistically and implement an appropriate international marketing strategy. Thakor and Kohli introduced the concept of brand origin in 1996 as new aspects of brands that can influence consumers' purchase. Since the concept is relatively contemporary, further conceptual and empirical validation is needed. The brand origin scale is adapted from Shukla (2010). In fact, Batra et al. (2000) initially implemented to test the effects of brand local and non-local origin on Indian consumer attitudes.

However, Shukla (2010) did comparative research among British and Indian consumers regarding the impact of branding cues on luxury purchase intention. The coefficient alpha of brand origin scales exceeds the recommended threshold value of .70. The average variance extracted for the measures are above 0.50; precisely, 0.59 in India and 0.56 in UK. The Cronbach's alpha values are 0.85 for the Indian context and 0.77 for the UK context. Additionally, the composite reliability values are 0.72 in India and 0.70 in UK. Since the reliability and validity measures are valid in countries with different economic, political and cultural contexts, two scales of brand origin proposed by Batra et al. (2000), Shukla (2010) are decided to adapt.

Table 4.4: The brand origin scale in Shukla (2010) study

<p>Scale item 1: The country that a luxury brand is originating from is important for me in making the final choice</p> <p>Scale item 2: If the luxury brand is originating from a country of which I have a favourable image, I will be more inclined to buy that luxury brand.</p>
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4.8.3.3. Product Country Image

The county image scales are adapted from Roth and Romeo (1992) who suggested that country image is multidimensional and these dimensions are all production and marketing oriented. The scales include four dimensions: innovativeness, design, prestige and workmanship with 7-point scales. Multidimensional scales are commonly used in previous research about the country image. Roth and Romeo researched the product-country match by testing the country image of ten countries in six product categories to find out different image dimensions across the products. Factor analysis is used to test the dimensionality and found that all four

dimensions load highly on one-factor (76 percent of the variance). Regarding the reliabilities of four dimensions, the values of Cronbach alpha are 0.815 for Irish consumers, 0.898 for Mexican and 0.835 for the US.

Researchers, in fact, use different dimension as well as items of the scales based on the aim and nature of their research. This means that the various types of scales can be used to measure the country image. Before Roth and Romeo's four dimensions scales, previous studies used 20-items (Narayana, 1981), 14-items (Han and Terpstra, 1988), 13-items (Jaffe and Nebenzahl, 1984; Johansson and Nebenzahl, 1986).

Table 4.5: The Product Country Image scale in Roth and Romeo (1992) study

Scale item- 1: For the countries listed below, how do you perceive the innovativeness of their products, where innovativeness means use of new technology and engineering advances?

Scale item- 2: For the countries listed below, how do you perceive the design of their products, where design means the product's appearance, colour, variety and style)?

Scale item- 3: For the countries listed below, how do you perceive the prestige of their products, where prestige means exclusivity, status and brand name reputation?

Scale item- 4: For the countries listed below, how do you perceive the level of country's workmanship, where workmanship means its product's reliability, durability, craftsmanship?

4.8.3.4. Brand Image

As the measurement of brand image, a 4-items scale is adapted from Hanaysh and Hilman (2015) which studies focus on advertising and country of origin effects as the main factors for building brand equity, particularly in the automobiles industry. This scale is also used by Nigam and Kaushik (2011). The coefficient alpha of brand image scales exceeds the recommended threshold value of .70. The average variance extracted for the measures is above 0.50, precisely 0.58. The Cronbach's alpha value is 0.70 for the Australian consumer's context, along with the composite reliability value of 0.71. Since the reliability and validity measures are valid in countries with different economic, political and cultural contexts, this 4-items scale proposed by Nigam and Kaushik (2011), Hanaysh and Hilman (2015) is decided to adopt.

Table 4.6: The Brand Image scale in Hanaysh and Hilman (2015) study

<p>Scale item 1: This brand has created a distinct image in my mind.</p> <p>Scale item 2: This luxury brand I believe this brand will deliver me their promises</p> <p>Scale item 3: This brand I believe using this luxury brand will make me look impressed among friends and family.</p> <p>Scale item 4: This luxury brand is associated with the manufacturer's image</p>
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4.8.3.5. Product Evaluation

The product evaluation scale is adapted from Cilingir and Basfirinci (2014) used in their research on the impact of product cues on Turkish consumers' product evaluation. Product evaluation is measured with a 7-item scales using 7-point semantic differential scale, using Laptops as a research product. For external consistencies, the exploratory factor analysis extracted one factor for all sample, and it was extracted with eigenvalues greater than 1, explain variances ranging from 66 percent to 80 percent for each of the scales. For internal consistencies, Cronbach's alpha values of all scales are ranging from 0.867 and 0.968 with high levels of internal reliability. The 7-items include consumers' perceptions of:

Table 4.7: Product Evaluation scale in Cilingir and Basfirinci (2014) study

<p>Item 1: Workmanship (poor to excellent),</p> <p>Item 2: Durability (not durable to very durable),</p> <p>Item 3: Reliability (not reliable to very reliable),</p> <p>Item 4: Technically advanced (technically advanced to technically backward),</p> <p>Item 5: Value of price (low to high),</p> <p>Item 6: Prestigious (low to high),</p> <p>Item 7: Total quality (low to high).</p>

4.8.3.6. Willingness-to-buy

Many types of scales use different items to measure the consumer willingness to buy based on the types of research. Batra and Ray (1986) measured consumers' willingness to buy using a single-item, 7-point scale. Simultaneously, MacKenzie et al. (1986) measure with a 3-item, 7-point scale to measure WTB. Further, Spears and Singh (2004) introduce a set psychometrically

sound measures and explore the uni-dimensionality of the two constructs to investigate the consumer willingness to buy. Their methodological approach suggests that the degree of willingness to buy can be measured in a 15-item scale along with a 7-point although 2-item which is related to time-specification are excluded. These above-mentioned scales are either too long or too short for the respondents.

Amongst, the scales for the construct of willingness to buy is adapted from Josiassen et al., (2011). This scale is also practised by other notable scholars, including Lim et al., (1994), Klein et al., (1998), Cronin et al., (2000). The constructs' quality is evaluated in three steps: reliability of each item in a scale (the squared loading), the composite reliability or internal consistency of each and the average variance extracted by each construct (Lim et al., 2006, p. 248). Cronbach's alpha value of 0.886 is achieved in accessing reliability. The composite reliability value of 'willingness to buy' construct is higher than the recommended value of 0.8 (achieved the value of 0.925). The individual item reliability scales are higher than the recommended 0.5 threshold value, ranging from 0.685 to 0.848, which means having higher explanatory power than error.

Table 4.8: Willingness to Buy scale in Josiassen et al., (2011) study

Scale item 1: I am considering purchasing from iBook now
Scale item 2: I would seriously contemplate buying from iBook
Scale item 3: It is likely that I am going to buy from iBook
Scale item 4: I am like to make future purchases from iBook's website.

4.9. Conclusion

This chapter has mentioned the theoretical and methodological justifications on the two main research methods, which is the quantitative positivist method and the qualitative interpretive method. The majority of social scientists widely discusses these two methods. Mainly, quantitative methods of the research approach have been applied in this research, as recommended by further similar studies. Besides, not only the description of the country, research product, and sample selections but also the product selection for this study are discussed and justified. The process of research instrument building and how the (quantitative)

research approach assists this process are also described. Further, the development of the research hypotheses is stated. In next chapter, the considerable effort exerted to choose appropriate measures and indicators of this research based on the theoretical concepts and the reliability of the scales will be presented in the pilot study and following by the main study. The theoretical model developing the hypotheses that will be tested.

Chapter 5: Analysis and Findings of Quantitative Data

Main contents

- **Phase one: The pilot study and results**
- **Phase two: Main study**
- **Usage of structural equation modelling**
- **Models comparison**
- **Summary of hypotheses' results**

5.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the detailed analysis and results obtained from this research, examine the hypotheses, and fulfil the research objectives. The considerable statistical analysis techniques (Structural Equation Modelling) to justify the research model are explained in the data collection process section. The chapter evaluates the data collection techniques, questionnaire design, and structure (including pilot study and translation issues), and the results from analysing quantitative research.

Aiming to purify the scale, it includes the process of exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis conducted on an independent sample of the pilot study, along with details of tests carried out to access the convergent and discriminant validity of the scale (Al-Rajhi, 2008). The four steps of processing the pilot study are clearly explained. The section then reports the empirical analysis of the structural model in terms of detailed data analysis, leading to the determination of proposed hypotheses.

5.2. A pilot study of the survey instruments

The preliminary test is carried out before the primary collection of data. Bryman and Bell (2015) identify that doing pilot studies are advantageous because it helps the research instrument and survey questions operate effectively as well as meets the qualified standards in the data collection process. Saunders et al. (2009) indicate that the purpose of the pilot study is to provide the validity and reliability of the research instruments.

5.3. Four steps in the pilot study process

The pilot study follows the guidelines of Saunders et al. (2007) and conducts in the four-steps process in order to obtain the clarity and consistency of data. These four steps are a) determining the feasibility of the study, b) recruitment of targeted participants, c) testing the measurement instrument, and d) data entry and analysis (illustrated as a flow chart in Figure – 5.1).

5.3.1. Step 1: Determining the feasibility of the study

The pilot study was conducted for the research context of Myanmar from May to June 2017. This time duration included the process of developing proposed items and scales (adaption of scales from previous studies), producing questionnaire format, getting feedback from the advisor, distribution of questionnaire on decided channel (whether online or offline), receiving feedback from some participants and finally, improving the questionnaire as a useful format for the main study.

This pilot study follows all aspects of conducting a standard survey, including question content, sequence, form and layout, and other suggested instructions. The supervisory team of this study reviews the draft of the questionnaire (English version) and academic staff from Myanmar University reviews the Burmese version of the questionnaire. (*The detailed of translation have explained in the section of 'Designing the questionnaire' in Chapter 4*). After that, the questionnaire is distributed online to a sample of respondents in order to get reviews and feedbacks.

Considering the time and budget constricts for the reason that the researcher was in the UK at that moment, the pilot test was conducted using the technique of online questionnaire. The target respondents are Myanmar young consumers aged over 18 who are currently using mobile phones. For establishing the participants' understanding of the research aims and objectives, the front page of the questionnaire provided with the information about the study, the reasons why they have been approached, the request for their consent to participate and right to withdraw, the disclosure about their identity and the researcher and her supervisor's contacts for further suggestions or complaints.

5.3.1.1. Reason for using online sample

Despite there are various suggestions to decide the suitable size of a sample, it is crucial to consider the following three factors – a) the size of the population under study, b) the research budget, c) the precision required and the degree of error accepted. However, the decision is made by the researcher's desire to obtain accurate results.

In social sciences research, it is common to occur the use of purposive sample due to the limitations of probability sampling methods. The main reasons to choose purposive sampling could be the researchers' situated knowledge of the field and the interrelationship between the targeted participants and their knowledge of the proposed research context.

Using online purposive sample has some criticisms regarding unknown biases and less strictly usage to conclude more extensive populations (Barratt, Ferris and Lenton, 2014). In order to solve this problematic issue, it is suggested to explore “the potential to use population sampling as a complement to purposive sampling in order to improve generalizability,” instead of considering all purposive-sample studies are ungeneralizable (Barratt, Ferris and Lenton, 2014, p.6).

As this study emphasises to investigate the perception of young professionals, it is sensible that the online sample is significantly contemporary and more likely to engage with the research product which is a smartphone, compared to using the probability sample. For enhancing the estimation of the sample distribution of nearly any statistic using probability (random) sampling, the bootstrapping method is used to produce confidence intervals of unbiased prevalence estimates (Hairs et al., 2012). Notably, Heckathorn (2011) suggests that the usage of bootstrap method is suitable for samples with purposive or convenient designs to diminish the effect of incapability to draw inferences from that sample to a larger population.

Bootstrapping is a statistical procedure that assists in the estimation of standard errors and other statistical parameters of interest from available sample data (Hairs et al., 2012). Ader et al., (2008) also recommend using bootstrapping procedure when the theoretical distribution of a statistic is complicated or unexplained. The implementation of this procedure offer assessing the statistical properties of nonprobability data in comparison with any available data from probabilistic samples.

5.3.2. Step 2: Recruitment of targeted participants

The online survey (*attached in Appendix 5.1*) was distributed to the participants who demonstrated their consent by clicking 'Agree to participate and continue' to the next page where the question number one of the survey started (*Appendix 5.2*). Besides, the time taken to answer the questionnaire was estimated for the participants to consider whether they wished to participate until the full completion.

There are different instructions by many scholars regarding the number of participants as a sample for the pilot test. Connelly (2008) suggest that the sample of pilot study should be 10 percent of the main study. Isaac and Michael (1995) and Hill (1998) recommend between 10-30 participants for pilots in the survey research. Treece and Treece (1982) suggested 10 percent of the project sample size as the minimum. However, Hertzog (2008) remarked that defining the numbers of sample participants for the pilot test is a complex and indirect issue as each study is unique and influenced by different factors. For example, the sample size for pilot test differs from study to study based on the type (quantitative or qualitative), the type of data collection (survey, interview, focus group) as well as the minimum requirement to apply statistical test on pilot data.

The sample size of the study is mostly dependent on the objective, the research design, non-response rate, and the sampling techniques. A small sample in size can minimise the investigation cost but not yield the valid inference. Thus, adequate size of sample aims to achieve a valid inference and minimise the cost of investigation. Consideration of taking 20 percent of the expected sample size of the main study, which means 60 respondents are needed. The main study aims to obtain 300 respondents, which is statistically calculated by G*power program for power analysis and sample size calculations based on an intended data analysis method and the expected standard error (*attached in Appendix 5.3*).

The response rate and details were recorded, and the data collection progressed conveniently. The fully-answered questionnaires from 96 people were received, with the response rate of 48 percent. Amongst, 67 percent of the participants were female, and 32 percent of them were male. It was observed that 50 percent of 18-24 years old, 48 percent of 25-35 years old and only 1 percent of (36-45, 46-55) years old. One question in the survey asked the participants to mention their current mobile phones' brand and unsurprisingly, found that the majority were Apple and Samsung users.

5.3.3. Step 3: Testing the measurement instrument

The measurement instrument or a questionnaire was designed as self-completion. It was the primary consideration that the questionnaire items correctly addressed the research questions. By doing the pilot study, it can ensure whether the questionnaire was comprehensible and appropriate, and the questions were accurate, understandable and presented in a consistent manner (Hassan, Schattner and Mazza, 2006).

The questionnaire was divided into four sections that related to 1) general perceptions about Country of Origin and Brand Origin, 2) specific perceptions about brand image and country image on chosen brands and countries, 3) consumers' perspectives on evaluation and buying intention on a chosen product (mobile phones), and 4) socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.

The following issues were observed in the pilot of the questionnaire and amended accordingly based on the feedback and recommendations of participants.

- Each respondent has a different opinion of the country of origin and brand origin's definitions in their mind. In order to achieve the clarity and consistency of the questions equally from respondents, a brief definition of each construct is decided to provide as a side note.
- Instead of asking respondents to fill in their age or monthly income since they find it hesitant to express, it is categorised as a group option for them to choose.

After taking consideration of all comments and errors, the amendments of the study were made and re-piloted and thus, no additional modifications were considered necessary.

5.3.4. Step 4: Data entry and analysis

Data obtained from 60 people were entered into the Microsoft Excel sheet, and then, the data were indirectly entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS – version 23) program, along with specific codes for each item. The analysis was primarily descriptive, with the calculation of their mean, median, modal, minimum and maximum values. Furthermore, the data are tested for reliability and validity using Cronbach's alpha test, principal component analysis, and factor analysis through SPSS 23.

As mentioned, the questionnaire includes different scales that are already used in previous studies. The various scales are designed to compact with the country and product under consideration in this study. As Robert (1999) suggested, the reliability and validity of the measures can be improved by conducting a pilot study in a large sample size. Hassan, Schattner and Mazza (2006) suggest that a pilot study should preferably be done using participants from a population that is different from those targeted for the main study. This main reason is to avoid the biased results that a pilot test could influence on the main study due to the involvement of the same people. Therefore, this study plans used the different population for the pilot, aiming to improve reliability and validity.

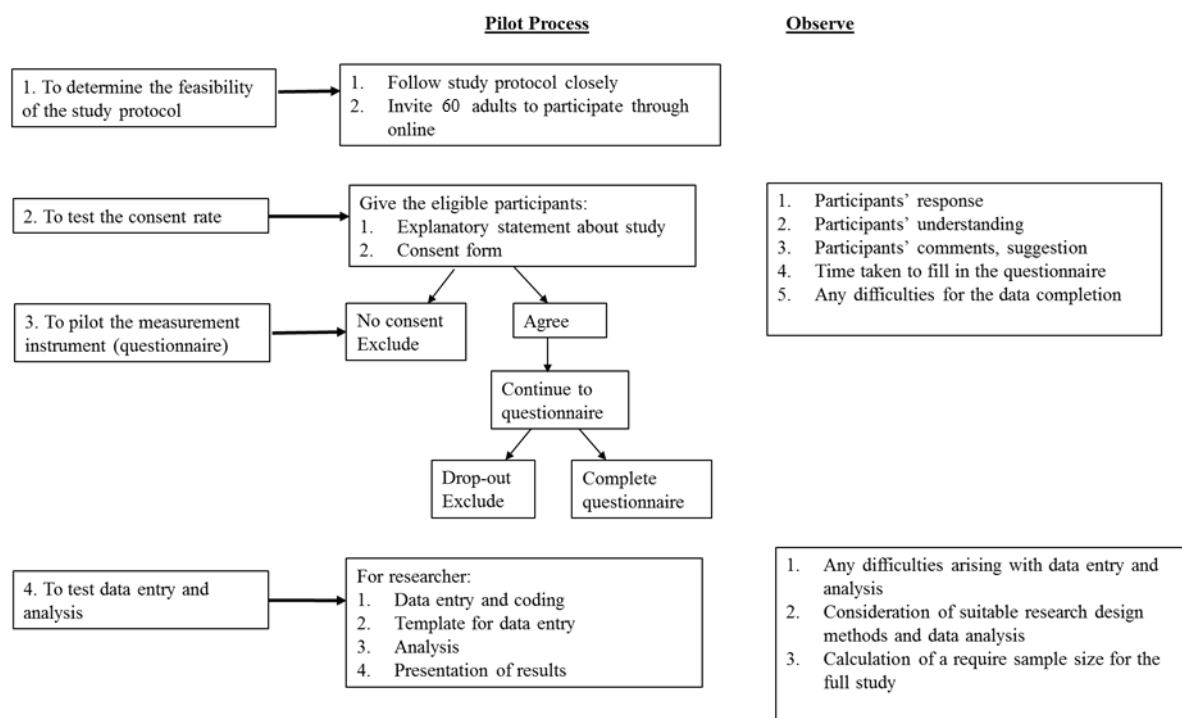


Figure 5.1: Flow chart of the pilot study of current research

5.4. Results of the pilot test

Reliability test: Country of Origin

The country-of-origin scale has three dimensions with 25 items. These dimensions are General Country Attributes (GCAs), General Product Attributes (GPAs) and Specific Product Attributes (SPAs). The reliability test carried out for each dimension separately. For the dimension of GCAs, Cronbach's alpha value is .798 and *two items* require to be deleted due to very low 'corrected item-total correlation' (CITC) value (achieving high standards = .141, technical skills = .372). For the dimension of GPAs, Cronbach's alpha value is .804 and *two items* require to be deleted (CITC value – intensely advertised = .258, prestigious products = .337). Other *two items* with slightly low CITC values (limitations = .406, long-lasting = .406) are tested for removal and found that these items are highly correlated with others and the reduction of them had negative impact on the values of other items and overall Cronbach's alpha. For the dimension of SPAs, Cronbach's alpha value is .764, and all five items showed acceptable CITC values ranging between .459 and .591.

Table 5.1: Reliability test of Country of Origin

Dimension of scale		COO: General country attributes (GCAs)			
Reliability Statistics					
Cronbach's Alpha		Number of Items			
.798		8			
Item-Total Statistics					
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted	
well educated	16.29	18.003	.603	.760	
hard working	16.28	18.209	.642	.755	
achieving high standards (removed)	16.98	22.582	.141	.817	
raised standard of living	16.22	18.000	.589	.762	
technical skills (removed)	16.94	20.427	.372	.794	
similar political views	15.60	17.959	.569	.765	
Economically similar	15.74	17.936	.534	.771	
Culturally similar	15.61	17.795	.563	.766	
Dimension of scale		COO: General product attributes (GPAs)			
Reliability Statistics					
Cronbach's Alpha		Number of Items			
.804		12			
Item-Total Statistics					
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted	

unreasonably expensive	23.96	31.998	.609	.774
limitations	24.01	34.663	.406	.794
not attractive	23.98	31.143	.656	.768
frequent repairs	24.16	31.694	.497	.787
cheaply put together	24.11	33.585	.442	.792
sold in many countries	24.59	34.915	.443	.791
intensely advertised (removed)	24.34	36.738	.258	.806
advertising informative	24.74	35.076	.450	.791
easily available	24.86	35.835	.436	.793
long lasting	24.94	34.983	.406	.794
good value	25.04	35.048	.466	.790
prestigious products (removed)	24.82	36.177	.337	.800
Dimension of scale		COO: Specific product attributes (SPAs)		
Reliability Statistics				
Cronbach's Alpha		Number of Items		
.764		5		
Item-Total Statistics				
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
phone's attractive style and design	5.94	3.902	.459	.746
phone's good workmanship	5.97	3.644	.514	.728
phone' comfortable to use	6.07	3.744	.584	.705
phone's quality service	6.17	3.899	.591	.708
phone's made to last long	5.85	3.216	.560	.717

Validity test: Country of Origin

After removing four items out of three dimensions of COO scales, the factorial validity is conducted using Principal Component Analysis (PCA). Under dimensionality reduction, the 21-items are extracted as 3-components and rotated using Varimax with Kaiser normalisation. In this factor analysis, five items are further removed from COO scales and finalised as 16-items. They include well-educated, hardworking, raised standard of living, similar political views, economically similar, culturally similar, unreasonably expensive, limitations, not attractive, frequent repairs, cheaply put together, phone's attractive style and design, phone's good workmanship, phone' comfortable to use, phone's quality service, phone's made to last long).

Table 5.2: Validity test of Country of Origin

Total Variance Explained (Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis)									
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4.381	27.380	27.380	4.381	27.380	27.380	3.314	20.712	20.712
2	2.638	16.486	43.866	2.638	16.486	43.866	3.274	20.463	41.175
3	2.356	14.722	58.588	2.356	14.722	58.588	2.786	17.412	58.588
4	1.341	8.379	66.966						
5	.945	5.907	72.873						
6	.726	4.538	77.411						
7	.640	4.002	81.413						
8	.489	3.057	84.470						
9	.475	2.967	87.438						
10	.444	2.776	90.213						
11	.412	2.576	92.789						
12	.310	1.936	94.725						
13	.282	1.762	96.487						
14	.226	1.411	97.899						
15	.215	1.345	99.243						
16	.121	.757	100.000						
Rotated Component Matrix ^a									
	Component								
	1			2			3		
CO06	.784								
CO02	.781								
CO01	.718								
CO08	.705								
CO07	.702			.371					
CO04	.639								
CO012				.850					
CO013				.825					
CO011				.816					
CO09				.749					
CO010				.552					
CO025							.753		
CO023							.747		
CO024							.732		
CO022							.680		
CO021							.597		
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.									
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.a									
a. Rotation converged in 4 iterations.									

Reliability test: Brand Origin

Brand origin is tested by using 2-items scale and found that very low Cronbach's alpha value of .160. Based on the results from the pilot study, this scale is currently problematic need to correct.

Table 5.3: Reliability, Validity tests of Brand Origin

Reliability Statistics						
Cronbach's Alpha			Number of Items			
.160			2			
Item-Total Statistics						
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Total	Item-Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted	
BO_Importance of BO info in choice	1.85	.584	.090		.	
BO_Positive perception to buy	1.71	.353	.090		.	
Correlations						
			BO_Importance of BO info in choice	BO_Positive perception to buy		
BO_Importance of BO info in choice	Pearson Correlation		1	.090		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.078		
	N		384	384		
BO_Positive perception to buy	Pearson Correlation		.090	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.078			
	N		384	384		
Validity statistics						
Total Variance Explained (Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis)						
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	1.090	54.501	54.501	1.090	54.501	54.501
2	.910	45.499	100.000			

Reliability test: Brand Image

Brand image scale consists of four items and initially shows a Cronbach's alpha value of .780 with good CITC values (BImage1 = .626, BImage2 = .654, BImage3 = .664, BImage4 = .408). Then, after removing the lowest value (.408) of brand image item – 'a brand's association with manufacturer's image, the value of Cronbach's alpha is increase to .809 and so do the value of the remained items.

Table 5.4: Reliability, validity tests of Brand Image

Reliability Statistics						
Cronbach's Alpha			Number of Items			
.809			3			
Item-Total Statistics						
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Total	Item-Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted	
BI_a distinct image in mind	5.15	2.785	.634		.762	
BI_deliver their promises	4.85	2.764	.674		.721	
BI_brand made impression	4.76	2.616	.665		.730	
Validity statistics						
Total Variance Explained (Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis)						
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.424	60.603	60.603	2.424	60.603	60.603
2	.749	18.719	79.322			
3	.446	11.152	90.475			
4	.381	9.525	100.000			

Reliability test: Product Country Image

Product country image scale includes four items and shows a high value of Cronbach's alpha (= .873). The CITC values of the individual item are also reliable for the current study.

Table 5.5: Reliability, validity tests of Product Country Image

Reliability Statistics						
Cronbach's Alpha		Number of Items				
.873		4				
Item-Total Statistics						
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Total	Item-Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted	
PCI_product innovativeness	6.51	4.814	.717		.842	
PCI_design of products	6.43	5.150	.696		.852	
PCI_prestige products	6.29	4.363	.823		.798	
PCI_country's workmanship	6.26	4.471	.695		.855	
Validity statistics						
Total Variance Explained (Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis)						
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.915	72.870	72.870	2.915	72.870	72.870
2	.486	12.140	85.010			
3	.370	9.246	94.255			
4	.230	5.745	100.000			

Reliability test: Product Evaluation

Product evaluation scale includes 7-items (workmanship, durability, reliability, technically advanced, value of price, prestigious and total quality). The initial test shows very high value of Cronbach's alpha (= .932) with relatively high CICT values ranging from .666 to .849. In literature, it is noted that a Cronbach's alpha value of .70 is considered as acceptable, of .80 as desirable (Peterson, 1994). Although an alpha value above .90 shows the high consistency, it is suggested to avoid due to its implication of a high level of item redundancy. However, it is decided to retain all items because each item provides an important factor in the evaluation of the research product in the real-world setting.

Table 5.6: Reliability, validity tests of Product Evaluation

Reliability Statistics						
Cronbach's Alpha			Number of Items			
.932			7			
Item-Total Statistics						
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Total	Item-Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted	
workmanship_PE	13.78	19.694	.750		.924	
durability_PE	13.61	18.741	.783		.921	
reliability_PE	13.58	18.229	.821		.918	
technically advanced_PE	13.77	18.873	.787		.921	
value of price_PE	13.64	19.627	.666		.932	
prestigious_PE	13.56	18.633	.821		.918	
total quality_PE	13.62	18.758	.849		.915	
Validity statistics						
Total Variance Explained (Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis)						
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4.990	71.287	71.287	4.990	71.287	71.287
2	.590	8.434	79.721			
3	.460	6.571	86.293			
4	.339	4.847	91.140			
5	.275	3.929	95.069			
6	.194	2.769	97.838			
7	.151	2.162	100.000			

Reliability test: Willingness to Buy

Willingness to buy scale includes three items, and the reliability test shows a desirable value of Cronbach's alpha (= .886) with a good CICT value for individual item.

Table 5.7: Reliability, validity tests of Willingness to Buy

Reliability Statistics						
Cronbach's Alpha		Number of Items				
.886		3				
Item-Total Statistics						
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted		
considering purchasing	4.70	3.000	.764	.850		
interested in buying	4.65	2.912	.811	.809		
going to buy in future	4.76	2.828	.761	.855		
Validity statistics						
Total Variance Explained (Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis)						
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.446	81.544	81.544	2.446	81.544	81.544
2	.319	10.641	92.185			
3	.234	7.815	100.000			

5.4.1. Discussion

Based on the feedback from the pilot test, the final version of the questionnaire is included four parts along with a cover letter which explained the information and nature of the research project to participants. The final version of the questionnaire is set as the following order to present the clear presentation for participants; 1) general perceptions about Country of Origin and Brand Origin, 2) specific perceptions about brand image and country image on chosen brands and countries, 3) consumers' perspectives on evaluation and buying intention on a chosen product (mobile phones), and 4) socio-demographic characteristics of respondents. Also, the cover letter describes the purpose of the study, the assurance of data confidentiality, the researcher's details.

Based on the reliability and validity results from the pilot study, it is found that some scale items need to reduce to work for Myanmar consumers in the main study. For COO scale, the original study by Pisharodi and Parameswaran (1992) includes 24 items for measuring COO scale, but it is reduced to 16-items for this study due to their weak statistics values. COO includes three dimensions (i.e., 6 items for General Country Attributes (GCAs), 5 items for General Product Attributes (GPAs), 5 items for Specific Product Attributes (SPAs) Thus, the final scale of COO includes the following items: GCAs (well educated, hardworking, raised standard of living, similar political views, economically similar, culturally similar), GPAs (unreasonably expensive, limitations, not attractive, frequent repairs, cheaply put together), SPAs (phone's attractive style and design, phone's good workmanship, phone' comfortable to use, phone's quality service, phone's made to last long).

An essential outcome of this pilot show that 2-items scale of brand origin cannot be feasible as an independent construct separated from the COO construct (values of coefficient alpha = 0.16, correlations = 0.09, p-value = 0.78). As a result, the influence of brand origin on consumers' product evaluation and willingness to buy is investigated qualitatively, based on the approval of the supervisory team and examiners. The possible explanation is that the research product that Shukla (2010) tested in his study is symbolic and Myanmar consumers can view the mobile phones as a functional product which make the scale invalidated for the current study. Moreover, very few studies conduct the brand origin scales and unable to find an appropriate scale despite the best of the researcher's knowledge. The focus on brand origin's aspect is shifted to explore qualitatively, considering the constraints of time, cost and research experience. Conceptually, brand origin is taken as the interdependent construct of country of

origin (as shown in Figure 4.2) whereas the variables of 'product country image' and 'brand image' are independent.

On the other hand, brand image scale adapted from Hanaysh and Hilman (2015) is reduced from the original 4-items to the applicable 3-items for the current study. The values of coefficient alpha of the factors increased from 0.780 to 0.809 after taking the 4th item out of scale. Apart from these changes, the rest variables of the conceptual model remain the same after data analysis. The scales of product country image, product evaluation and willingness to buy are sufficiently fitted in the current study.

As in Figure 5.2, these variables' effect on consumers' product evaluation and purchase intention are tested by hypotheses. The variable of product evaluation is acted as a mediator in the indirect relationships between the independent variables and a dependent variable. The next section will explain the analysis method for the main study and how it is achieved.

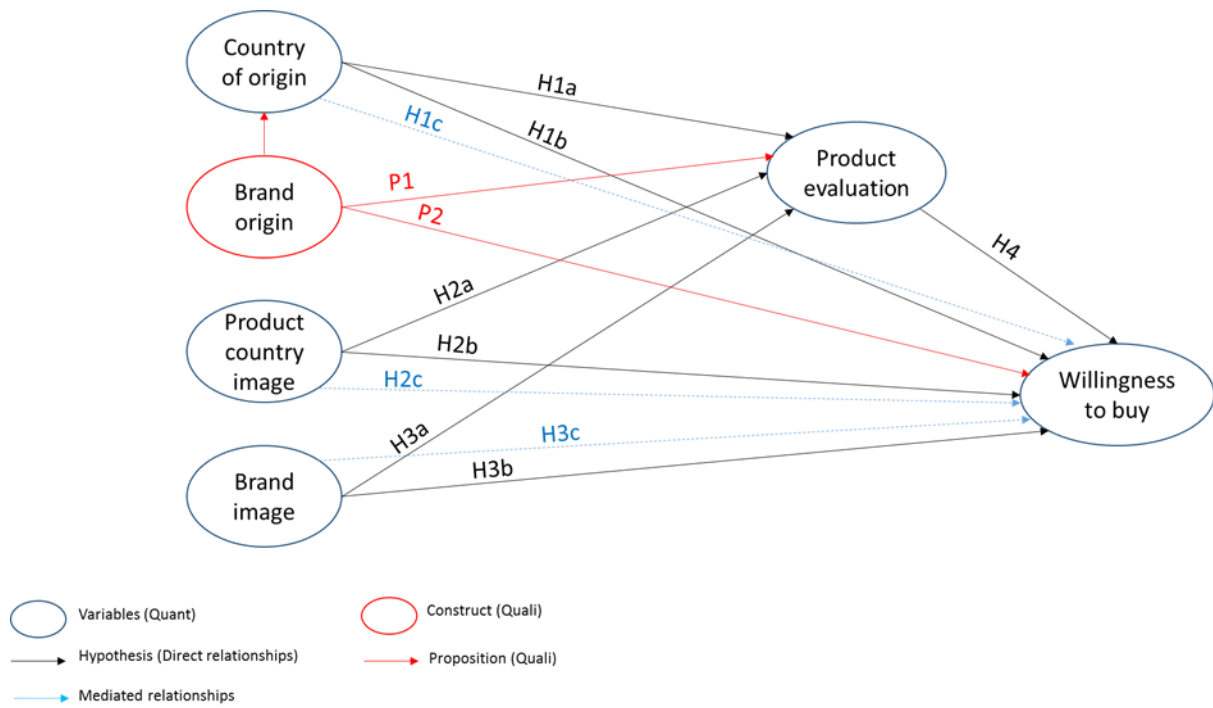


Figure 5.2: Final version of the conceptual model

Constructs	Borrowed scale's items	Usable items of scale (after the pilot's analysis)
Country of origin	25 items	16 items
Brand origin	2 items	Not usable
Product country image	4 items	4 items
Brand image	4 items	3 items
Product evaluation	7 items	7 items
Willingness to buy	4 items	3 items

5.5. Main Data analysis method: Structural equation modelling (SEM)

Structural equation modelling is a multivariate statistical analysis technique that is used in analysing structural relationships. Statistical analysis methods are prevalent for social science researchers and the use of SEM is comprehensive in some studies due to its combination of factor analysis and multiple regression analysis as well as the examination of structural relationship between measured variables and latent constructs which help researchers to evaluate the multiple and interrelated dependence in a single analysis (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988).

Since SEM represents a causal modelling, the capability of the method is often misunderstood as being directionality which indicates the cause-effect associations between exogenous and endogenous variables. The path diagrams, generated by various software (e.g., LISREL, AMOS, SmartPLS), have directional arrows which can be interpreted as the directionality has been tested (Hair et al., 2017). However, the hypothesis of directionality cannot be tested by using SEM. Although the results of SEM are valid only when the assumptions of linearity, multivariate normality, and independence of observations are met, SEM can estimate and test relationships between latent variables by considering measurement errors. Social and behavioural science can carefully measure reality by considering measurement errors (Hair et al., 2010).

Although there are a variety of methods for analysis, the application is dependent upon the nature of research questions, whether confirming a priori established theories or identifying data patterns and relationships. Other multivariate methods are based only on observed variables while SEM is capable of estimating on both observed variables and latent variables (Hair et al., 2010; Hoyle, 1995; Schumacker and Lomax, 2004). This act is beneficial for a better representation of theoretical constructs as a result of incorporation of latent variables into the analysis, and the improvement of the statistical estimation of the relationships between constructs (Hair et al., 2010).

There are two methods: 'confirmatory method' is used in testing the hypotheses of existing theories and concepts whereas 'exploratory method' is used in exploring patterns in the data which have little knowledge on how the variables are related (Hair et al., 2017). Based on these methods, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) is used as a technique for exploratory research and Covariance-based Structural Equation Modelling (CB-SEM) is used to confirm or reject theories.

5.5.1. The rationale for Study: Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM)

PLS-SEM is appropriate to use either when the purpose of applying structural modelling is to predict and explain the target constructs, or when the theory is less developed (Kline, 2005). PLS-SEM is advantageous over multiple regression due to the use of weighted composites of indicator variables which facilitate accounting for measurement error. Moreover, PLS-SEM offers parameter estimation, which provides higher statistical power than CB-SEM, meaning that PLS-SEM can contribute a significant relationship. While the sample size can be limited, PLS-SEM has strengths over CB-SEM, including the ability to handle complex models, formative measure construct and nonlinear relationships. Also, the nature of the research is more on exploration than confirmation by identifying key driver constructs and has little a priori knowledge of structural model relationships of the constructs.

In practical sense, the use of structural equation modelling approach is in line with the suggestions for further COO research. Since then, many notable scholars including Aichner (2014) practise the analysis method of PLS-SEM in their COO-related investigation of consumer behaviour research. Unlike previous researches, the current study tests a hypothetical model containing relationships among psychological constructs including country image, brand image, the evaluation of the product's functional characteristics and appearance to the attitude towards the product, and the behavioural intention about the product.

Like any other data analysis method, PLS-SEM method, is no exception from the limitations. It includes a) being unable to apply to structural models with causal loops or circular relationships between latent variables, b) having some limitations in use for theory testing and confirmation (Hair et al., 2017).

5.5.2. Sample requirement for PLS-SEM

According to Hair et al., (2012), Henseler et al., (2009), the requirement of minimum sample size, non-normal data and scale of measurement (using different scale types) are the primary consideration for using PLS-SEM in many types of research. The consideration of sample size is relevant, especially in multivariate analysis techniques. Although PLS-SEM needs minimum sample size, it does not reveal a significant effect that exists in the underlying population and not results in committing a Type II error. Having a minimum sample does not affect the robustness of results of the statistical result and the generalisability of the model. Unlike CB-

SEM, this method has a higher level of statistical power in the circumstances such as applying the complex structure of models or small sample sizes.

One of the widespread application of sample size (SEM-PLS) is considered as “10 times rule” by Barclay, Higgins and Thompson (1995), Hair et al., (2017, p. 24), which indicates the sample size should be equal to the larger of

- 10 times the largest number of formative indicators used to measure a single construct or,
- 10 times the largest number of structural paths directed at a particular construct in the structural model

Following this rule-of-thumb, the largest number of formative indicators used to measure a single construct is the COO scale with 24 items (formative indicators) proposed by Pisharodi and Parameswaran (1992). It means that the minimum sample requirement of the current study should be 240 samples (10 * 24 indicators).

Alternatively, Cohen (1992) suggests that “the measurement models have an acceptable quality in terms of outer loadings (i.e., above the standard threshold of 0.70). The minimum sample size requirements need to detect minimum R^2 values of 0.10, 0.25, 0.50 and 0.75 in any of the endogenous constructs in the structural model for significance levels of 1%, 5%, and 10%, assuming the commonly used level of statistical power of 80% and a unique level of complexity of the PLS path model” (p.25).

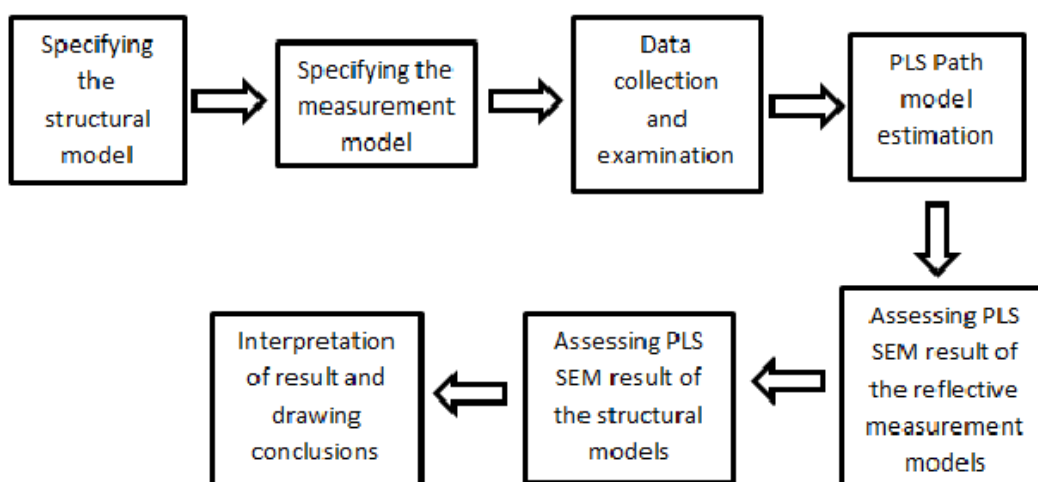


Figure 5.3: Procedures of conducting PLS-SEM

Adapted from Hair et al., (2017)

5.6. Data Analysis: Path models with latent variables

The evaluation of structural equation modelling is mainly followed by a two-step modelling approach, including the measurement model and the structural model. In a two-step approach, the structural model can only proceed when the measurement is sufficiently valid (Hair et al., 2010). The measurement model is often known as confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) model and determines the relationship between observed measures and their underlying latent constructs (Byrne, 2010; Hair et al., 2017).

The initial analysis on measurement model is crucial because inadequate measures cannot be applicable for a valid structural model. This study adopts the two-step modelling approach and follows the step-by-step guidelines of Hair et al., (2017) for the analysis of SEM. The following sections will be well-explained about the measurement model specification and assessment and its procedures, following with the specification and assessment of the structural model.

A path model of this study with latent variables and their indicators are shown in Figure 5.5. In an SEM analysis, a path model is a diagram that hypothesises and variable relationships to be assessed (Bollen, 2002). Constructs (latent variables) are important elements that represent conceptual variables and are defined in the theoretical models of the research.

In this study, constructs are visualised as circles (country of origin, brand image, product country image, product evaluation, willingness to buy) in path model, connected through single-headed arrows that represent predictive relationships. The indicators are directly measured or observed variables that serve as raw data. SEM analysis represents them as rectangles (COO_GCA1 to WTB3) in path models and links to their corresponding constructs through arrows.

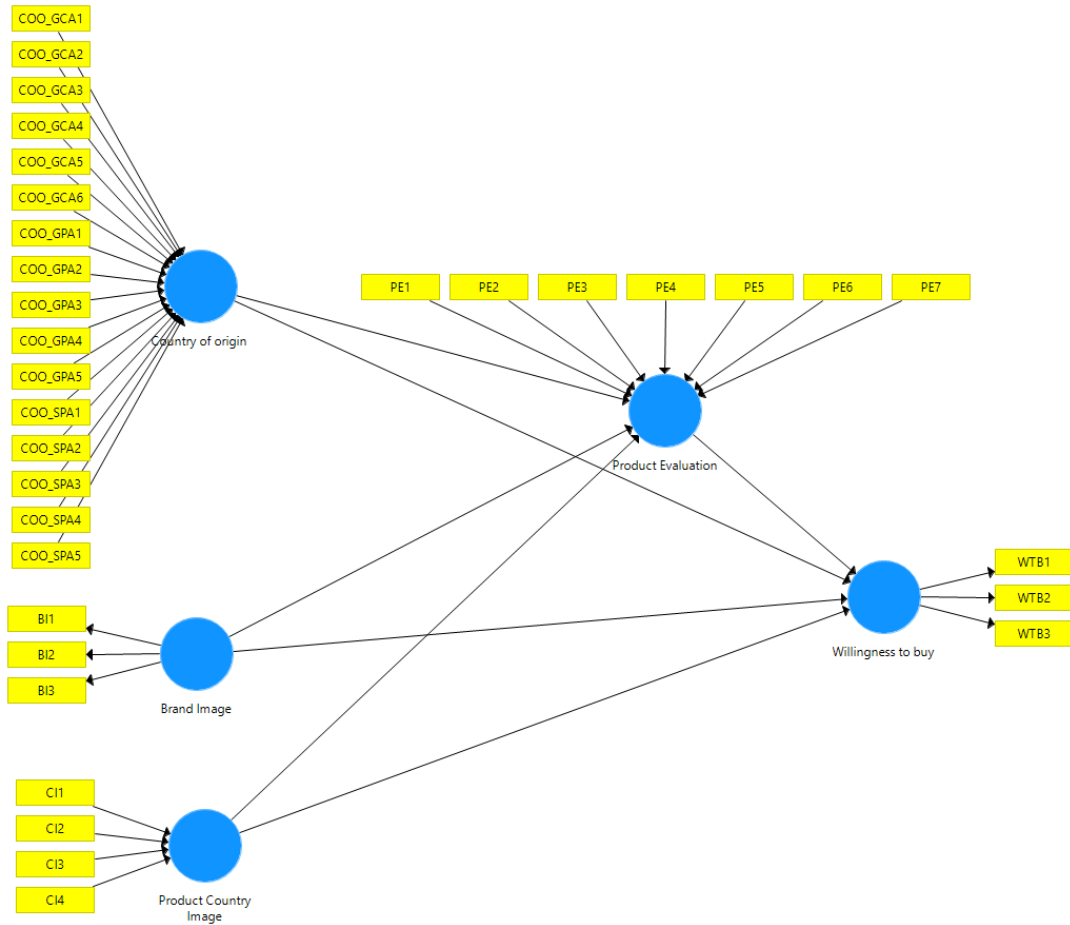


Figure 5.1: Conceptual model of the current study in SmartPLS 3

The above figure shows the country of origin model, as displayed in SmartPLS 3. The objective of this model is to explain the effects of three exogenous constructs (country of origin, brand image, product country image) on product evaluation and, ultimately, willingness to buy. Country of origin represents consumers' broad general perceptions of a country and its overall image or stereotype, which includes three components. The first component captures a country's general attributes, the second component captures a product's general attributes, and the last component captures a product's specific attributes.

This measurement has been validated in different countries and applied in various research studies (Souiden, Pons and Mayrand, 2011; Dagger and Raciti, 2011; Wu and Fu, 2006). Other two exogenous constructs, brand image and product country image, represent the crucial factors that influence on consumers' product evaluation as well as willingness to buy (Pappu et al., 2007; Shukla, 2011; Sichtmann and Diamantopoulos, 2013; Vijaranakorn and Shannon, 2016; Kim and Li, 2016)

In terms of construct measurement, brand image (BI) and willingness (WTB) to buy have reflectively specified measurement models with three items. The three latent variables, country of origin (COO), product country image (PCI), and product evaluation (PE) have formative measurement models. Table 4.8 provides an overview of wordings of all items.

Table 5.8: Item wordings of current study

Country of origin (COO) – formative		
1	COO_GCA1	A country's level of education standard
2	COO_GCA2	A country's level of hard working
3	COO_GCA3	A country's level of living standard
4	COO_GCA4	Sharing similar political views with your own country
5	COO_GCA5	Economically similar to your own country
6	COO_GCA6	Culturally similar to your own country
7	COO_GPA1	Generally, its products are unreasonably expensive
8	COO_GPA2	Its products has limitations
9	COO_GPA3	Its products are not attractive
10	COO_GPA4	Its products need frequent repairs
11	COO_GPA5	Its product are cheaply put together
12	COO_SPA1	When you buy a [mobile phone], the phone's exterior style and design should be attractive
13	COO_SPA2	When you buy a [mobile phone], the workmanship (i.e. reliability and durability of phone) should be good.
14	COO_SPA3	When you buy a [mobile phone], it should be very comfortable to use
15	COO_SPA4	When you buy a [mobile phone], it should have good quality service
16	COO_SPA5	When you buy a [mobile phone], it should be made to last long.
Brand image (BI) – reflective		
1	BI1	[The brand] has created a distinct image in my mind.
2	BI2	I believe [The brand] will deliver me their promises.
3	BI3	I believe using [The brand] will make me look impressed.
Product country image (PCI) – formative		

1	CI1	[The country]: The level of product innovativeness (i.e. the use of new technology and engineering advances) of their products is
2	CI2	[The country]: The design of products (i.e. the product appearance, variety, styles) made in [The country] is
3	CI3	[The country]: The level of the prestige (i.e. status, brand name reputation) of their products is
4	CI4	[The country]: The level of the country workmanship (i.e. its products reliability, durability) of their products is
Product evaluation (PE) – formative		
1	PE1	[The brand] product's workmanship (i.e. the degree of skill with which a product is made)
2	PE2	[The brand] product's durability
3	PE3	[The brand] product's reliability
4	PE4	[The brand] product's the level of technically advanced
5	PE5	[The brand] product's value of price
6	PE6	[The brand] product's prestigious (i.e. having high status)
7	PE7	[The brand] product's overall quality
Willingness to buy (WTB) – reflective		
1	WTB1	I am considering purchasing a mobile phone with [specific brand origin] now
2	WTB2	I am seriously interested in buying a mobile phone with [specific brand origin].
3	WTB3	It is likely that I am going to buy a mobile phone [specific brand origin] in future.

5.6.1. Data

The model estimation extracts data from active mobile phones users of different brands in Myanmar. The questionnaires are initially distributed to 300 respondents and the researchers received 251 questionnaires returned by the participants. After rejecting the invalid data of 6 observations, a total of 245 respondents rated the questions (refer as *items* in the analysis) described on a 5-point Likert scale. A value of 5 represents the best possible judgement and a

value of 1 the opposite. The most complex partial regression in the path model has 16 manifest variables (i.e., the formative measurement model of COO).

Using Barclay et al., (1995) “10 times rule” for the requirement of sample size for PLS-SEM, the recommended sample size should be equal to the larger of 10 times the largest number of formative indicators used to measure a single construct (i.e., $10 * 16 = 160$). Moreover, to detect R^2 values of around 0.25 and to assume a power level of 80% and a significance level of 5%, the researcher would need around 150 observations. According to power statistics as suggested by, this sample size is technically large enough to estimate the path model (Hair et al., 2018).

The dataset has 86 missing values, which are coded with the value -99 (Hair et al., 2018). As the relative number of missing data points is medium, the analysis is continued by using the mean value replacement of missing data option. Using IBM SPSS statistics, box plots diagnostic shows the influential observations and no outliers. Using SmartPLS 3 data view, the skewness and excess kurtosis values demonstrates that all the indicators are within the -1 and +1 acceptable range (Hair et al., 2018).

5.6.2. Model estimation

According to Hair et al., (2014), the model estimation applies the basic PLS-SEM algorithm, the path weighting scheme, a maximum of 300 iterations, a stop criterion of 1×10^{-7} and equal indicator weights for the initialisation, by using Lohmoller's (1989) guidelines. *Figure 5.5* illustrates the PLS-SEM results. The numbers on the path relationships indicate the standardised regression coefficient, and the numbers showed in the circles of the endogenous constructs (product evaluation, willingness to buy) represent the R^2 values. This initial assessment reveals that product country image (PCI) has the strongest effect (0.440) on product evaluation (PE), followed by brand image (0.360). The third strongest effect (0.177) is the path from BI to WTB. These three constructs explain 43.8% (the R^2 values) of the variance of the endogenous construct, PE, as well as 15.7% of that of WTB. Before addressing the interpretation of the ending results, there is a need to assess the constructs' reflective and formative measurement models.

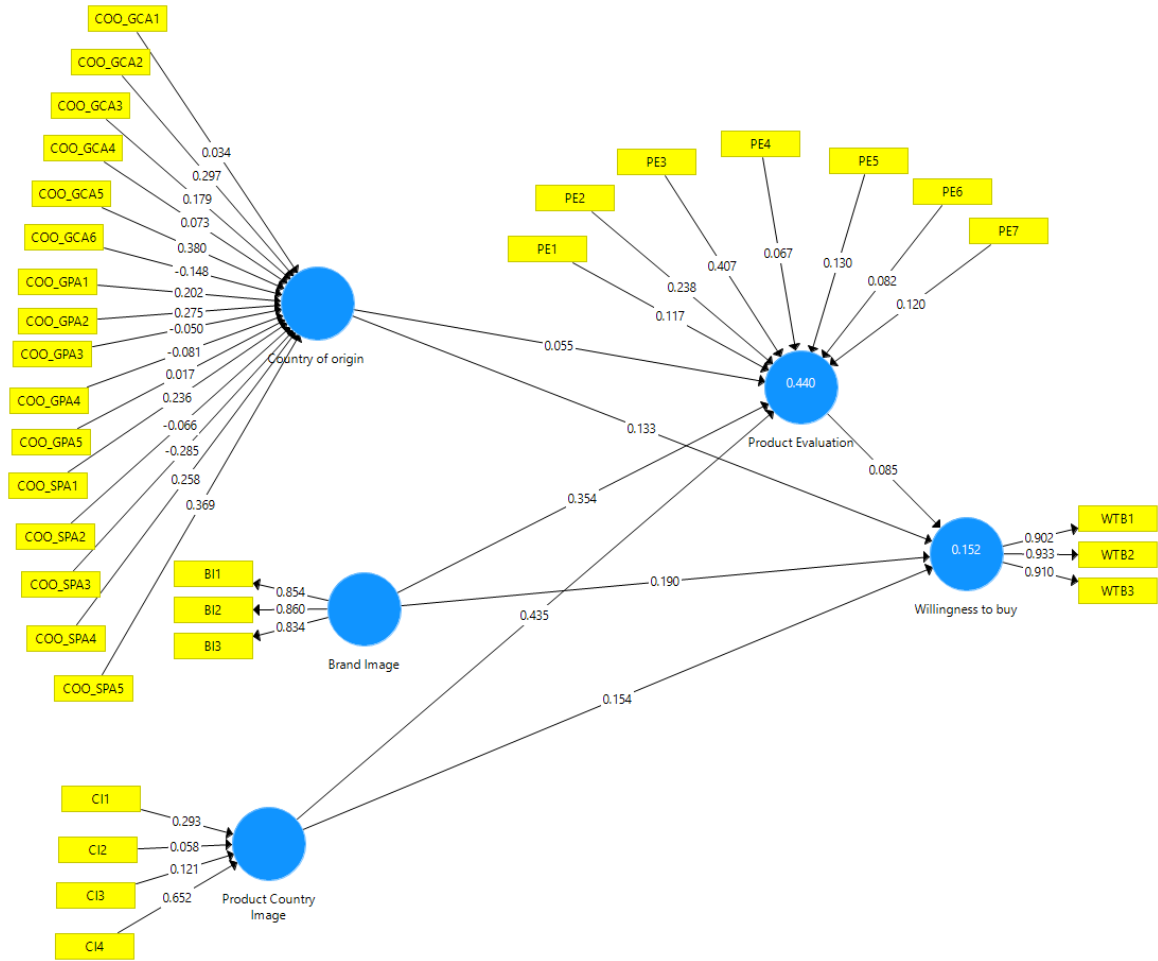


Figure 5.2: A proposed conceptual model and PLS-SEM results

5.6.3. Result evaluation: Assessing model with reflective indicators

Firstly, an evaluation of the reflective measurement models (i.e., BI and WTB) is started by assessing the PLS-SEM results. *Table 5.9* describes the results and evaluation of criteria outcomes. It is found that all reflective measurement models conform the relevant assessment criteria. Notably, all the outer loadings are above 0.70, and a sufficient level of reliability of all indicators is achieved (i.e., >0.50). All AVE values are above 0.50, and the support for the measures' convergent validity is obtained. Composite reliability has values of 0.866 and higher, which certainly above the recommended minimum value of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2017). All P_A values fit with the 0.70 thresholds. Although the Cronbach's alpha values of WTB is slight above 0.90, the range is acceptable based on the standard of PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2010). Overall, the construct measures of BI and WTB show adequate levels of internal consistency reliability.

Lastly, the discriminant validity is assessed by using the HTMT criterion. All the results are certainly below the conservative threshold of 0.85 (*Table 5.10*). Further, the bootstrapping procedure runs with 5,000 samples and apply the no sign changes option, BCa bootstrap confidence intervals, and two-tailed testing at the 0.05 significance level (corresponding to a 95% confidence interval). The results show that all the HTMT values are significantly different from 1 (none of the HTMT confidence intervals comprises the value 1) and hence, discriminant validity has also been demonstrated.

Table 5.9: PLS-SEM assessment results of reflective measurement models

Latent variable	Indicators	Convergent validity			Internal consistency reliability		
		Loadings	Indicator reliability	AVE	Composite reliability Pc	Reliability P _A	Cronbach's alpha
		>0.70	>0.50	>0.50	>0.70	>0.70	0.70 - 0.90
Brand Image	BI1	0.859	0.812	0.722	0.866	0.814	0.808
	BI2	0.858	0.789				
	BI3	0.832	0.687				
Willingness to buy	WTB1	0.897	0.837	0.837	0.939	0.91	0.903
	WTB2	0.935	0.952				
	WTB3	0.912	0.819				

Table 5.10: Discriminant validity (HTMT values)

	Brand Image	Country of origin	Product Country Image	Product Evaluation	Willingness to buy
Brand Image					
Country of origin	0.06				
Product Country Image	0.404	0.22			
Product Evaluation	0.59	0.191	0.616		
Willingness to buy	0.359	0.055	0.3	0.292	

5.6.4. Assessing model with formative indicators

Initially, the formative measurement model measures the constructs' convergent validity by performing a redundancy analysis of each construct (i.e., Country of origin, Product country image, and Product evaluation). The redundancy analysis extracts global single items, which recap the essence each formatively measured construct purports to measure. In this study, an indicator with the highest loading of the exogenous latent variable (i.e., COO_GCA5 (0.416), CI4 (0.653), and PE3 (0.417)) is extracted as a global item of each construct. These items assist as an endogenous single-item construct validating the formative measurement of COO, PCI and PE respectively.

All the path relationships between the formatively measured latent variable and its global single-item measure are above the critical value of 0.70 (0.896 for COO, 0.885 for PCI, and 0.885 for PE). Further, the country of origin construct explains 80.3% (the R^2 values) of the variance of the endogenous global item; the PCI construct explains 78.3% of the variance of its global item and the PE construct explains 78.3% of the variance. Hence, the convergent validity of the formatively measured constructs has been demonstrated.

Further, the formative indicator weight estimates are assessed to reveal whether the effect of critical values of collinearity is substantiated. It is found that the highest VIF value (i.e., 3.728 of the formative indicator PE3) is below the threefold value of 5; hence, the collinearity is not at a critical level. The indicator weights' significance is tested by running the bootstrapping procedure (5,000 samples, no sign changes option, bootstrap confidence intervals (BCa), two-tailed testing at the 0.05 significance level) and produces the 95% BCa confidence intervals as Hair et al. (2017) guided (*shown in Table 5.11*).

The confidence interval supports the information on the stability of the estimated coefficient by providing a range of plausible population values for the parameter dependent on the variation on the data and the sample size (Hair et al., 2017, p.196). The results show that most of the indicator weights are significant at 5% level, with the expectation of COO_GCA6, COO_GPA3, COO_GPA4, COO_GPA5, and COO_SPA3, whose indicators weight confidence intervals include the value 0. However, Hair et al. (2010) suggest that the non-significant indicators in the formative measurement models can be maintained when they are relevant to the main construct. The significant relevance of these indicators for the measurement of country of origin construct has been justified and thus, retained in the model.

Table 5.11: Formative indicator weights and significance testing results

Formative constructs	Formative indicators	Outer weights (Outer loadings)	95% BCa confidence interval	Significant (p < 0.05) ?
Country of origin	COO_GCA1	0.033 (0.369)	[0.128, 0.681]	Yes (0.020)
	COO_GCA2	0.298 (0.624)	[0.52, 0.840]	Yes (0.000)
	COO_GCA3	0.182 (0.504)	[0.345, 0.767]	Yes (0.000)
	COO_GCA4	0.073 (0.272)	[0.027, 0.563]	Yes (0.058)
	COO_GCA5	0.379 (0.423)	[0.203, 0.702]	Yes (0.006)
	COO_GCA6	-0.149 (0.101)	[-0.147, 0.360]	No (0.436)
	COO_GPA1	0.196 (0.495)	[0.307, 0.764]	Yes (0.001)
	COO_GPA2	0.268 (0.448)	[0.237, 0.707]	Yes (0.003)
	COO_GPA3	-0.042 (0.213)	[-0.002, 0.495]	No (0.097)
	COO_GPA4	-0.076 (0.073)	[-0.177, 0.350]	No (0.582)
	COO_GPA5	0.008 (0.138)	[-0.127, 0.459]	No (0.358)
	COO_SPA1	0.232 (0.404)	[0.141, 0.699]	Yes (0.011)
	COO_SPA2	-0.059 (0.411)	[0.029, 0.738]	Yes (0.045)
	COO_SPA3	-0.282 (0.324)	[-0.024, 0.637]	No (0.079)
	COO_SPA4	0.252 (0.565)	[0.27, 0.814]	Yes (0.002)
COO_SPA5	0.280 (0.584)	[0.276, 0.868]	Yes (0.003)	
Product country image	CI1	0.293 (0.814)	[0.735, 0.878]	Yes (0.000)
	CI2	0.064 (0.723)	[0.623, 0.809]	Yes (0.000)
	CI3	0.125 (0.843)	[0.777, 0.900]	Yes (0.000)
	CI4	0.643 (0.949)	[0.911, 0.980]	Yes (0.000)
Product evaluation	PE1	0.113 (0.81)	[0.74, 0.870]	Yes (0.000)
	PE2	0.236 (0.876)	[0.832, 0.920]	Yes (0.000)
	PE3	0.385 (0.931)	[0.894, 0.963]	Yes (0.000)
	PE4	0.067 (0.826)	[0.759, 0.882]	Yes (0.000)
	PE5	0.127 (0.752)	[0.688, 0.813]	Yes (0.000)
	PE6	0.102 (0.769)	[0.693, 0.836]	Yes (0.000)
	PE7	0.136 (0.837)	[0.792, 0.888]	Yes (0.000)

The outcomes of the reflective and formative measurement model evaluation indicate that all construct measures show satisfactory levels of reliability and validity. The next step is to assess the structural model of the research.

5.6.5. Structural model assessment

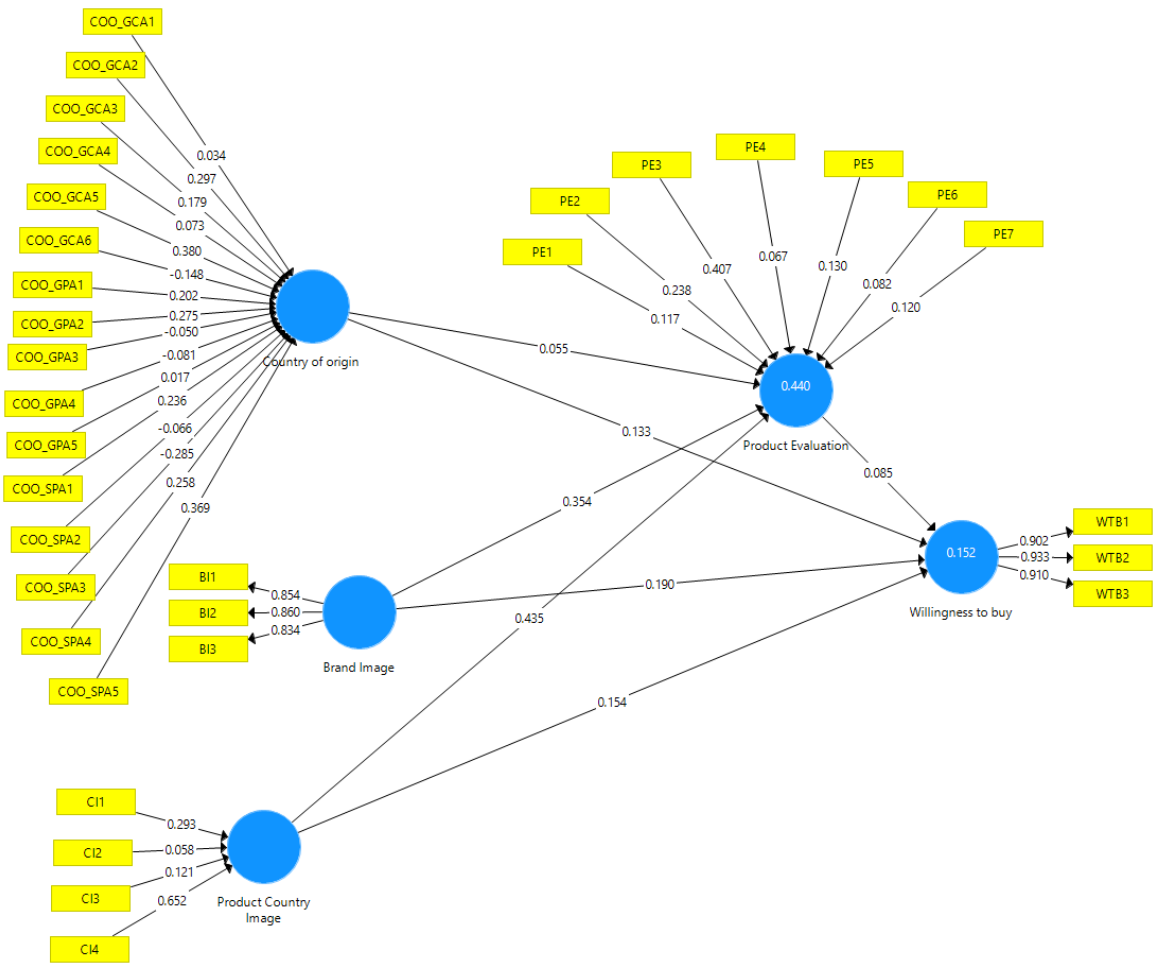


Figure 5.6: Structural model (The paths between blue-coloured variables)

Step 1: collinearity assessment

Firstly, the structural model is checked for collinearity issues by testing the VIF values of all sets predictor latent variables in the structural model. The VIF values of all combinations of endogenous constructs and corresponding exogenous constructs are accessed. It is found that collinearity is not a vital issue since all VIF values are below the threshold of 5. If the collinearity problem occurs, it should be considered to eliminate the construct, emerge predictors into a single construct or create higher-order constructs.

Step 2: structural model path coefficients

When analysing the path coefficient estimates of the structural model (*Figure 4.6*), the product country image (PCI) construct (0.435) has the strongest effect on production evaluation (PE), followed by brand image (BI) (0.354) whereas the effect of COO to PE shows the weakest path (0.055). BI also has a direct but relatively small effect on consumers' WTB (0.190), followed by PCI (0.154). These path coefficients can represent the hypothesized relationships amongst the constructs, meaning estimated path coefficients close to +1 indicate a strong positive relationship and vice versa for negative values. Also, bootstrapping procedure checks whether a coefficient significant ultimately relies on its standard error (Hair et al., 2017).

The standard bootstrap error calculates the empirical t-values and p-values for all structural path coefficients. Since all empirical t-values are larger than the critical values, it is concluded that the coefficient is statistically significant at a certain error probability. Hair et al., (2017) also recommend using the double bootstrap routine when the models is less complex (fewer than four constructs), and sample size is relatively small (less than 300). In this study, the bootstrapping results justify that the effects of all relationships are significant, except from the path COO → PE which does not have a significant effect at that 5% probability of error level ($p = 0.921$).

Analysing the exogenous constructs' total effects (i.e., the sum of one construct's direct and indirect effects via mediating construct) on PE shows that PCI has the strongest total effect (0.435), followed by BI (0.354). For these total effects on WTB, the BI construct has the strongest effect (0.190), following PCI (0.154) and COO (0.133) respectively. Moreover, the total effect of COO construct shows the considerably weak relationship on consumers' product evaluation (0.055) while PE also shows weak total effects on the endogenous construct, WTB (0.085).

Step 3: coefficient of determination (R^2 value)

Further, the structural model's predictive power can be determined by measuring the coefficient of determination (R^2 value). It is calculated as the squared correlation between a specific endogenous construct's actual and predicted values. The R^2 value ranges from 0 to 1, and the higher level of predictive accuracy is pointed out by higher levels (0.75, 0.50, or 0.25 as substantial, moderate or weak) (Hair et al., 2011). The current model explains 44.0% of the PE's variance (i.e., $R^2 = 0.440$), which is relatively high for a model that only considers the

effect of country's origin and images of brand and product country as predictors of consumers' product evaluation. With a value of 0.152, R^2 of WTB is lower but still acceptable, considering the only COO, BI, and PCI predict consumers' willingness to buy in this model. As Hair et al (2017) suggest, selecting a model entirely relies on the R^2 value is not reasonable because the R^2 value of model can maximise simply by adding additional (non-significant) latent variables to explain endogenous constructs, which can lead to an inherent bias toward the model.

Step 4: effect size f^2

The f^2 effect size is also mentioned in Table 4.12. The f^2 effect size measures the change in the R^2 values when a specified independent variable is deleted from the model and then evaluated whether the omitted construct has a substantive impact on the dependent variable. Medium f^2 effect size develops for the relationships PCI \rightarrow PE (0.298), BI \rightarrow PE (0.196), particularly indicating the strong path coefficients of 0.30 and higher. All other f^2 effect sizes in the structural model are small, and the effect size value of below 0.02 can be neglected (Hair et al., 2017).

Step 5: blindfolding and predictive relevance Q^2

At last, the predictive relevance of the PLS path model is estimated by conducting the blindfolding procedure using an omission distance $D = 6$. This measure is the indicator of the model's out-of-sample predictive power. Q^2 values larger than zero for a specific reflective endogenous latent variable indicate the path model's predictive relevant for a particular dependent construct. The resulting cross-validated redundancy Q^2 values are above 0 for all endogenous constructs, supporting the model's predictive accuracy (Hair et al., 2017). PE has the highest Q^2 value (0.279), followed by WTB (0.119). Further analysis of q^2 value indicated that the relationship of PCI \rightarrow PE has moderate q^2 effect size of 0.15 and higher. All other q^2 effect sizes are relatively weak and, the effect size value of below 0.02 is neglected (i.e., the relationships of COO \rightarrow PE, and PE \rightarrow WTB).

Table 5.12: Path coefficients of the structural model and significance testing results

	Path coefficient	95% confidence interval	BCa Significant (p < 0.05) ?	f ² effect size	q ² effect size
Brand image → Product evaluation	0.354	[0.297, 0.428]	Yes (0.000)	0.196	0.100
Brand image → Willingness to buy	0.190	[0.112, 0.247]	Yes (0.000)	0.026	0.017
Country of origin → Product evaluation	0.055	[-0.061, 0.126]	No (0.921)	0.000	0.001
Country of origin → Willingness to buy	0.133	[0.025, 0.206]	Yes (0.000)	0.027	0.018
Product country image → Product evaluation	0.435	[0.368, 0.508]	Yes (0.000)	0.298	0.151
Product country image → Willingness to buy	0.154	[0.077, 0.229]	Yes (0.000)	0.019	0.012
Product evaluation → Willingness to buy	0.085	[0.018, 0.181]	Yes** (0.018)	0.006	0.002

Note: **significant at p < 0.1

5.6.6. Mediation analysis

Further, the relationships between the exogenous latent variables and target construct willingness to buy. According to the model, it is expected that product evaluation meditates the relationship between brand image and willingness to buy. Country of origin and willingness to buy as well as product country image and willingness to buy.

As a first step of the mediation analysis, the significance of the indirect effects is tested, as shown in *Table 5.13 and 5.14*. The indirect effect from BI via PE to WTB is the product of the path coefficients from BI to PE, and from PE to WTB (Mediation Path 1), similarly, the indirect effect from COO via PE to WTB as mediation path 2 and those effect from PCI via PE to WTB as mediation path 3. The significance of these path coefficients' products by running the

bootstrapping procedure. Table 5.13 describes the bootstrapping results for the relationships of mediation path 1, 2 and 3, including the results of indirect effects, the confidence interval (derived from BCa method), t-values and p-values.

Table 5.13: The outcomes of mediation analysis

	Specific indirect effects	97.5% BCa confidence interval	t values	Significant (p < 0.05) ?	Mediated ?
BI → PE → WTB	0.030	[0.001, 0.061]	1.937	Yes (0.053)	Partial mediation (weak)
COO → PE → WTB	0.005	[-0.008, 0.018]	0.723	No (0.470)	No mediation (Direct-only)
PCI → PE → WTB	0.037	[0.001, 0.075]	1.950	Yes (0.051)	Partial mediation (weak)

It is found that the indirect effects of path 1 and 3 are significant as the 95% confidence intervals do not include zero. The empirical t-value of the indirect effect (0.030) for BI → WTB relationship is 1.937, indicating a p-value of less than 0.1. Similarly, for the indirect effect (0.037) of the PCI → WTB relationship, obtaining t-value of 1.950 and p-value of 0.051.

As the next step, the significance of the direct effects amongst latent variables is determined. As shown in Table 5.14, the relationship from COO to PE is relatively weak (0.055) and statistically non-significant (p = 0.307). Following the analysis of the direct and indirect effects, it is concluded that product evaluation (PE) does not mediate the COO to WTB, instead COO establish the direct-only effect on consumers' WTB. On the other hand, BI exerts a pronounced (0.220) and significant (P < 0.001) effect on WTB as well as PCI exerts a pronounced (0.191) and significant (P < 0.001) effect. Hence, PE partially mediates both relationships since all direct and indirect effects are significant. The type partial mediation is also substantiated by calculating the product of direct and indirect effect. Their product is also positive as both direct and indirect are positive, meaning that PE represents **complementary mediation** of the relationships, BI → WTB and PCI → WTB.

Table 5.14: Significance analysis of the direct and indirect effects

	Total effects	95% BCa confidence interval	Significant (p < 0.05) ?	Total indirect effects	95% BCa confidence interval	Significant (p < 0.05) ?
Brand image → Product evaluation	0.354	[0.289, 0.414]	Yes (0.000)			
Brand image → Willingness to buy	0.220	[0.164, 0.284]	Yes (0.000)	0.030	[0.000, 0.059]	Yes (0.050)
Country of origin → Product evaluation	0.055	[-0.145, 0.131]	No (0.328)			
Country of origin → Willingness to buy	0.137	[-0.095, 0.204]	Yes (0.009)	0.005	[-0.008, 0.017]	No (0.458)
Product country image → Product evaluation	0.435	[0.364, 0.505]	Yes (0.000)			
Product country image → Willingness to buy	0.191	[0.124, 0.253]	Yes (0.000)	0.037	[0.001, 0.075]	Yes (0.048)
Product evaluation → Willingness to buy	0.085	[0.000, 0.165]	Yes (0.045)			

The test of quadratic effect (non-linear relationship)

Conducting PLS-SEM can sometimes present the various forms of the relationships between the constructs. It can be in two forms; a) linear relationships can be shown by straight lines (with positive or negative slopes), plotting the values of latent variables in a scatterplot, whereas nonlinear relationships illustrate the curves (not straight lines) for all associations (Hair et al., 2018). In marketing field, it is common to form a pattern of nonlinear relationship (for example, marketing activities and sales) although it cannot be defined a priori on theoretical foundations. Testing nonlinear effect also needs a thoughtful consideration of theoretical reasoning. Using the analysis method of SEM-PLS, the process conducts by comparing the scores of two constructs in a scatterplot using spreadsheet software. In illustrating the estimation of nonlinear effects, the variable of interest can obtain a significant nonlinear relationship if the 95% confidence interval of it does not include the value zero. Then, the f^2 effect size is accessed to determine the strength of the nonlinear effect.

According to Cohen (1988; cited in Hair et al., 2018), the f^2 effect size values of 0.02 as small, 0.15 as medium and 0.35 as large effect. According to the results of an analysis (*Figure 5.16*), quadratic relationships can certainly be rejected and the linear relationships between latent variables would be retained. This is because the 95% confidence interval of all proposed relationships include the value zero and the f^2 effect sizes is significantly small. One explanation is that since there is no deviations of normality amongst the dataset, the involvement of a quadratic term is not necessarily interpret into a nonlinear effect in the analysis.

Table 5.16: Results of analysing nonlinear effects

	Path coefficients	97.5% BCa confidence interval	Significant (p < 0.05) ?	f ² effect size	Linear relationship?
COO → WTB	0.009	[-0.033, 0.061]	No (0.701)	0.000	Yes
BI → WTB	0.008	[-0.033, 0.050]	No (0.705)	0.000	Yes
PCI → WTB	0.021	[-0.025, 0.065]	No (0.357)	0.001	Yes
PE → WTB	0.004	[-0.034, 0.040]	No (0.850)	0.000	Yes
COO → PE	-0.017	[-0.067, 0.025]	No (0.498)	0.001	Yes

BI PE →	-0.024	[-0.067, 0.022]	No (0.293)	0.002	Yes
PCI PE →	0.008	[-0.041, 0.055]	No (0.730)	0.000	Yes

5.6.7. Models comparison

Testing measurement model invariance

The key concern for comparing group-specific parameter estimates for significant differences conducting a multigroup analysis is ensuring measurement invariance (referred to as measurement equivalence) (Hair et al., 2017, p. 291). The absence of the measurement variance can affect in reducing the power of statistical tests, influencing the precision of estimators, and providing misleading results. To put it simply, any conclusions about the model relationships are debatable without the demonstration of measurement invariance of the model. More importantly, its establishment is essential for the analysis of multigroup analysis in order to assure the validity of outcomes and conclusions.

In SEM-PLS, Henseler et al., (2016) introduce the measurement invariance of composite models (MICOM) procedure. In this procedure, the scores of the constructs are regarded as composites which mean the linear combinations of indicators and each indicator weights estimated by the PLS-SEM algorithm. The MICOM procedure includes three steps – 1) configural invariance, 2) compositional invariance and 3) equality of composite mean values and variances. All steps are hierarchically interrelated, meaning that configural invariance is a requirement for compositional invariance and subsequently, Step 2 is a precondition for conducting the equality of composite mean values and variances. Partial measurement invariance can be confirmed when the Step 1 and 2 are established whereas full measurement invariance can be assured when all three steps are established.

Given that the current study intends to compare a model over two groups through PLS-SEM, MICOM test is adopted. In this study, the result of MICOM step 1 is supported by permutation p values higher than 0.05 as an indication of nonsignificant correlation (lower than 1). Since the original correlation of the latent variables are not significantly different from 1, it is concluded that compositional invariance has been established (results of all steps shown in *Table 5.17*). To sum up, the results from Step 2 support partial measurement invariance and thus, there has confidence to compare the standardised path coefficients across the group by using multigroup analysis (PLS-MGA) (Hair et al., 2017) .

To extend checking for full measurement invariance, step 3 results show that every confidence interval does not include the original difference in mean values. It shows the significant difference in the mean values of latent variables across the groups. Since not all the composite mean values and variances are equal, the full measurement variance is not supported (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 5.17: MICOM results

MICOM step 1				
Configural variance established?		Yes		
MICOM step 2				
Composite	Correlation c	5% quantile of the empirical distribution of c_u	Permutation p values	Compositional invariance established ?
Brand image	0.998	0.996	0.150	Yes
Country of origin	0.479	0.133	0.744	Yes
Product country image	0.933	0.913	0.111	Yes
Product evaluation	0.945	0.884	0.447	Yes
Willingness to buy	0.999	0.999	0.180	Yes
MICOM step 3				
Composite	Difference of the composite's mean value (=0)	97.5% confidence interval	Permutation p values	Equal mean values ?
Brand image	-0.675	[-0.195, 0.174]		No
Country of origin	0.000	[-0.178, 0.182]	1.000	Yes
Product country image	-0.920	[-0.169, 0.177]		No
Product evaluation	-1.046	[-0.182, 0.172]		No
Willingness to buy	-0.471	[-0.18, 0.172]		No
Composite	Logarithm of the composite's variances ratio (=0)	97.5% confidence interval	Permutation p values	Equal variance ?
Brand image	-0.057	[-0.261, 0.236]	0.679	No
Country of origin	0.000	[-0.246, 0.26]	1.000	Yes
Product country image	-0.327	[-0.318, 0.355]	0.058	No
Product evaluation	-0.290	[-0.313, 0.326]	0.089	No
Willingness to buy	-0.217	[-0.224, 0.209]	0.048	No

5.7. Summary of hypothesis testing

The main interest of research is twofold – to investigate Myanmar young professionals' perceptions of brand origin and the effect of country of origin on product evaluations and purchase intentions towards foreign brands, in the mobile phones product category. For answering those questions, six objectives have been set to inquire the research problem in both quantitative and qualitative (*which will be presented in the following chapter*) techniques.

As this section is particularly aimed for the quantitative research inquiry, **four** main objectives have been set to achieve the aim of quantitative research. It aims to a) identify influential factors of brand and country of origin in product evaluation and consumers willingness to buy, b) examine the effect product country image, country of origin and brand image on Myanmar young professionals' product evaluation of foreign mobile brands, c) understand whether origin, image cues of country and brand can influence on Myanmar consumers' buying intention, d) determine the role of product evaluation on the relationships between origins-images ascendants and consumers' willingness to buy (*The summary is shown in Table 5.18*).

The relationships among latent variables of the conceptual model are hypothesised (shown in Table 5.19) and the majority of the findings support with the hypothesis. Firstly, **Hypothesis 1a**, “COO information will affect significantly on Myanmar consumers' product evaluation of mobile phones brands” is **rejected** for the overall model. The relationship between COO and product evaluation is initially non-significant ($p=0.307$), with path coefficient value of 0.058.

Hypothesis 1b, “COO information will affect significantly on Myanmar consumers' willingness to buy mobile phones” is **fully supported** for all brands and countries, with the significance of $p = 0.026$.

Hypothesis 1c, “Product evaluation construct can mediate the relationship between COO and willingness to buy” is **not supported** in the relationship ($P = 0.470$). No mediation effect of product evaluation is found and there is a ‘direct-only’ relationship between country of origin and willingness to buy. Also, the analysis of ‘total direct and indirect effects’ showed similar results for this relationship. Thus, it is concluded that the relationship between COO and WTB has a definite connection.

Hypothesis 2a, “Product country image of a product (PCI) has a direct positive impact on product evaluation of Myanmar consumers in buying their mobile phones” is **supported**. There

is a highly significant effect ($p < 0.001$), and the impact is positive for all four countries targeted in this study – the USA, South Korea and China.

Hypothesis 2b, “Product country image of a product show a direct impact on Myanmar consumers’ willingness to buy mobile phones” is positively *supported* for all countries.

Hypothesis 2c, “Product evaluation construct can mediate the relationship between PCI and willingness to buy” is *supported* as the partial mediation of product evaluation is found between product country image and willingness to buy ($p = 0.051$). There is not only a significant relationship between product evaluation and willingness to buy but also highly direct relationship between PCI and WTB ($p < 0.001$).

Hypothesis 3a, “Brand image has a direct positive impact on the positive evaluation of Myanmar consumers on foreign mobile phones brands” is *supported*. It shows a positive relationship with a significant level of $p < 0.001$.

Hypothesis 3b, “Brand image of a product shows a direct impact on Myanmar consumers’ willingness to buy mobile phones” is highly *supported*. The significant difference is found in the models’ comparison of brand image between Apple and Xiaomi in the analysis.

Hypothesis 3c, “Product evaluation construct can mediate the relationship between brand image and willingness to buy” is *supported* as the partial mediation of product evaluation is found between brand image and willingness to buy ($p = 0.053$). There is not only a significant relationship between product evaluation and willingness to buy but also highly direct relationship between brand image and WTB ($p < 0.001$).

Hypothesis 4, “Product evaluation will have a significant, positive relationship with consumers’ willingness to buy foreign brands in Myanmar mobile phones market” is *fully supported*.

Table 5.18: Summary of hypothesis testing

Objectives	Hypothesis	Supported in all brands and countries	Not supported in all brands and countries
Objective #2: To examine the effect of product country image, country of origin and brand image on Myanmar young professionals' product evaluation of foreign mobile phone brands	H1a: COO information will affect significantly on Myanmar consumers' product evaluation of mobile phones brands		Rejected
Objective #3: To understand whether origin and image cues of country and brand can influence on Myanmar consumers' buying intention	H1b: COO information will affect significantly on Myanmar consumers' willingness to buy mobile phones	Accepted	
Objective #4: To determine the role of product evaluation on the relationships between origins-images ascendants and consumers' willingness to buy	H1c: Product evaluation construct can mediate the relationship between COO and willingness to buy		Rejected - No mediation (direct only)
Objective #2: To examine the effect of product country image, country of origin and brand image on Myanmar young professionals' product evaluation of foreign mobile phone brands	H2a: The country image of a product (PCI) has a direct positive impact on product evaluation of Myanmar consumers in buying their mobile phones.	Accepted	
Objective #3: To understand whether origin and image cues of country and brand can influence on Myanmar consumers' buying intention	H2b: County image of a product shows a direct impact on Myanmar consumers' willingness to buy mobile phones	Accepted	
Objective #4: To determine the role of product evaluation on the relationships between origins-images ascendants and consumers' willingness to buy	H2c: Product evaluation construct can mediate the relationship between PCI and willingness to buy	Accepted	

Objective #2: To examine the effect of product country image, country of origin and brand image on Myanmar young professionals' product evaluation of foreign mobile phone brands	H3a: Brand image has a direct positive impact on the product evaluation of Myanmar consumers on foreign mobile phones brands	Accepted	
Objective #3: To understand whether origin and image cues of country and brand can influence on Myanmar consumers' buying intention	H3b: The Brand image of a product shows a direct impact on Myanmar consumers' willingness to buy mobile phones	Accepted	
Objective #4: To determine the role of product evaluation on the relationships between origins-images ascendants and consumers' willingness to buy	H3c: Product evaluation construct can mediate the relationship between brand image and willingness to buy	Accepted	
Objective #4: To determine the role of product evaluation on the relationships between origins-images ascendants and consumers' willingness to buy	H4: Product evaluation will have a significant, positive relationship with consumers' willingness to buy foreign brands in Myanmar mobile phones market	Accepted	

5.8. Conclusion

In this chapter, the process and results of pilot test have presented in the first section to produce reliable and valid scales and followed by the main data analysis using PLS-SEM technique. The chapter displays the presentation of analysis and findings of quantitative data with the correlational design which explores and observes the relationships among variables. The paths in the model are tested by various analysis methods including mediation, moderation in order to prove/ reject the proposed hypothesis of the study. The next chapter will be devoted to the analysis and findings of qualitative data with detailed procedures.

Chapter 6: Analysis and Findings of Qualitative Data

Main contents

- **Qualitative research design**
- **Data collection method**
- **Thematic analysis**
- **Findings of qualitative data**

6.1. Introduction

This chapter probes the findings from mixed-method research, particularly in the qualitative data. With support from theory explored through in-depth interviews, the chapter represents the critical contribution of the current study. This chapter outlines the research design of the qualitative data, the data collection method, and data analysis and findings. The interview technique applies to collecting data from respondents. The data are analysed using thematic analysis, following the guidelines of Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-steps framework.

6.2. Research Design

The aim of presenting research design is to reveal the overall structure and details of how the research is achieved (Kumar, 2014). Hence, many important variables and decisions relating to the strategies and tactics of qualitative research methods are consciously considered to reach the ultimate objectives of the study. In this section, the purpose of the study, the research strategy, research tactics, sample size, and data collection methods are discussed. Kumar (2014) stated that the sophisticated research design should deliver two main functions: 1) identification of procedural arrangements required; and 2) the relevance of the quality of these structures and components in terms of validity, accuracy and objectivity.

The purpose of conducting this qualitative study is *to investigate Myanmar young professionals' preferences and perceptions of foreign branded products* and to *explore how Myanmar consumers evaluate products in their buying decisions for mobile phones*. Theoretically, this particular area, brand origin, is understudied by the scholars of international marketing, consumer behaviour field although the richness of related country-of-origin theories. The study is undertaken as complementary qualitative research by exploring the extensive knowledge about the relation between brand origin and consumer choices, aiming to fill the gap as mentioned above and add knowledge in the field. The findings of qualitative

study can assist in better understanding of the concepts and relationships tested in the quantitative data collection.

In addition to this, the major supported underlying reason to conduct this specific research purpose is – market research in Myanmar have been newly booming since a nominally civilian government rules the country in 2011 and the firms have been competing fiercely to fill the void of consumers' needs and demands. Despite the fact that international market research firms eagerly enter into the consumer behaviour field, there still have some arguable data that are contradictory between local-based firms and international ones since the field is a new start. Nevertheless, Myanmar occupies an attractive, exciting market where nearly 50 percent of the population is under age 24 and over 46 percent increase rate of advertising (since 2008) for multinational firms, marketers, and consumer behaviour researchers (Macisaac, 2013).

There are many approaches to conduct the qualitative analysis and Saldana (2010) describes over 20 different qualitative research categories for investigators, especially a group of well-established traditional methods and those of more progressive genres of qualitative methods. The former group includes well-known methods such as ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, case study, and content analysis. The latter group includes new methods such as poetic inquiry, narrative inquiry, ethnodrama, autoethnography and duoethnography (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014). Amongst, there are five well-recognised qualitative research commonly practised by many scholars (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014) and it is shown in Figure 6.1.

Table 6.1: The differences between the five qualitative types of research

Method	Focus	Sample size	Data collection
Ethnography	Context or culture	-	Observation and interviews
Narrative	Individual experience and sequence	1-2	Stories from individuals and documents
Phenomenological	People who have experienced a phenomenon	5-25	Interviews
Grounded theory	Develop a theory from grounded in field data	20-60	Interviews, following by open and axial coding
Case study	Organisation, entity, individual or event	-	Interviews, documents, reports, observations

Source: Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014)

The research data can be employed particular forms of analysis by using each method, depending on the intention of the research questions to answer. For instance, the main intention of grounded theory is to generate theory by using a series of cumulative condign cycles and reflective analytic memoing and then developing significant categories. The technique of phenomenology considers data thematically to extract essences and essentials of participants' meanings. The nature of ethnography tends to be descriptive with the analysis task of reaching across multiple data sources and condensing those data.

On the other hand, progressive genres such as poetic inquiry, narrative inquiry and ethnodrama derived from the adaption of the conventions of fictional literature to contribute to experiences of nonfictional participants. Other categories such as content analysis, conversation analysis, and discourse analysis are extremely cautious to the nuances and embedded meanings of literally each word in a data corpus. Autoethnography investigates the self while duo ethnography analyses the self in relationship with another (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014).

6.3. Data collection method: Interviews

The reason for choosing an interview technique is due to its nature of gaining an in-depth understanding of the different aspects of the research (Rugg and Petre, 2007). The researcher can explore a topic area in more significant details as interviews offer freedom of choosing different types of questions and formats. Following these facts, in-depth interviews are taken to explore these three areas noted in the research objectives section.

Firstly, it is crucial to explore Myanmar young professionals' perceptions of foreign brands, whether they prefer eastern brands which are close to their culture, lifestyle, and traditions or prefer brands of developed countries which can offer them their desired values or standards. Secondly, how brand origin, a new sub-concept of country of origin, can influence on their evaluation of products and decisions will be analysed by doing thorough interview with the product users.

Finally, to explore the linkage and impact of country and brand choice, consumers buying patterns are investigated in the interviews to define opportunities and constraints of considering brand origin in their buying decision process. Aligning with these objectives, Saunders et al., (2016) recommend that data collection is non-standardized to assure a naturalistic and interactive research process when the aim is to explore the nature of social interactions and to access in-depth understanding. Rather than requiring a large-scale sample size, this investigation is more suitable with more in-depth and less-structured interviews (Saunders et al., 2016).

To add more, conducting interviews are the most useful method to obtain a deep understanding of the different perspectives of the research (Rugg and Petre, 2007). Conducting interviews offer the researchers to freely choose different type of questions, formats and explore a diverse topic. It can also identify the useful insight about possibilities and non-possibilities of the research outcomes, the importance of terminology and etiquette. Like other techniques, the interview method has some disadvantages including its inability to provide the results with numbers or cross-validation on the qualitative aspects. However, these defects can be addressed by using some other techniques.

In this stage of the research, the 'brand origin' concept needs to be explored in-depth to clarify it as an elaborated dimension of country of origin concept regarding the impact on consumers' product evaluation and willingness to buy. Although the brand origin concept has clear definitions in academic articles, it still needs to determine how initially Myanmar consumers

communicate their understanding of that concept. Moreover, there is a need to explore consumers' usage of terminologies and expressions when discussing their opinion and concept of brand origin. It is crucial for the contribution of this research because the data derives from a different culture and language, unlike previous English-language academic literature.

With maintaining the level of openness and flexibility, the question type is semi-structured in order to gain insight into participants' perceptions and identify the reasons behind their viewpoints or beliefs. In real-world, every individual can offer new suggestions to the research and the semi-structured interview can be able to represent this new information or factors answered by participants. Besides, its ability to be flexible allows the researcher to follow the flow of conversation by balancing questions during the interviews. This interview method is the most appropriate for the current study because the brand origin concept in the research country is previously less-known areas and thus, potentially unclassified aspects are expected to emerge.

Unlike other methods such as structured interview and questionnaire that give participants a fixed direction, the semi-structured interview gives every individual to express the new aspects to the piece of research. The main advantage of using semi-structured in this research is the flexibility of the method which the flow of the conversation and questions can be adjusted during the interview. This attribute can allow the interviewer to explore the unknown areas and potentially unknown factors.

Limitations of interview technique

Regardless of the researchers' effort to practise the most suitable data collection method, there will be limitations for any method, and the interview technique has no exception. There are some practical limitations of using interview technique, considering time-consuming, cultural barriers and consumers' knowledge level. However, the complementary practice of quantitative techniques considered as the primary method can compensate these limitations by offering cross-validation for the data.

6.3.1. Data collection process

As mentioned previously, this study contributes to practising the mixed method of 'complementarity.' The research questions of the study are designed for complementary to provide the insightful knowledge on a particular case – investigation of consumer perception and evaluation of mobile phones products and subsequently their buying intention – by applying different methods such as survey and interviews. The research objectives of exploring the relationship between country of origin and other variables are conducted by using quantitative techniques whereas the research question about consumers' perception, evaluation and purchase intention on brand origin is answered by using qualitative techniques.

In conducting exploratory research, it is crucial to gather the central issues from a variety of qualitative information. Hence, Cooper and Schindler (2011) suggest the *convergent interviewing technique* which means the researchers organise the interviewees in a sequential series of in-depth interview process. Simply, the iterative process of interviewing and coding after each interview is advantageous for deciding when to explore new issues and to stop data collection. This interview method is mainly suitable for under-researched areas with limited attention from experts to address an issue.

The semi-structured interview offers a crucial insight into the participant's opinions by using open questions to create an interactive interview environment. At the same time, much other information is captured indirectly which helps the researcher to identify the reasons behind their opinions. A set of questions (including *three* specific sections) is produced based on the previous literature and relevant preliminary studies, covering the topic of consumers' perception on country of origin and brand origin and to what extent do these factors impact on their product evaluation and willingness to buy mobile phones. The following criteria are used in developing the questions. The questions must be easily understandable to enhance the contribution of the participants and to obtain more in-depth detail of their ideas and opinions. The questions must be distant from each other and must not lead the participant to a particular answer (Rugg and Petre, 2007).

All main questions help to make sure the topic is explored as much as possible and determine how consumers express their ideas and explain their reasoning. Most of the questions are used as a guideline to instruct the interviews to flow the relevant and accurate direction. The interview sections are divided into three parts. Section 1 contributes *eight* main questions to general questions about brand origin, section 2 refers to product-specific questions of *seven*

about brand origin, and section 3 includes *three* main questions on their perception on specific brands and countries (i.e., brands and countries used for this study). The probes (or sub-questions) are also included to encourage participants to delivering more information.

The researcher in face-to-face setting conducts all interviews. The neutral settings including library's meeting room, quiet coffee shops, restaurants with quiet area and each interview were recorded on electronic device upon the permission of interviewees. Each respondent is provided with the consent form included the research information, right to withdraw, confidentiality, anonymity and asked to sign the form as their permission to continue the interview.

Then, the researcher verbally explained the structure of interview questions and objectives. Since all participants are recruited from the quantitative survey (where they were asked whether they are willing to be contacted for a follow-up interview), they have been familiar with the content of research which can increase the credibility and reliability of interviews as well as overall research quality.

During the interviews, the participants are cautiously interrupted whether the flow of the interview is on track, aiming to find the new ideas. However, in order to avoid complicated codes and results, the interviews are managed to balance between following the guided interview questions and flowing the conversation itself. Besides, the interviewees are encouraged to express their ideas using everyday vocabulary and their styles and mode of expression. It intends to reveal their new ideas and level of understanding about the concept that is essential for mutual communication and understanding.

6.3.2. Sample selection

The standard sample size of qualitative research has long been debatable among researchers, and there are different assumptions about this issue. The concept of 'saturated point' is widely supposed as an appropriate sample size. This means that the researchers cease collecting data when it hits the point where the new data are unobserved. Since the concept of situation is too ambiguous to use in determination of sample size, Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest that the minimum of 15-20 interviews are needed to reach reliably to situation point for grounded theory. Guest, Bunce, Johnson (2006), on the other hand, claim that situation occurred in the first 12 interviews out of sixty interviews conducted. In this thesis, 24 potential participants show the interest and agree to be interviewed as a follow-up after survey. Amongst, 20

participants are selected due to their eligibility (being young professions in Yangon, aged between 20 and 34), and their convenience with the allocation for interview settings.

After signing on the consent form, a short introductory questions are asked regard to their knowledge and experience in using mobiles – a) number of different brands usage since from buying the first mobile phones (options: 1-3 brands, 4-6 brands, 7 and above), b) how many years of using mobiles (options: 2 to 5 years, 6 to 10 years, 11 years and above). All of them show the moderate to high exposure to mobile phones through their product knowledge and experience. Their profiles are presented in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2: Profile of participants

Participant ID	Type of participant	Age	Gender	Numbers of different brands usage	Experience of using mobiles	Interview duration
#001	Small business owner	29	Female	4-6	6 to 10 years	42 mins
#002	Employee in multinational technology corporation	21	Female	1-3	2 to 5 years	30 mins
#003	Employee in multinational telecommunication company	27	Male	4-6	6 to 10 years	57 mins
#004	Employee in multinational telecommunication company	33	Female	4-6	11 years and above	38 mins
#005	Director in family-owned SME	25	Female	4-6	6 to 10 years	24 mins
#006	Employee in a well-known private bank	25	Female	4-6	6 to 10 years	53 mins
#007	Dentist in a public hospital	25	Male	1-3	6 to 10 years	48 mins
#008	Employee in a foreign embassy	25	Female	4-6	6 to 10 years	25 mins

#009	Employee in a private company	21	Female	1-3	2 to 5 years	36 mins
#010	Executive in a private university	26	Female	4-6	6 to 10 years	30 mins
#011	Employee in an international research firm	24	Female	1-3	2 to 5 years	45 mins
#012	Small business owner	25	Male	4-6	6 to 10 years	45 mins
#013	Employee in a foreign accounting firm	25	Female	4-6	6 to 10 years	32 mins
#014	Employee in a architecture company	26	Female	4-6	6 to 10 years	35 mins
#015	Freelancer in an education sector	20	Male	1-3	2 to 5 years	18 mins
#016	Employee in a private technology firm	23	Female	4-6	6 to 10 years	49 mins
#017	Employee in a foreign auditing firm	24	Female	1-3	2 to 5 years	37 mins
#018	Mobile phones shop owner	29	Female	4-6	6 to 10 years	42 mins
#019	Mobile phones shop owner	30	Male	4-6	6 to 10 years	28 mins
#020	Director in family-owned SME	25	Female	4-6	6 to 10 years	30 mins

6.3.3. Analysis strategy: Thematic Analysis

In order to analysis data, the main procedures of analysing qualitative data are followed – including identifying, coding, and categorising data in pre-set categories and new groups that potentially reveal during the analysis of interviews. As Miles, Huberman and Saldana's (2014) flow of qualitative data analysis, three components – data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification – are considered as essential steps in the analysis procedure. These steps are not separate from analysis but part of the analysis. For instance, data condensation can sharpen, sort, focus, discard and organise the data as if the 'final' conclusions can be drawn or verified. Data display mainly concerns with analytic activities by organising, compressing, and assembling information which supports conclusion drawing. At last, the verification of conclusion process is deliberately carried out through well-defined and familiar methods. Unlike the former steps which can be iterative or cyclical during analysis process as necessary, the conclusion step is rather sequential. *Figure – 6.1* illustrates the interactive model of these steps by Miles and Huberman (2014).

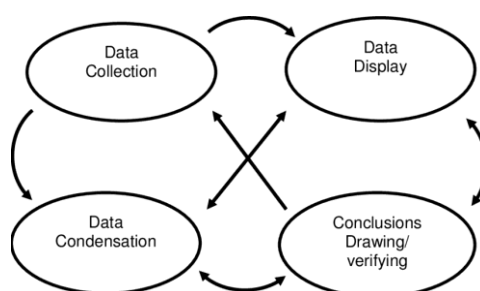


Figure 6.1: The interactive model of components of data analysis

(Source: Miles and Huberman, 2014)

Since there are many diverse, complex and nuanced (Holloway and Todres, 2003) qualitative approaches, the thematic analysis should be taken as an underpinning method for qualitative analysis. This research follows the guidelines of Braun and Clarke's (2014) 6-steps framework for the practice of thematic analysis (as shown in *Figure 6.2*). Thematic analysis can offer an accessible and theoretically flexible approach in analysing qualitative data. It is narrowly-branded but widely-used in the qualitative analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Braun and Clarke (2014) argue that thematic analysis should consider a core analysis method for qualitative data because it includes the primary skills for all data analysis. It focuses on identifying patterned meaning across a dataset commonly used in analysing qualitative data. The answers to the research questions is provided by identifying these patterns in a dataset.

The first justification for using thematic analysis in this study is because of its theoretically-flexibility (Braun and Clarke, 2014; Creswell, 2014). This analysis can apply in different frameworks, answer different research questions and is suitable for questions related to people's experiences, views, and perceptions, related to understanding and representation, related to the construction of meaning (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

Secondly, it is a practical method for exploring different perceptions among participants, highlighting similarities and differences, producing unanticipated insights. Unlike other methods (such as discourse analysis (DA), decomposition analysis, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and grounded theory), the detailed theoretical and technological knowledge of approaches is no necessity for thematic analysis. Besides, it is useful for summarizing critical findings of large dataset due to its well-structured technique in data handling, resulting in producing a clear final report (King, 2004). Finally, thematic analysis is suitable for early career researchers as it is easily accessible with few prescriptions and procedures. It provides a more accessible form of analysis, resulting in being able to use within different theoretical frameworks. Also, this analysis can be effectively applied in reflecting reality or disclosing the surface of reality (Braun and Clarke, 2014; Creswell, 2014).

The initial research question is realist ones – *to investigate Myanmar consumers' preferences and perceptions on foreign branded products, and to explore how Myanmar consumers evaluate products in their buying decisions for mobile phones*. Following Braun and Clarke's (2014) 6-step guidelines (Figure 6.2), there are two approaches to analysing data; top-down or, theoretical thematic analysis and bottom-up or inductive one. Since this study is more specific research question-driven than the data itself, top-down (theoretical thematic) analysis is applied.

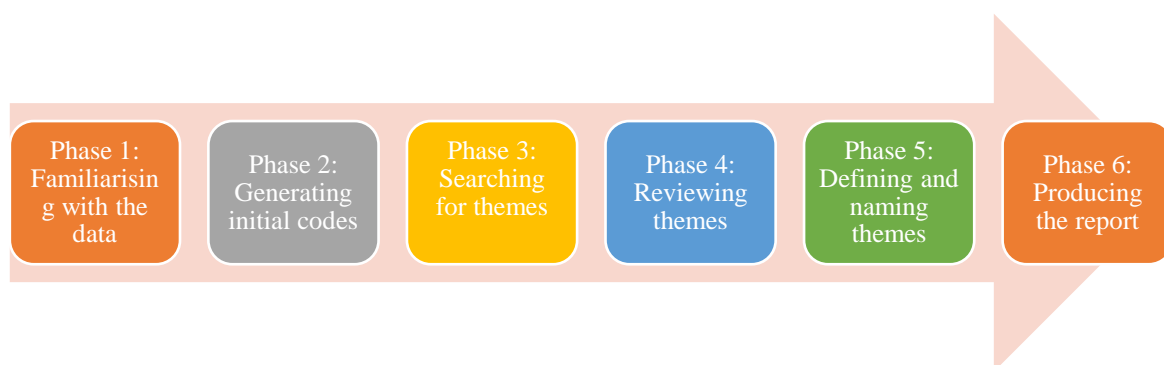


Figure 6.2: Phases of thematic analysis

Phase 1: familiarising with the data

In this step, all files (raw data) name to represent the project from which the data came from, a unique identifier for the source (including participant code, name of document or meeting) and the data initially conducted. Raw data are stored in the secure repository and analysed the interpretation for adequacy. An Excel spreadsheet records the researcher's progress in collecting and Word document transcripts raw data (recordings) to text.

The data consists of 20 interview transcripts which are initially kept in the voice recording device based on the participant's permission, in order to increase the *credibility* of the research finding and interpretations. The transcripts are written into two languages, Myanmar and English. Since Burmese language is widely spoken in Myanmar and also regarded as the official language of the country, all respondents use Burmese language, the mother tongue, in the interview process. Aiming to capture the exact meaning of participants' words, their expressions, tone of voice and flow of the conversation, the transcripts are noted in Myanmar before the translation to English to enter into the data analysis software (NVivo 11) and analyse them.

There are two common methods for translation techniques, namely 'back translation' and 'parallel translation' (Usunier, 2000). Back translation means one translator translates the questionnaires from the source language into a target language. The parallel translation, on the other hand, includes the several translators who are influent in both languages, work individually or as a team and then, the questionnaires are translated from the source language into the target language. In this study, all data are translated from Myanmar to English by the researcher herself. This is due to two main reasons a) translation by oneself can give more opportunity to familiarising with data, b) the amount of data is too abundant to hire a co-translator voluntarily.

The researcher familiarises the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts while translating the entire body of data corpus. At this stage, the researcher makes notes on early impressions to shape the potential pattern of ideas and identification from various aspects before starting the coding process.

Phase 2: Generating initial codes

After the translation process of data is completed, the initial generating of codes from the data begins. The main purpose of coding is to reduce big data to small chunks of meaning. There are different methods to code according to the research's perspective and questions. Since this study analyses the data concerned with addressing the research question, theoretical thematic analysis is practised by coding particularly relevant and interesting data that can capture the research question. Given this, the research nature is deductive, unlike an inductive analysis which uses line-by-line coding. Instead, the study uses the open coding which means it discards pre-set codes, but the codes are developed and modified during the process of coding.

For instance, some preliminary ideas about codes have been developed during Phase 1. At this step, each transcript is worked through coding on the text that appears to be relevant to or answer the research question. Then, it is also required to generate new codes and modified existing ones if required. All these processes are done by electronically such as writing transcripts in Word documents and entering data into qualitative data analytic software (NVivo 11). There is other data analytic software such as Microsoft Excel and ATLAS as well as the traditional manual technique.

Phase 3: Searching for themes

Braun and Clarke (2013) define a theme as "...captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (p.82). Practically, themes are explored from the frequent and significant features of participants' responses. Some of the codes noted in Phase 2 are clearly matched with a theme and consequently, the central theme is defined. For example, several codes are found to be related to the perceptions of brand origin and why consumers are less likely to consider it in the actual buying context. Thus, these codes are collated into a *preliminary theme* called "barriers to brand origin consideration."

Similarly, the codes are categorised into broader themes that have the potential of answering the research question. These themes are prevailing descriptive which describes patterns in the data applicable to meeting the research objectives. The majority of codes belong to one theme although some codes are found to associate with more than one theme.

Phase 4: Reviewing themes

This is the step where the preliminary themes are reviewed, modified and developed by allocating all the data relevant to each theme. As the advantage of using data analysis software, this process is quicker and easier. Data or codes allocated in each theme are re-evaluated whether the data clearly support it. After that, it is considered whether the themes can associate with the context of data set. For example, it is considered how the themes can work within an individual interview and across all interviews.

In this step, the researcher deliberately chooses each theme to be coherent and distinct from another theme. It includes a) overlooking the unsupportive or overlapped themes, b) creating a new theme with some subthemes for data clarification and capturing the participants' answers in a better and more meaningful way. Numbers of changes are made as follows:

- “Country-related ascendants and their influence on brand choice” theme is eliminated as it is irrelevant to the research question of the study
- A new theme, “Insight into consumers buying patterns and understanding Myanmar mobile phones market” is created as it produces a significant prevalence of data
- A theme related to the brand origin is split into two main themes for the purpose of data clarity due to its large amount of data with distinct patterns and sub-themes.

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes

This step is the final clarification of themes, and the aim is to identify the ‘essence’ of each theme (Braun and Clarke, 2006). As mentioned above, this study identifies themes at the semantic level with theoretical thematic (top-down) analysis by answering the proposed research question. It is aimed to *investigate Myanmar consumers’ preferences and perceptions on foreign branded products*, and to *explore how Myanmar consumers evaluate products in their buying decisions for mobile phones*. Based on this, three main thematic maps (i.e., a) consumers’ perception on foreign brands, b) consumers’ product evaluation and the use of COO/BO, and c) the influence of country of origin and brand origin on consumers’ buying intention) that illustrate the key points to explore with their relevant main themes, sub-themes are drawn as in Figure 6.3, 6.4, 6.5.

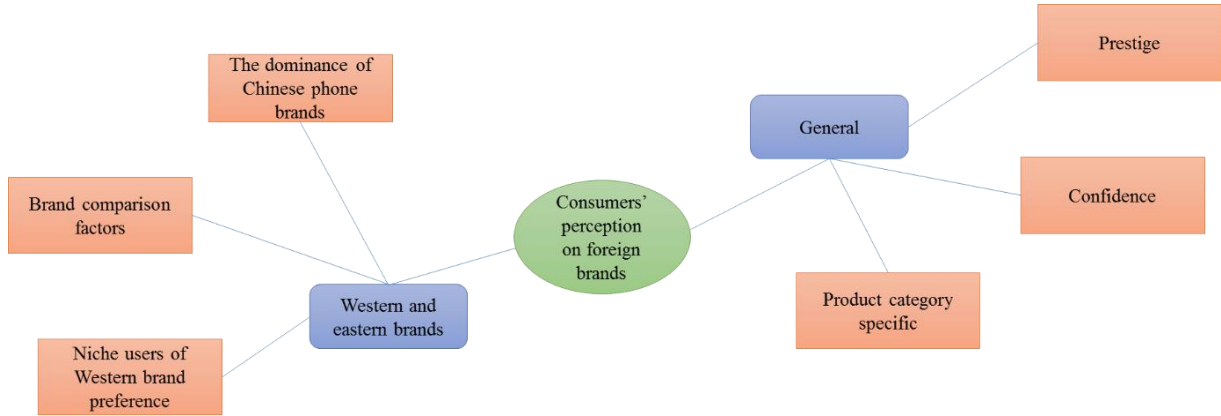


Figure 6.3: Thematic map of consumers' perception on foreign brands

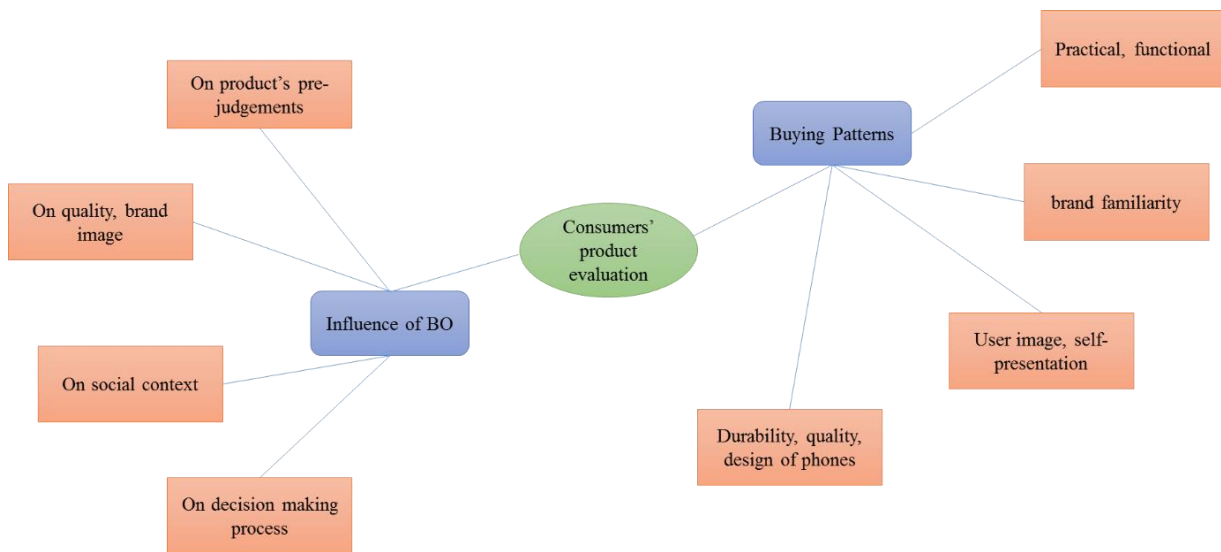


Figure 6.4: Thematic map of consumers' product evaluation and the use of COO/BO

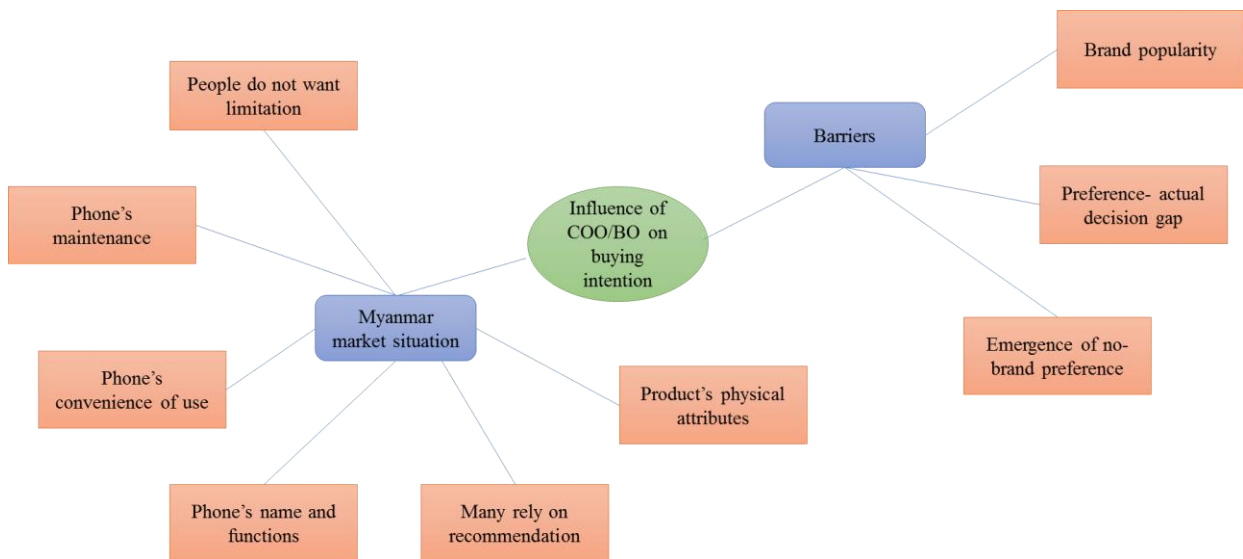


Figure 6.5: The influence of country of origin and brand origin on consumers' buying intention

These thematic maps are advanced into and named as shown in Table 6.3. The key themes from a rich dataset are highlighted and identified, aiming to communicate the important research features to a broader audience (Creswell, 2010). When the analysis of the interviews are done, the inter-observer process takes place to prove the reliability of the analysis, meaning whether the same results obtained from the same transcript analysed by different observers and the researchers or not. In this study, the supervisory team (supervisors with consumer behaviour/ marketing background) verify the overview results of the analysis, regarding the opinions on the interpretation of result.

Table 6.3: The descriptions of the thematic map

Key contexts	Main themes	Sub-themes
Consumers' perceptions of foreign brands	Theme 1: Personal opinions and beliefs influence consumers' perception of brands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumers' brand evaluation factors • The impact of a brand's prestige position • Functions hunters versus status hunters • Product category matters and its choice depends on gender
	Theme 2: Stereotypical effect on foreign products is still relevant, yet consumers' preferences become rational and liberal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The perception of categorising as east and west • Every country has its own national product/s • Contemporary issue: The emergent of Chinese brands' popularity
Consumers' product evaluation	Theme 3: Brand origin has a specific influence on evaluation of both hard and soft attributes of a product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard attribute: the influence on price, quality • Hard attribute: the influence on functional products • Soft attribute: the influence on consumer's trust • Soft attribute: the influence on impression creation/formation • Soft attribute: purchase of high-involvement products • The role of BO in the decision making process
Influence of COO/BO on buying intention	Theme 4: Brand origin is either unimportant or insignificant to consider in actual buying intention/ decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theoretical-concept related barrier: brand popularity • Theoretical-concept related barrier: brand name

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practical-concept related barrier: preference-actual purchase gap • Practical-concept related barrier: consideration of functions in phones • Practical-concept related barrier: accessibility of mobile phones • The emergence of no-brand preference users
	<p>Theme 5: Insight into consumers buying patterns and understanding Myanmar mobile phones market</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contemporary market situation of mobile phones in Myanmar • The behaviour of Myanmar consumers • The main usage of mobile phones • The choice as a favourite brand: mobile phones • External influences on Myanmar consumers' consumption • Product evaluation of mobile phones • Buying behaviour of mobile phones

Limitation of thematic analysis

It is, on the other hand, important to recognise the disadvantage of this method. The main drawback of thematic analysis lacks substantial literature compared to that of other qualitative methods. Also, it does not allow researchers to express language use while other methods such as ethnography do so. As a weakness of theoretical flexibility, the lack of consistency and coherence can occur in developing themes from research data. However, these issues can be solved by applying and explicating an epistemological position that can underpin the study's empirical claims (Holloway and Todres, 2003).

6.4. Data analysis and findings

This section examines the findings from qualitative research with 20 participants who are well-experienced and active users of mobile phones. The findings from the interviews are outlined under six main themes: 1) Myanmar consumers' perception on brands, 2) preferences of developed or developing country-of-origin branded products, 3) influence of brand origin on product evaluation, 4) barriers to brand origin consideration in buying decisions, and 5) pursuit of consumers buying patterns. After analysing and coding each case, the processed data will assist the study to contribute the new knowledge of country of origin and brand origin concept in the Myanmar context as a final result. The processed data emerged from analysing and coding individual response assists the current research to contribute for the reasons behind Myanmar consumers' preferences and perceptions on certain branded products as well as how these consumers evaluate products in their buying decisions for mobile phones Myanmar consumer.

6.4.1. Theme 1: Personal opinions and beliefs influence Consumers' perception on brands

Perception of the representation of a branded product will be different from person to person based on their product preference. Without mentioning any specific product type, many participants describe a vague and subjective perception of generic brands. A few interviewees have a clear perception of brands linking with their life philosophy.

Brand consumption is not entirely crucial for me, it has a certain level of importance in my life when it comes to social situations. Personally, I have two levels of stages in my life – firstly, when I start working for my career, a brand can reflect my position and status. Eventually, when I can hold a higher position in my career, I can become a brand and the representation of a brand rather than a brand is the representation of me. (Participant #02)

Participant #11 clearly said that '*personally, I believe the talent is more important than a brand (s)he is using.*' However, this type of perception is rarely found amongst interviews for this research, and many consumers show the potential of considering people's opinion and presenting their image to fit in with them by using the trendy brands. For example, participant #16 had her own reasoning for buying two different brands of phones;

I bought Apple for the sake of people's impression in society, mainly for social status. When I buy another phone, Xiaomi, I consider many criteria such as camera function, email system, and other Android apps. (Participant #16)

It is found that the majority of Myanmar consumers consume branded products for their **self-image representation** purpose, whereas functional brands serve to fulfil their needs, but not

for image representation unlike high-end brands do.

6.4.1.1. Consumers' brand evaluation factors

In this regard, it is worth to mention how Myanmar consumers evaluate the brands they consume. Consumers tend to evaluate a product or brand based on their personal experiences and/or other people suggestions. *'My evaluation of a product doesn't link with the brand origin and the brand name. I like to search from the internet about that **brand** and ask my friends and family who have **experience** of using it. I also consider the **price** as well'* (Participant #11). The high level of **familiarity** with a particular brand can lead to a positive evaluation of it. *'I was already familiar with Samsung brand due to its different product categories such as air-con, washing machine, refrigerator- so, I already assume it will have good quality.'* (Participant #04).

Sometimes, the **name of a brand** is also an indicator of quality and price, which are crucial in bridging consumers' product evaluation and actual purchase. The majority of participants express their assumptions on a particular brand based upon **price, user experience, brand image** and the **manufacturing location** as indicators of a decent brand.

The most important thing I consider is the price – for example, I like Roll Royce but I cannot afford to buy it. The second thing is 'consumption or user experience' – for example, if I ride Roll Royce, it has a high consumption rate of petrol that is not okay for me. The third thing is 'brand image'; I mean I don't know much about branded products. However, having a good brand image means that it has good quality, uniqueness, innovativeness, ease-of-use, attractiveness and so on. (Participant #15)

I evaluate a brand, I like to look at my personal experiences, other people suggestions, the country of manufacture- for example, which specific country of among western countries, the price factor- for example some eastern-origin products have higher price value than others which give me the impression of having good reliability. (Participant #04)

I look at the brand name and then balance between other factors including quality, price – which are the most important, usability, guarantees and security of the phone. Also, I put the durability and reliability of the phone under my consideration of quality. (Participant #11)

The above answers prove that consumers expect specific attributes from a brand to offer when they invest their money on it. Interestingly, very few consumers link the **company's philosophy** to their evaluation and preference. The number of these customers are niche but express the potential of being loyal consumers to the company. Participant #19 expressed that;

'I think brand name and philosophy are also related because when you see a brand you know philosophy if I like it, I will buy that brand. [...] I wouldn't use Samsung because I feel like manufacturing mobile phones is not specialised in its company's philosophy. I mean Samsung has many other businesses apart from mobile phones and it makes me think that the organisation is profit-oriented'.

6.4.1.2. The impact of brand's prestige position

For most consumers, a good brand is the reflection of its prestige which in return, the representation of the status of its users. Participant #02 expressed her perspective, '*a brand can represent like 30 percent out of 100 in my life. For example, when you see Apple, you know the brand position of it and its representation to the user.*' Also, participant #15 had the same opinion, although he self-claimed that he is not a brand-conscious consumer, '*I accept that a prestigious brand can represent a certain status in society. For example, possessing Roll Royce cars or Apple phones.*'

The pattern is that **the higher the perceived prestige of a brand by consumers, the higher the level of expectations of consumers from that brand.** Participant #16 mentioned the expectations in the case of buying a phone, '*for western brands like Apple, I have high expectation from them in terms of technology advancement, durability, social status, innovation.*' Therefore, it is essential for the companies to successfully manage the popularity of their brand by focusing on how the brand to be positioned in the market.

In brand positioning, price is the leading indicator of whether it is a premium brand or not. Regardless of the genuine truth about brands, '*people have the perception that a product or a brand must be high brand status when they have a premium price*' (Participant #17).

6.4.1.3. Functions hunters versus status hunters

In this study, the researcher categorised two groups of users according to their outlook on an evaluation of a brand/product they use; 1) **functions hunters** whose evaluations are focused upon quality and ease-of-use, and 2) **status hunters** whose evaluations are based on status and self-representation.

Some remarkable answers from **functions hunters** are listed as below;

'Brand is not that important for me but when a brand represents quality, then it will affect me. I don't differentiate a brand based on its price but I care about the quality. [...] I will consider a brand that can provide a certain standard of quality for their products. I also do not accept the perception that a certain brand can represent the status of users.' (Participant #09)

'When you see a brand, you can know its quality and status since it is long-established from others. If it is a good brand, you don't need to do further research and make your decision-making process quicker.' (Participant #19)

'I don't accept the fact that I need to own a prestigious brand to show my status in society. My main concerns are the product's quality and ease-of-use in my buying decision.' (Participant #08)

'It is something to do with people's psychology rather than a brand as a representation of status. Of course, it a good brand can be an indicator of good quality but I don't think it is a guarantee for sure.' (Participant #05)

In contrast, **status hunters** evaluate a brand positively when it can achieve their **self-fulfillment** such as boosting confidence and/or good impression for others. Their perceptions are as below;

'Consumption of a brand is important for me, especially when I am going to important events or going out for meetings. I accept that a certain brand can represent a status.' (Participant #04)

'In professional life, for example, some people love to wear a branded watch to represent their status, some people love to use a branded handbag to represent it.' (Participant #14)

'A person's status by observing the brands they use and guess a status. If I am using a brand I like, it is kind of boost me my confidence because I know its brand value.' (Participant #01)

'I don't buy branded clothing a lot but when I wear a good clothing brand, it gives me confidence.' (Participant #16)

6.4.1.4. Product category matters and its choice depends on gender

On balance, these evaluations mainly rely on the type of product category. Participants in this research showed their different evaluations of different product types. Depending on the category, brand evaluation is important for some products yet insignificant for others. Participant #04 said that *'depends on the product categories, for example brand is not very important for the food products. However, for products which are sensitive such as cosmetics, brand is important in my consideration'*.

As a **male consumer**, participant #07 clarified that *'I think consumption of a famous brand is 50% important in my life because I cannot buy branded products every time, so I might buy a good brand for*

belts or phones.' Another **female participant** #16 shared the similar view, *'my perception is because I need to carry a handbag wherever I go, using a branded **handbag** can give a good impression to others even if I wear casual clothes.'* As a **managing director** in her family-owned company, participant #03 favoured on technology, *'I always buy reputable brands like Apple. This is because I suppose I don't need very expensive clothes to wear every day. For phones, I consider the durability and long-lasting, for example, Apple brand has good image for durability and usage within the business environment.'*

6.4.2. Theme 2: Stereotypical effect on foreign products is still relevant, yet consumers' preferences become rational and liberal

It has been realised that a consumer has a specific preference for each product after exploring Myanmar consumers' perceptions about generic brands in the market (as in Theme 1). The researcher then analysed their perceptions on developed and developing countries' branded products by encouraging them to discuss their opinions on available products in the market.

Generally, participants have a **positive perception of products from developed countries**. As explained in previous literature, consumers from developing countries show the admiration of products from developed countries, in terms of reliability, durability, technically advanced and prestigious. Amongst these criteria, participants primarily link their positive perception of western countries with the **quality** of a product. In analysis, it is found that nearly half of interviewees described their favourable quality perception to branded products from developed countries.

Moreover, the **quality perception is occurred to interrelate with price factor**. Participant #01 stated that *'I try to correlate the price and overall quality, to be honest. The higher the price of the price, the better the overall quality of it.'* Also, participant #04 mentioned that *'brand origin has impact of price and quality perception, for example, products from Europe are assumed to have better quality along with an expectation of having higher price.'* Similarly, another participant's #09 opinion is as following; *'In people perception, even though they haven't seen a product yet, they already have an expected price or quality when they hear a brand name or a country origin of a particular product.'* Some Myanmar consumers are willing to pay premium price for a good quality product or a durable product.

*'I consider a product's **durability, price** become important – for example, if the price is higher than others, the durability of the product should last longer, in my opinion.'* (Participant #19)

*'The **price and quality** are crucial factors in every purchase for me. Mainly because I do not mind paying a premium price for a good quality product, so I am not that price conscious.'* (Participant #11)

Table 6.4 illustrates the participants' evaluation of developed or developing country-of-origin branded products.

Participant's ID	Evaluations of foreign branded products	Country of origin preference (developed vs. developing)
#08	To my knowledge, I believe that western brands are more durable and better quality than eastern brands. In terms of my preference, I need to compare both the strengths and weaknesses of western and eastern brands. For example, after-sale service will be different based on the origin of country.	Equal but developed countries' brands on more favour
#10	<p>The big weakness of eastern brands or products, such as China, is they don't have R&D (Research and Development) whereas western products have good R&D and brands are very stable. As a drawback, when a company has good R&D, it will compensate the R&D cost by upgrading applications (in mobile phones) gradually without giving them all at once. For eastern brands like Chinese brands, they can put all applications on device because they just copy them.</p> <p>Eastern brands have more in touch with Myanmar consumers because it is widely sold in the market at an affordable price for the majority of users.</p> <p>My evaluation of both western and eastern brands are equal because different people have different needs in buying products. In phones, for example, when someone has a limited budget, (s)he will not consider western brands like Apple because it is out of reach whereas someone wants to show off the status rather than its functionality, then (s)he will not buy eastern brands.</p>	Equal
#11	<p>I like the strategy of eastern brands more because their phones are convenient and comfortable to use, they produce products at affordable price with good functions.</p> <p>If someone asks me for brand preference, I would recommend eastern brands for the majority of consumers.</p>	developing countries' brands
#13	<p>Even a less-known brand from western countries can create a positive perception in Myanmar consumers' mind. However, as an exception, eastern brand like Sony also create a positive perception due to its origin of being a Japanese brand.</p> <p>I think it is more important to consider an individual country's level of development.</p> <p>I perceive products from western countries and also western brands have more familiarity than eastern ones.</p>	developed countries' brands
#14	I don't have many perceptions of being western or eastern brands. I only have the perception that the bigger the brand name is, the higher I expect to get more benefits from using it.	Equal but developed countries' brands on more favour

	I don't know why eastern mobile phones are not strong and I believe that western brands are reliable .	
#15	Whatever I buy, I don't look at the differences between eastern and western brands, in terms of quality, brand familiarity . I believe that not every western brand is good and not every eastern brand has poor quality.	Equal
#16	<p>As brand familiarity, the eastern brands will have more exposure on consumers than the western one due to easy access to product-imports and transportation and affordable price.</p> <p>The main issues of these western brands for Asian consumers are that they are expensive and not user-friendly for everyone. Therefore, they can only target specific groups of users.</p> <p>I have a good impression on western brands because they are developed countries and have a long history of producing quality products.</p> <p>I purchase eastern brands for inexpensive nondurable goods but use western brands for displaying social status.</p> <p>[In phones] Eastern brands like Samsung and Xiaomi are quite user-friendly, cheap and practical in reality. Except for lack of innovativeness, eastern brands can have many features as western brands do.</p> <p>I would recommend eastern brands because it is cheap and easily accessible, although it is not long-lasting.</p>	Equal but developing countries' brands on more favour
#17	<p>[...] It is important to understand the consumption behaviour of Asian consumers. It is especially important for categories such as skincare products, or cars because Myanmar has scorching weather, or the road system is different from other developed countries. So I think products from Asian countries can be more compatible and familiar with Asian consumers.</p> <p>In general, a western brand can give you a good impression amongst the society whereas an eastern brand can offer you comfort and convenience-of-use.</p>	Equal but developing countries' brands on more favour
#18	I suppose western brands are more durable and reliable than eastern brands that are cheaper and less durable .	developed countries' brands
#19	<p>Western brands are leaders in creativity and innovation, whereas eastern brands have cost-effective ways which are suitable for users.</p> <p>As for me, I slightly prefer western brands over eastern ones because it has more brand options and choices than eastern brands.</p>	
#20	I prefer eastern brands more because it is familiar with the user and convenient for use . Some western brands are outstanding but not useful or suitable to use for Myanmar consumers.	developing countries' brands

#01	<p>Western products are better in quality, but I need to experience it first to know whether it is actually good or bad.</p> <p>Western brands have higher position although it can be dependent on product types, for example, I prefer perfumes or cosmetics to buy and use western brands.</p>	developed brands	countries'
#02	<p>If you focus on quality, western brands have advantages over eastern brands. It is not because all eastern brands are in reduced quality but because western brands have long history of brand origins which can act as their quality assurance.</p> <p>Western brands are more reliable and trusted. Eastern brands have low quality, although they are mass-produced. In terms of brand status, I think western brands have an impression of prestige in consumers' mind regardless of reality.</p> <p>Brand preference in western brands because my firm perception is that a brand from western countries is good regardless of product categories.</p>	developed brands	countries'
#03	<p>I am sure many people have a perception that western brands and products have better quality than eastern ones. On the other hand, eastern products are cheaper, easy-to-buy, and more familiar because we tend to share similar culture and tradition.</p> <p>My perception of western brands origin, especially in phones market, are quite positive. This is because it has better quality, durability, and status in the social circle.</p>	developed brands	countries'
#04	<p>Western countries have higher status because they are already developed, people from western countries are more likely to assure the quality, and take more responsibility for their produced products.</p>	developed brands	countries'
#05	<p>I believe western countries have better technology than eastern brands.</p>	developed brands	countries'
#07	<p>I like the phone brands from western countries because I think they can customise their products to suit users.</p> <p>If I do not know the brand name, but its origin says western-made, I would buy it.</p>	developed brands	countries'

6.4.2.1. The perception of categorising as foreign brands

As listed above, the opinions of participants on brands from either developed or developing countries show consistency with previous literature, seeing western countries as higher-profile than eastern counterparts. For those participants, it is difficult to change their perception which has been developed in their young age, overhearing that western brands are premium regardless of the reality. It is found that this **stereotypical effect** that derived from their family and social

environment's way of thinking that products from foreign countries, especially from the West, are good. In contrast, the main favourable perceptions of participants on eastern countries are brand familiarity as a result of geographical closeness and easy accessibility to after-sale services.

Specifically, many participants more favour on the term, 'developed versus developing countries', than 'western/ eastern countries.' Participant #16 highlighted that, '[...] *western brands perceive in my mind to have better quality. Depending on the individual country, I have a different perception of whether they are Eastern Europe countries that perceive to be less developed than Western Europe ones*'. Similarly, participant #04 suggested that '*I would say the status of each country, such as developed or developing ones, is more important than being a western country or an eastern country. [...] Japan is already developed; their products are expected to be reliable.*'

People accept that the quality of the product is dependent on the level of the development of the country, accepting that products from developed countries are expensive and in good quality. [...] Rather than considering a group of western countries or eastern countries, it is better to consider the strengths and weaknesses of each country. (Participant #05)

Hence, it is significant that consumers perceived that **the more developed a country's economic situation, the better the quality of products and the more trustable on brands**. Although Myanmar consumers show their evaluations on foreign brands as above, it is more significant to consider the developmental status of countries than regional geography for better perspective.

The main reason of Myanmar consumers' preference of considering the developmental status of each country instead of east or west is due to the **trust factor**. This research shows that the critical adverse perception of participants in developing countries is trust issues. Consumers show the belief that products from developing countries are ambiguous about its quality, brand promise and trust. Participant #01 stated that '*company can promise anything like being organic, I cannot trust at once due to its country situations.*' Also, participant #20 claimed that '*I don't dare to buy its foundation or makeup cushions. If it is from other developed countries, I am willing to buy and use them.*'

6.4.2.2. Every country has its own national product/s

Nonetheless, the product category plays an essential role in creating positive or negative perceptions about either western and eastern brands or developed and developing countries. Participant #08 explained that *'depending on product types, there are popular brands in each category because not every brand can good at every product category. [Although she is a loyal user of Apple brand] I won't buy Apple, let's say, washing machine because there already have other trusted brands in washing machines industry.'*

In this sense, participants show a pattern of **substantial consideration of origin for some product categories which matter to them**. As *female* consumers, for example, these two participants shared similar consumption and thoughts;

However, it is also dependent on the types of products. For example, I like to buy western branded handbags for the sake of status whereas I prefer to buy eastern branded **skincare products** as it is suitable for our Asian skin. (Participant #03)

Depends on the product category, for example, in the case of **cosmetics**, countries that have same skin tones/ complexion with me then I will prefer products from them. **Clothing** produced from countries that have similar cultural and economic situations like us can have influence as well due to their similar geographical and cultural position which make me think of being suitable to wear in my country. (Participant #04)

I think it largely depends on types of products, for example, Asian countries are famous for **gold, silk** and so on as well as African countries are well-known for producing a **diamond**, so when it comes to those products, I think the brand status of products of those countries are higher than others. (Participant #02)

I won't buy cars produced from Myanmar (Industrial Zones Motors) or India (Tata Motors) or China (Chery Motors). However, I will buy ceramics, **silk and porcelain** products from China. Also, Thai silk is famous in Southeast Asia and I am happy to buy them. But certain products like cars or skincare products, I will never buy Chinese skincare honestly. So, it is dependent on the type of product that is famous for. (Participant #11)

Many Myanmar consumers accept the concept that each country has its famous national products in different categories. They also believe that there are distinct brands in the market that are reliable and trusted by their users under different product categories. It seems that Myanmar consumers favour on western/developed countries, yet it counts on products which are reputedly produced by a particular country.

6.4.2.3. Contemporary issue: The emergent of Chinese brands' popularity

Chinese products and brands have a history of perceiving negative outlook from global consumers. However, it is found that Myanmar consumers display **a relaxed attitude towards Chinese brands, particularly in the mobile phones industry**. *'I think the country stereotyping is still influential but (for example, China) more and more companies are trying to internationalise and therefore, they do more quality control with their products to diminish the poor country stereotype of China'* (Participant #05). Participant #08 pointed out this factor; *'the economy of China is quite booming and many international companies manufacture their products in China. So, you can't avoid Chinese or made-in Chinese products in these days.'*

Another reason for Chinese brands becoming popular is that they know how to **tailor Myanmar consumers' needs**. Especially in the phones market, people's perception of Chinese brands of being poor in quality and cheap is eventually diminished. The majority of people are using Chinese phones brand. As a young developing country, the majority of Myanmar consumers demand for sophisticated smartphones at an affordable price due to their limited disposable income.

The quality and functions of Chinese brands like Oppo and Xiaomi become as same as Samsung, so people, including me, are willing to switch to Chinese brands. So, I think the quality and function have nothing to do with brand origin. A brand is good and well-known in the market regardless of its origin. (Participant #10)

China can develop many brands in the phones market; most of them are entirely new and enter into the market quite quickly. Chinese brands like Oppo, Vivo, Xiaomi, and so on are quite competitive and their market share in Myanmar is larger than western brands. [...] Also, they produce many series of phones and the latest versions become better and better. (Participant #12)

Despite some participants used to have negative perspective on Chinese brands in the past, they admit that their perception shift towards positive on these brands. *'Back in the old days, I have a perception of disliking 'made in china' products, but I don't mind seeing 'made in china' label on the product and will buy it if the brand is good'* (Participant #14).

However, there is a group of users with a strong determination of not consuming Chinese phones due to their doubts on Chinese brands' **durability, image, and technology advanced**.

Some Chinese phones are indeed copycat and their design and functions are precisely like western brands like Apple. Nevertheless, the quality of Chinese phones cannot be changed how much they copy on a prestigious phone's design. I will never buy those phones. (Participant #03)

China has a very large economy in Asia, but I will not buy advanced technological products because it is not a developed country in my mind. (Participant #11)

I asked the salesperson about Huawei p10 model and the price is nearly the same as Apple. But, I don't want to invest the same price of Apple for Chinese brand like Huawei. Since it is a Chinese phone, I have suspect in the product durability. (Participant #20)

Along with their perception of Chinese brands, some participants draw their attention to their perception of home country products, Myanmar. As the interview questions are semi-structured and the participants willingly express their opinions, the researcher notes them to examine their level of national identity and how it shapes their perception on consumption.

It is found that Myanmar consumers have **less tendency to consume their national products**. This is because *'Myanmar has skillful labours but the level of technology of Myanmar is quite low, and therefore, the level of product quality or research and development level are poor. I think that's why people don't want to use Myanmar products'* (Participant #02).

I have the perception that a product from a country that has higher development level than our own country will definitely have better quality. (Participant #16)

Like participant #16, Myanmar's young professionals are more **quality-conscious consumers** than ethnocentric consumers, and thus, they express their willingness-to-buy if the quality of products is acceptable.

Even Myanmar people have a negative outlook on products Made in Myanmar in terms of quality or durability or reliability. For me, I want to raise a good outlook on Myanmar products and change people perception on them. I think if an entrepreneur or a brand from Myanmar can penetrate the international market, then people's perception will change. (Participant #12)

However, if the quality is still the same, I would buy our nation's products. [...] If other similar countries like Lao, and Cambodia can produce something, I want to encourage my country to produce our own products. (Participant #17)

6.4.3. Theme 3: Brand origin has particular influence on the evaluation of both hard and soft attributes of a product

The results from the interviews showed that brand origin has **a certain level of influence on a product's evaluation**. The researcher categorised as **hard-attributes** and **soft-attributes** that have an impact on brand origin. By definition, hard-attributes are likely to be objective, measurable and principally associated with the functioning and performance of a product. Soft-attributes are subjective, emotional and concerned with the character of the product and its user experience. The hard attributes include factors such as price, quality and functional products and soft attributes are trust and impression creation/formation. In addition, the theme also explains the role of brand origin on consumers' decision-making process and their product purchase.

6.4.3.1. Hard attribute: the influence on price, quality

The perception of price and quality of a product can be different based on the brand origin of a product. It can also have impact on people forming attitude on a particular brand. Participant #01 outlined that, *'a Chinese brand can be as good as a US brand in every aspect of the product. But when a customer sees a US product at the same **price** as a Chinese product, he will choose a US product over Chinese brand because of its brand origin.'* Hence, it can be assumed that brand origin has impact on price perception of consumers.

Considering participants' comments, the influence of brand origin is more significant in intangible attributes like price and quality than tangible attributes. Participant #11 mentioned that *'I look at the brand first, I wouldn't say that brand origin is not entirely important but I look at brand origin only when I balance between **price and quality**. But I will not change my buying decision due to the country-of-origin or brand origin I don't favour.'* Also, participant #14 shared her outlook, *'I have an opinion that the price is the main factor between brand origin and quality of goods. A product can be the same, but when the price is different, people have the perception or expectation of being higher quality for premium price products.'*

The proposed pattern is that **brand origin has an initial effect on the quality of a particular country, and then the price of that product will be affected**. It can be assumed that the critical message of brand origin has a direct effect on its strategy of targeting a specific group of users by means of price or other factors. A good brand origin can enhance the price and

quality of a product as well as good quality and price of that product can create a positive image of a brand origin.

6.4.3.2. Hard attribute: the influence on functional products

Likewise the above attributes, it is found that consumers consider brand origin cue in buying functional products, saying that brand origin knowledge can make their decision making process quicker. In other words, brand origin offers a product's **reliability** in consumers' minds.

When I consider buying an expensive product such as cars, if an origin of that car is not good, then I have to spend time to carefully research about its [product] information before I buy it. When a car's brand origin is good and worth paying an expensive price, then I don't need to do so. (Participant #01)

I think brand origin will influence on utilitarian products because I would buy whatever I want for hedonic use of products by deciding spontaneously. When I think these and those factors should include according to its functions, then I will consider whether the product can offer these attributes or which origin of a brand can offer them for me. I will consider the strengths of a specific brand origin in delivering the promises the companies offer. (Participant #04)

Brand origin is more important in buying functional products because I need to consider the length of durability in everyday use. (Participant #05)

6.4.3.3. Soft attribute: the influence on consumer's trust

When consumers evaluate a product and intend to purchase, knowing its brand origin can deliver the feeling of **safety and reliability** to them. In other words, brand origin influences on the level of trust perceived by consumers on a product or brand. Participant #02 stated that *'an origin of brand has huge impact on a product they produced. For example, L'Oréal Paris is one of the famous brands in cosmetics industry due to its origin of French being a famous country for perfumes and cosmetics. So, I have a perception of French brand, L'Oréal must be good and reliable. Personally, I think the location of a brand comes from can represent 100% of a brand.'* The following quotes describe how brand origin has impact on creating trust in consumers' mind.

I think the brand origin of a product can give me a certain level of trust relating to the product I use. [...] consider brand origin more when it comes to risky products in terms of finance or physical appearances such as skincare and cosmetics. (Participant #03)

If I have a choice between two countries, for example, the same brand - the whole product is made in US and made in China, then I will definitely buy the US one. This is because, for example, Apple is US brand origin and I have more trust in the actual brand origin of the product. (Participant #08)

Buying electronic devices like phones favour for good brands because a good brand can offer the feeling of security to use. (Participant #14)

As a consumer, I expect to have a good quality of the product regardless of where it is manufactured. I have trust in the brand I am using and if that brand breaks the trust, then I will walk away from that brand. (Participant #18)

I consider the brand origin of a mobile phone before I make the purchase decision. This is because I have the trust in an original country of a brand is developed. (Participant #16)

I think a brand is related to the trust of users. For example, when I see a western brand, I have trust that the products are carefully testified. (Participant #20)

6.4.3.4. Soft attribute: the influence on impression creation/formation

The majority of participants opinionated a brand with favourable origin can deliver a **good impression on its owner** in the social environment. *'The brand origin has an influence on my purchase intention. In social context, the experience of consuming a good brand is really different from using a no-brand. I prefer to buy a branded product which is socially displayed in the groups'* (Participant #16). By reading the following statements, it can be clear that the main reason for consuming well-known brands with positive origins is to match with their profession and social status.

When I go for work- appointments as a director of the company, I need to consume a particular brand in order to match my status. In daily life, I don't need much consuming of popular brands, I use any brand when the quality is excellent. [...] For example, if you can use iPhone and MacBook, people have impression of you as an elite, especially it is crucial for business people. That is why I am using Apple now. (Participant #03)

It did not matter when I was in student life. I just chose the products that suit and convenient for me including clothing and handbags. For example, I did not pay much attention to brand but chose the ones which are trendy and suitable for me. When it comes to a working environment, I need to deal with other colleagues and professions. So, I use the similar brands they are using not because I want to show off but because I should be inclusive and presentable. (Participant #04)

I want to say it that even if we use whatever brand we like, we need to consider what others will think of us in society. (Participant #17)

In Myanmar culture, it is a norm to consider people's opinions, especially in **gift-giving context**. This is another aspect that the origin of the brand displays influence in consumers' mind. Interestingly, many participants consider the brand origin of a product more for a gift-giving than for personal purchase as a way of showing respect to the receiver.

I consider the brand origin more when I give a gift to someone because I want something presentable and many people think if a brand origin from some famous countries, they assume that it is expensive and valuable for them. [...] Myanmar people have a perception of products from developed western countries like England or Italy are prestigious. In order to show my respect to someone, I probably buy those products. (Participant #05)

I believe that the brand that I gave as a present is the representation of me. The brand shows how much value I put on the receiver. (Participant #16)

I consider brand origin when I give presents to others because it represents my social image and care for the receiver. (Participant #17)

Although I do not consider brand origin for a personal purchase, I consider it when I buy a gift for someone else. This is because people have perception that a product from this country is good or bad in general. (Participant #09)

Brand origin is quite essential for me because brand origin can convey the idea of how much I value them or care about them in my life. (Participant #02)

I consider brand origin more for giving a gift than my personal purchase because I want to show respect for the receiver. (Participant #20)

6.4.3.5. Soft attribute: purchase of high-involvement products

The nature of high-involvement purchase is that multiple buyers or multiple influencers can influence a single buyer. As mentioned above, Myanmar consumers' nature is considerate of other people's opinion; it is not surprising that brand origin influences high-involvement purchases. Not only that, there are other considerations such as **durability**, **return on value** that is influenced.

I only consider brand origin when I buy expensive products because I have to invest a considerable amount of money and I want the same **value-for-money** in return. (Participant #02)

Brand origin is more influential in buying products that need to spend huge money and have **durability** such as cars. I would consider brand origin for cars because its **level of risk** is more than other products. [...] I think that I need to consider either a country of origin or a brand origin for a product which I need to use for the long term. (Participant #05)

When I need to buy products that need to be **long-lasting**, I am a bit concern about the origins. (Participant #09)

In terms of technology and **expensive** things, brand origin has more or less important, like 10 percent in my decision-making. No more than that. Also, the brand origin will be conscious of products that need to buy by considering its **usage** and **functions**. (Participant #14)

The brand origin should consider for durable goods due to its **long-lasting** and **expensive** nature. Personally, I consider the brand origin while buying durable goods but do not consider products with short usages, such as foods or personal cares. (Participant #15)

I carefully consider the brand for electronics products and expensive products that I need to **take time** for decision making. There will be a precise cost for high involvement products whether money or replacement which I consider to use one product from 2 to 4 years. Then, I need more time in the decision making process since it is about long-term investment. Brand origin becomes essential at that point. (Participant #19)

6.4.3.6. The role of BO in the decision making process

In real-life purchase, consumers mostly have to compare different products/brands at one point of their decision-making process (Figure 6.6). Amongst these five stages, brand origin becomes the most influential factor in the step of **evaluations of alternatives**. Participants in this research mention about the consideration of brand origin in making comparison between brands from different countries. However, the consideration of brand origin does not show much impact on other stages.

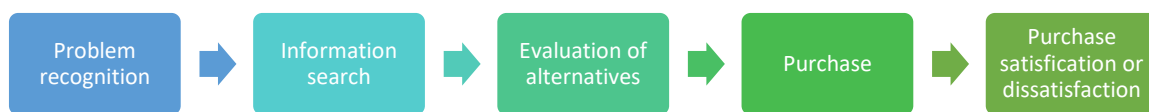


Figure 6.6: Consumers' decision-making process

Participants' statements are as following;

I don't have influence from brand origin while making a purchase decision. However, for example when I compare two brand origins of laptop, between Xiaomi and Dell, I will make comparison and choose Dell laptop unless Xiaomi has way better functions or specifications. (Participant #02)

Amongst Chinese brands, there is also have a different perception, for example, people love to buy Taiwan-made compared to Mainland China-made. If the image of the brand origin is good, people are

happy to buy them. If you compare the same quality product from China and America, there are more chances of buying product from America. (Participant #11)

I think the brand origin is slightly important in terms of comparison from one brand to another. (Participant #17)

If there is a comparison between two different brands, I will consider the origins of each brand in order to make my final decision. (Participant #19)

6.4.4. Theme 4: Brand origin is either unimportant or insignificant to consider in actual buying intention/ decision

Despite the relative consideration of brand origin in the evaluation process, a substantial number of barriers to brand origin consideration in participants' buying decision are found and emerged as an essential theme in the research. The researcher grouped them as two: **theoretical-concept related barriers** and **practical-concept related ones**.

6.4.4.1. Theoretical-concept related barrier: brand popularity

In modern consumerism, there are many brands in the market and allows consumers to have more choices than the old time. Consumers are more likely to choose some famous brands which have already established quality assurance and loyal customers in order for them to make decision process faster and save time. Besides, people are more likely to seek suggestions from friends and family since Myanmar culture is mainly collectivism. In this regard, either the popularity of a brand itself or the popularity amongst their social circle is influential in their decision making, but the consideration of brand origin becomes diminished.

For personal purchase, I usually buy well-known brands in the market and believe in its quality because the brand is already popular, so I don't think I need to consider the brand origin of it. (Participant #03)

When I need to choose a new product that a brand is not also familiar with me, the country attributes will affect my choice of products. If a brand is already long-established for its product, the country origin will not influence me. (Participant #09)

I don't bother about its brand origin. I think it is because its brand name is very well-known and prestige and brand recognition is quite high. (Participant #13)

I don't consider the brand origin of the phone because a brand is already well-established in the market. So I would say the country of origin becomes unimportant when a brand name becomes big enough to take in consumers' mind. (Participant #14)

Another consideration which is similar to brand popularity is **brand position/rank** in the market. Participant #19 stated that *'when I make a decision, in reality, I don't have much time to think and I mostly consider its brand **position** in the market.'* Also, participant #15 described that *'even the product is high-involvement and hedonic, I will buy a product that I am fond of rather than choosing according to brand origin. I consider the **'rank'** of that product in the market, but I don't consider its original country.'*

In reverse thinking, the penetration level of a country within international market can initially influence brand origin because it is widely produced and accepted in international market. Hence, that particular brand is seen as acceptable and becomes well-known which leads to its initial origin reach to the point of unnoticeable due to either the popularity of brand or its long-existing history in the market. In short, **the higher the level of brand familiarity of a product with consumers, the lower the level of brand origin consideration of a product by its users.** Many participants prove this proposition by stating;

The level of market penetration internationally can have influence in the initial stage while a company promises the good functions of the product. However, after people experience it and use it widely in the market, I don't think the effect of brand origin will be relevant anymore. For example, Chinese mobile phone brand Xiaomi is widely used and well-known in the market due to its reasonable price and quality although it is Chinese brand origin. Even though it is not as good as Apple, the quality is quite good and therefore, the brand origin of being a Chinese brand is not affecting anymore. (Participant #05)

For example, although Apple is a US brand origin and assembled in China, the brand name is already established in the market and thus, the brand origin is not that influential in my mind. However, it is lookalike as a history of a person which means that where he was born and raised has an impact on his life more or less. Looking at a brand where it comes from, it can give certain impression on a product's price, quality, and values. (Participant #02)

6.4.4.2. Theoretical-concept related barrier: brand name

Interestingly, participant #04 evaluated that the brand's name and its image can more influence the perception of consumers on a particular brand. *'**Brand image and brand name** will shape the perception rather than the origin. For example, both Xiaomi and Huawei are Chinese brands, Chinese origins, but the way I perceive on Xiaomi is different from the way I perceive*

Huawei. [...] As long as the current users accept a brand with positive feedbacks, an origin of that brand does not matter anymore. Even though a brand can have poor traits due to its origin, as long as its image is good, then the brand is acceptable.'

I don't consider brand origin because I only look at the brand name. If a brand name is well-known and I like it, I will buy without researching its brand origin. (Participant #01)

For personal purchase, I normally buy well-known brands in the market and believe in its quality because the brand is already popular, so I don't think I need to consider the brand origin of it. [...] Brand name is crucial for me, like 70 percent in buying phones because if a brand does not do well in the market and has a bad reputation, nobody will buy or recommend that brand to others. (Participant #03)

I consider the brand name rather than considering brand origin. I buy it when I like it, especially when I start using a brand and find that I like it and convenient to use. Also, I don't know much about the phone's specification. (Participant #05)

I do not consider brand origin when I buy things. For example, I don't think that iPhone made in USA is the best over other origins. I buy a product because I like it, so mainly consider the name of brand. (Participant #07)

The criteria such as reliability and durability are mainly dependent on the name of the brand rather than the origin. (Participant #15)

Since this study is mainly focused on mobile phones market, some participants gave the practical example of choosing their current mobile phones based on the brand name as well. The following quotes explain how and why they chose Apple's iPhones;

Some people in Myanmar are so conscious about the brand name, and there is a group of consumers who love Apple and would buy anything which is produced by Apple. Therefore, people have a mindset that a product must be good if it is produced from that brand and company like Apple, rather than giving a thought on country of origin or brand origin. (Participant #06)

Rather than saying brand origin, I would like to talk about 'brand' because I like Apple not because of its US brand origin but because 'it is Apple'. (Participant #17)

Apple is assembled in China to save the production cost but people are still willing to pay the premium price for its brand value. Honestly, I think an attribute like the brand name is more influential. (Participant #13)

Although Apple is a US brand origin and assembled in China, the brand name is already established in the market and thus, the brand origin is not that influential in my mind. (Participant #02)

6.4.4.3. Practical-concept related barrier: preference-actual purchase gap

Practically, it is common to see that consumers not always do what they say and this phenomenon is called an attitude-behaviour gap in marketing terms. Similarly, this research analyses that the main gap between the preference of consumers and their actual purchase is their **consideration of price-quality balance**. Although the brand is a consumer's favourite, many participants answer that they usually have an intended amount of money to spend on a product which means limiting the price range in their mind before purchase. One of the reasons is that all participants are young professions and millennium generation who recently start their careers, meaning they tend to have less disposable income than older consumers or other generations. Participants in this research show the consideration of **practicality** and **feasibility** in their purchase instead of following their hedonic needs.

In my age, even I have a brand preference but it doesn't necessarily important for me in decision making process. I have my own perceptions and expectations about western brands but in reality, I tend to spend money cautiously in every purchase I make. (Participant #16)

When you buy a car when although you like brand origin, you need to consider the price and buy a suitable one, which is affordable for you. (Participant #17)

However, I mostly buy products that are widely available in the country regardless of its western or eastern origins. I need to consider my budget whether I can afford to buy it or not. Even though I would prefer western and European brands to buy, I balance with my budget and income. Then I would buy eastern branded products in reality. (Participant #18)

I think it will vary from person to person based on their philosophy. For me in this age, I use a good brand at my affordable price in order to show my status, I don't buy a brand beyond my limits. I think if I buy a brand beyond my ability, it is more likely to behave as a show-off. I don't judge a product is bad when it comes from developing countries but I just focus on whether I can afford to buy a product from developed or developing countries. (Participant #19)

6.4.4.4. Practical-concept related barrier: consideration of functions in phones

Despite the importance of brand origin for other product categories, brand origin is entirely unexamined factor in consumers' buying decision of mobile phones. As one of the technological devices, potential users consider the functions, specifications, and compactness to them as key factors. Apart from it, the reputation of a brand in the phones market can also be considered.

I have my own requirements, so I do not look at the brand most of the time. I mainly consider functionality and design. Right now, brand is still the second choice after **functionality**, a primary concern. (Participant #10)

Brand origin is important to me. Other important factors are **functions** and **features**. If I have to choose between a brand origin I like (but not applicable) and a functional brand that is useful, I will go for the second one because there is no use buying a prestigious origin of mobile phone that I can't do anything with it. (Participant #16)

I don't consider the brand origin and I mainly consider the specifications I want to use. Wherever the brand comes from, I will buy if a **brand name** is reputable, and I like its **functions**. (Participant #05)

I do not consider the brand origin of a country. I consider the **functions** of that phone. The main factors are data security, quality and lastly, durability. (Participant #07)

Even though a brand is prestigious and offers the best quality, I cannot be able to use if its **specifications** and **functions** are not usable for me. (Participant #09)

I don't consider brand origin. I will buy it as long as it is convenient for me. Rather than looking for a particular brand, I mainly consider factors like **durability**, **comfortableness**, and **functionality** for work usage. (Participant #20)

6.4.4.5. Practical-concept related barrier: accessibility of mobile phones

In this research, it is found that participants mention the term “**ease-of-use**” for several times as a factor that leads to the actual purchase decision. Mostly, ease-of-use means **user-friendliness** and **convenience** in using their mobile phones. Nowadays, people have more exposure to their IT devices than contact with other human beings. Thus, the level of accessibility of mobile phones become essential in daily basis. Firstly, participants consider the **accessibility of software** (either Android or iOS) on their phones. For instance, when a participant is used to using iOS phone of Apple, it is difficult for a user to switch to using another phone with Android platform unless s(he) is a technology person. Secondly, participants show the unwillingness to consider brand origin or brand switch not because they are loyal to that brand but because the positive **user experience** of using their current phones. These mentioned factors can be seen in the following answers;

I don't have much consideration of brand origin because I usually buy products that are **convenient** for me rather than considering a specific brand in mind. (Participant #05)

I don't think the brand origin of those phones is important. I prefer the quality and **ease-of-use** for me. (Participant #01)

I do not consider brand origin. I accept that all Apple products are in the same quality regardless of where they are manufactured. I might consider the brand origin of other products but not for mobile phones. For mobile phones, I mainly consider **suitability** with Myanmar users. (Participant #07)

In people's mindsets, they know a brand origin of Coca Cola or another product, and they buy them not because of their brand origins but because of its **convenience of access**. That is why brand origin is becoming less and less important. (Participant #14)

Personally, I don't distinguish of being eastern brands or western brands in the mobile phone market. Even though I am currently using iPhone, I am willing to switch to another brand if it is **convenient** for me. (Participant #11)

I think the more important consideration is being **user-friendly** than considering its origin. I didn't research the brand information about Apple because it is so trendy and you don't even need to inquiry about its brand. (Participant #17)

As a third and last factor, the term accessibility also means the level of **maintenance** of a phone after purchase. Compared to the purpose of practicality and feasibility, the consideration of country-of-origin or brand origin become unimportant. Participants consider that the maintenance factor, including after-sale service and show unwillingness to buy a brand without having such support.

Brand origin is moderately important in buying but ease-of-use and being suitable for me the most important things I consider. This is because I need to buy accessories or other components to maintain my phone after buying and using it for a while. (Participant #08)

I prioritise the maintenance and after-sale service of the product rather than the origin of the brand while in actual purchasing. Even though I know a brand is excellent, I will not actually buy it if the maintenance is not okay for me. (Participant #20)

6.4.4.6. The emergence of no-brand preference users

Participants in this study show the pattern of no-brand preference consumers due to their tendency to be **rational decision-makers**. Participant #02 described herself as, '*I am a bit rational because even though I love a brand origin based on my feeling, I wouldn't buy it if it is not useful for me. Honestly, I don't have much preference on either eastern or western brands. I buy a product that does its purpose well and useful for me*'. Similarly, participant #11 explained that '*if I have to spend that particular amount of money, I am likely to do for rational purchasing decision. The brand name is not that important for me to purchase decision making, I will buy a brand that is convenient for me since I don't have my favourite brand*'. One

participant showed the willingness to use a product that is useful for him even if he has a negative outlook on a brand origin of it.

Predictably, these no-brand preference consumers do **not** show the pattern of **loyalty** on any brand. As long as a product can meet their needs and expectations, there is no consideration of a brand and its origin, especially in the mobile phones market.

I don't have a brand preference for most product categories. In skincare, I love Clinique because it is convenient for me. It is more important to be compatible, useful for me. I like to switch one brand from another and I am willing to try different brands. The main consideration is ease-of-use. [...] I primary have any favourite brand, I use one brand as long as I am okay with it. (Participant #01)

I don't have my favourite, I like Apple because it is convenient to use. To become my favourite, the quality needs to be good, the price should be reasonable, the company should be responsible for after-sale-services including guarantees.

I do not have any brand influence and I choose based on my requirements whether I want to use for this and that purpose. I will buy a brand that is suitable and practical for me. (Participant #10)

I am willing to switch one brand from another when the quality is indifferent and the price is cheaper.[...] I don't consider about the brand origin of a phone because I will buy iPhone or same-quality brands if that brand meets my need recognition regardless of its brand origin – western or eastern brands. (Participant #15)

It is interesting to explore the hidden motivation of being a no-brand preference user. In the analysis, **the fear of limitation** is found to be the primary motivator of not being unable to devote one brand. Participants show that brand loyalty can diminish their freedom of switching one brand to another and the choice of available brands in the market. Another factor is limitation in **product availability within the country**. As Myanmar used to be under military regime over six decades, the effect of sanctions by some developed countries can cause the limitation of brand and product availability for consumers. Apart from some elites and people who have exposure to international environment, the majority of Myanmar consumers rely on products available in the market and leads to the behaviour of having no-brand preference.

I do not have a favourite brand in the mobile phone market. Personally, I feel that when I have a favourite brand, it is like a **constraint** for me when I make choices. (Participant #10)

When I buy clothing, I **don't limit** myself to wear a specific brand but I love to wear any brand as long as it looks nice on me. (Participant #08)

I only look at the phone's capability and price. If you consider the brand-specific or brand origin only, your **choice** would be so **limited**. (Participant #15)

I wouldn't go to the shop and buy just one brand when I go shopping, it will definitely limit my choice.
(Participant #19)

6.4.5. Theme 5: Insight into consumers buying patterns and understanding Myanmar mobile phones market

This theme represents the pursuit of Myanmar consumers buying patterns in the mobile phones market. It emerges as the data-driven theme that found to be significant based on the participants' responses. After Theme 3 shows the specific influence of brand origin and country of origin on product evaluation whereas Theme 4 portrays brand origin/country of origin is not significant for buying intention of consumers, there is a need to in-depth understanding of the way Myanmar consumers evaluate the products and make the buying decisions for mobiles. The current theme highlights the essential knowledge of contemporary mobile market, the behaviour of Myanmar consumers including their usage and choice of mobile phones, their buying behaviour and other external influences on consumption.

6.4.5.1. Contemporary market situation of mobile phones in Myanmar

In Myanmar mobile phones market, the dominant brands are mainly from China and the US. These brands are not competitors, and instead they occupy very different target of consumer groups. While China has the advantage of having better camera function and reasonable price and quality, Apple's iPhones targets for elites and sophisticated consumers intended to display their status or image through a brand they consume. *'For example, Apple really focus on packing, design, and quality whereas Huawei can offer good value-for-money quality at its price'* (Participant #02). Other two participants also reviewed the current market situation as below;

The mobile market is quite big, different brands target their consumers differently. Two main groups of users use iOS and Android in Myanmar. [...] The perception of being a western brand or an eastern brand becomes blurred in people's mindset because there are quite a lot of mobile phone brands in the market.
(Participant #06)

In my perception, I think Myanmar consumers consider these attributes in the balance because the majority of Myanmar are in middle class or below middle class, so they are quite price-conscious. You can see most people are using Chinese phone brands. The percentage of people using Apple is very few compared to the whole population of the country. (Participant #11)

As a current market situation, the eastern brands have more market shares than western brands due to minimal market penetration rate of western phone brands. Findings in this study show that the western brands' market entry to Myanmar is prevented by not only political situation but also the misunderstanding of Myanmar consumers' behaviour. As an example, Blackberry (Canada mobile phones company) recently entered into Myanmar market but failed to market penetration. Participant #10 who is working for a big telecom company explained the main reason of Blackberry's failure; *'Blackberry users could not use internet in Myanmar and required additional costs and procedures to be able to connect with mobile data, but Myanmar consumers prefer on affordability and do not want to spend extra money for it. It is not because of blackberry's brand origin but because its technical requirement.*

As another good example, Ooredoo (Qatar-based telecom company) faced with negative criticism before their market entry due to its Qatar origin. The company had more difficulties than their main competitor Telenor (Norway-based) as a result of religious conflict and political situation within Myanmar. Fortunately, Ooredoo understood the behaviour of their potential users and managed to gain millions of subscribers by applying pricing strategy such as reducing price for the data packages. The company successfully managed to cover the negative impact of brand origin with better price and product packages than competitors.

6.4.5.2. The behaviour of Myanmar consumers

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that Myanmar consumers are **trend followers**. They like to change a new handset frequently according to the trend, design, and popularity. As one of the advantages of using Chinese brands, their need is fulfilled as those brands are affordable with attractive design.

In terms of durability and reliability, I think the consumption level of each phone brand is almost the same because a new model comes out like every six months, so I do not think about it that much. (Participant #13)

I want to try using Xiaomi as well. Its price and quality are very reasonable, unlike Samsung. I don't mind changing one phone per year for Xiaomi at that affordable price. (Participant #08)

I am the kind of person who likes to follow the trends and changeable. I don't seek for durability and I don't buy very expensive phone because after using it for a while I want to use another new one. (Participant #01)

As a result, many Myanmar people, apart from low-income households, own two phone number and two handsets. Nearly all participants in this research mention that they use two

mobiles phones – one for an expensive brand like Apple and another for a cheap Chinese brand like Xiaomi. They also mention that the reason for having two mobile numbers is one as work-related use and another as personal use.

The lifestyle in Yangon needs to have two SIMs/phones and many people own two phones in their hands. In this case, China brands are the second choice due to its sensible price and functions. (Participant #11)

I am currently using two phones, Apple and another Chinese brand. Apple meets my hedonic need for the sake of social status, but it is not compatible with my work's purpose. Hence, I bought a Chinese brand which is functional and useful for working. (Participant #16)

6.4.5.3. The main usage of mobile phones

Nearly ten years ago, the use of mobile phones was not common amongst young people and the usage was mainly for calls, communication, and functions such as camera to take photos. Participant #07 recalled the memory of using his first mobile phone in late 2000s, *'at that time, the phone functions were not advanced like now. My main intention was for communications and ease-of-use. Nokia was a famous brand in the market at that time. Later, since we have plenty of choices in the market in terms of brands, design, and style, I buy a phone brand that I like'*.

In the present, consumers shift the intention of using mobile phones from communication purpose to **social display**. The phones need to perform not only their basic functions but as a socially inclusive and presentable device.

One of the reasons is that I was about to study in a Western country and heard that iPhone was widely-used in western countries, so I decided to buy it without researching much about its functions. (Participant #03)

I still prefer Sony because I feel like it is more user-friendly, innovative and has a better camera function. The reason I am now using iPhone is that most people use it and my boss from the office assumes that it offers better security and privacy. [...] The reason why I changed those phones is mainly because of social influence. (Participant #04)

I have a brand preference and it is Apple because more and more people use this brand. The main thing is due to its brand popularity, innovativeness, and social situations like people around me using Apple. (Participant #13)

I switched to Apple because it is a brand with a premium price which can offer me a certain social role. (Participant #16)

I used to focus on my convenience of use regardless of the brand name. Eventually, as I grow older, I become more favour in good brands based on my social setting. (Participant #01)

6.4.5.4. The choice as a favourite brand: mobile phones

Although many participants show the characteristic of no-brand preference for mobile phones, this study still explores how they choose a brand to become their favourite. In this point, it is found that two categories of users: some focus on **the capability of mobile phone itself** and others focus on **the performance of the company**. The first group of consumers favour on the specifications and functions of a brand to become their favourite whereas the second group considers the reliability of the parent company in terms of delivering company's promises and trustworthiness.

<p>Consumers who consider the capability of mobile phone</p>	<p>My favourite brand, I consider whether it is compatible with me or not, innovative or not, value-for-money. (Participant #04)</p> <p>I prefer Apple to those brands. It is unique, innovative, and durable and also has nice features and quality. (Participant #15)</p> <p>I like Apple in terms of design, useful functions for me, good return for investment and status as well. (Participant #19)</p> <p>I don't have my favourite, I like Apple because it is convenient to use. As my favourite, the quality needs to be good, the price should be reasonable, the company should be responsible for after-sale-services including guarantees. (participant #11)</p>
<p>Consumers who consider the reliability of company</p>	<p>I expect them to offer at least 90 percent of their promise to earn my trust. Because I usually buy a product based on the company's promise. The higher level of expectation you have on a product, the higher chance of disappointment you could have when a product does not perform as it is supposed to. (Participant #01)</p> <p>A brand is essential for me because a famous brand can deliver a promise as it said and guarantee for you to offer a worthy experience. (Participant #08)</p> <p>Apple products assembled in China but people, including me, will buy it as long as the brand is prestige regardless of the location of manufacturing. It's because we have trust in its brand. (Participant #20)</p>

6.4.5.5. External influences on Myanmar consumers' consumption

Participants are asked to identify the process of buying mobile phones from the first phone to the current one. They were mainly influenced by family and friends' recommendations as well as the popular brands in the market at that time. It is also found that external factors influence their consumptions are **brand popularity** and **social influence**.

I used Nokia at that time because it was a quite popular brand in Myanmar at that time and everyone was using it. (Participant #03)

My very first phone was Nokia because it had a user-friendly interface, tough, long-lasting and my family suggested me to buy it as it had quality insurance. (Participant #15)

I switched the brand mainly because Nokia cannot follow the trend of advanced technology when its competitors were making changes in advanced technology. Back then, I wanted to use the brand that my friends were using. (Participant #05)

Some participants mentioned that they notably have social influence at every time they buy a new phone. Participant #21 mentioned that '*I mainly rely on the brand name and I don't have brand preference. When I see a good brand, I am willing to change. Another thing is people around me can sometimes influence my decision making*'. Similarly, participant #20 describe her impression on a brand can be influenced by certain people, saying '[...] *but people from my environment, my social circle- including my idols, I would think that certain brand as a good one, so, such social factors will influence my decision*'.

Besides, it is found that consumers more rely on the **feedback and reviews of peers** in their social circle than company's message. In other words, word-of-mouth is more influential than advertising.

I chose Samsung and I think that is why I feel familiar with Samsung. Then, I changed to Huawei because it became popular in the market and heard positive feedback from the users. (Participant #08)

Then, I rely on searching for customer reviews online/offline more. So, the main decision making is mostly based on my own research rather than the messages that a company delivers. (Participant #11)

For me, when many people around me use a particular brand, I want to buy it too. As I am not a heavy user of technology, if I don't know something, then I can ask my friends and family who are using the same brand. (Participant #21)

Another essential yet underrated factor in academic literature is the **influence of popular culture**. In recent years, Korean drama series and K-pop culture have been spreading in many

Asian countries including Myanmar. Some participants expressed that either their brand switching behaviour or choice of brand is sometimes influenced by K-pop culture. *'I changed to Sony because it has a beautiful design. Then, I switched to Samsung touchscreen phones after smartphones became popular. Korean drama series are one of the influences of choosing Samsung phone for me because I saw Korean actors and actresses use in the drama and wanted to use it'* (Participant #03).

6.4.5.6. Product evaluation of mobile phones

From these suggestions, it is questionable which factors are more influential on consumers' perception of the brand origin of mobile phones than certain country attributes. Consistent with the findings in Theme 3 which *explored brand origin evaluation on general products*, factors including the level of **brand familiarity**, **brand reputation**, and **image** have a direct influence on brand origin. The statements from participants are as following;

There are many Chinese brands but if you compare to a well-known Chinese brand and less-known brand, I will buy a well-known one even though both brands come from the same country. So, the stereotype is not important for me but the **brand familiarity** is important in purchasing. (Participant #08)

Many international companies do so since they can manage their product quality and brand name; otherwise it will destroy their **image and reputation**. In these days, my perception on these country stereotypical effects become diminish slowly. (Participant #14)

It will have huge impact on brand origin because when a brand has strongly **stable image** in its own and then it has a high chance to success within the international market. (Participant #07)

Nowadays, more and more eastern countries are catching up with western countries to improve quality and technology so I think the stereotype line will blur in the future. (Participant #19)

Most importantly, the level of **technological advancement** the crucial factor for mobile devices.

I think technology advancement is the most important in supporting a good brand origin. Similarly, a country's economy needs to be developed when a political situation is stable. I think it is related to the laws of the government. [...] I think it is a concern with the country because USA has Silicon Valley and technology is already advanced which can be advantageous for Apple. (Participant #05)

The technological advancement is important in consideration of whether a product is innovative, safe and secure, as well as research and development of that product. (Participant #10)

6.4.5.7. Buying behaviour of mobile phones

Different people have different perception in their buying pattern. In this study, some participant saves money before the purchase of a new phone, whereas some do not have budget limitation and buy a brand immediately based on the recommendation of either salesperson or friends and family.

In general, Myanmar consumers the factors of **quality, durability, design, and data security** in their buying decision making. The following quotes can offer an insightful explanation of their buying behaviour of mobile phones.

It [Apple] is a US brand and the country is a developed country and the products from US are expected to have a better quality than others. Price doesn't matter for me; I will buy a product at a certain amount of price if it is worthy for me. I will equally focus on factors such as durability and reliability as well as design and style. If I only focused on durability, I would have used Nokia. [...] Whenever I buy a phone, I consider the *design, functions, and durability* of the phone. Many Chinese phones are in beautiful design but they are not long-lasting, therefore I won't buy them. (Participant #03)

I like Apple because the brand is very well-established and comfortable to use for me. My first priority in buying mobile phones is safe and secure. Apple can guarantee *data safety and security*. Then, I will consider the *design and functions*. (Participant #07)

The good thing about Samsung is software but the hardware function is not useful because it can become hot after using for a while. That's why I change to iPhone because it has good *security* and very strong in *durability*. (Participant #08)

I first assessed the *quality* of the product. Then, I compared the famous brand and infamous brand based on my needs. After that, I balance the price of these brands and buy the one that is practical for me. (Participant #10)

I do not mind paying for a reasonable amount of money if a product can use it longer. I balance the price and the duration that I intend to use. (Participant #14)

But now, I am okay with using iPhone with iOS because it is hard and durable. It has a good camera function and is easy to *track the location* of the phone in case of losing it. [...] I also consider other factors like *quality and design*. Mobile phones, for example, since I have much information on my phone, it is not convenient for me to switch a new phone within a year or two of using the current phone. (Participant #18)

6.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, the qualitative exploratory research have conducted in the investigation of more in-depth knowledge if 'why' and 'how' than a descriptive question of 'what' that is answered in the previous quantitative chapter. The one-to-one interviews of 20 participants who showed the moderate to high exposure to mobile phones through their product knowledge and experience are conducted. Then, the obtained data transcripts are analysed and coded by practising thematic analysis. The results are critically chosen among the answers of the interviewees to use as support arguments and legitimate evidence as the assurance of the data's quality and reliability. The primary five themes with many subthemes are presented accordingly, supporting data to answer the objective *five* and *six*; a) *to investigate Myanmar young professionals' preferences and perceptions on foreign branded products*, b) *to explore how Myanmar consumers evaluate mobile phones in their buying decision*. Since all the data analysis are fulfilled, the following chapter leads to the discussion on the research findings and accumulating the research objectives.

Chapter 7: Discussion

Main contents

- **Discussion of findings**
- **Accumulation of the research objectives**
- **Discussion of extant literature review**

This chapter aims to describe the detailed theoretical underpinning of the findings obtained from the data analysis chapter (Chapter 5 and 6). It has been divided into four sections answering the six research objectives. These sections examine the study's objectives which have been systematically tested with hypothesis both quantitatively and qualitatively. Answering the main research question of the current study, the discussion focuses on examining the effect of country of origin, brand origin, product-related country image and brand image on Myanmar consumers' product evaluation and how these origin and image cues of chosen countries and brands can influence on Myanmar consumers' buying intention/willingness to buy.

Precisely, the role of product evaluation on the relationships between origins-images ascendants and consumers' willingness to buy is determined using the quantitative (survey) method. Besides, Myanmar young professionals' preferences and perceptions on foreign brands and the relationship between the product evaluation and their buying decision for mobile phones are explored together with the qualitative (interviews) method where appropriate, with the intention of support the argument.

7.1. The effect of product country image, country of origin and brand image on Myanmar consumers' product evaluation of foreign mobile phone brands

7.1.1. COO information

In literature, the COO studies show the influence on product evaluation of consumers by generating as global indicators of quality, performance, or specific product attributes. Consumers evaluate this product attributes along with the perceptions of country stereotype and their previous experiences with products from a particular country. For this purpose, COO is viewed as a form of stereotyping that assists in processing information fast and reducing potential risk in their purchase (Josiassen and Assaf, 2010).

However, the current study proves that COO has no influence on product evaluation in the overall model, rejecting *H1a: COO information will affect significantly on Myanmar consumers' product evaluation of mobile phones brands* ($p = 0.921$, path coefficient = -0.002).

Respondents show a significantly high level of usage other brands in this study (i.e., Apple, Samsung, Xiaomi) but no influence of COO on the product evaluation of these phones. The influence of COO on product evaluation can vary according to the level of consumers' motivation and product knowledge. Cheah and Phau's (2014) study on the COO cues as part of product (wine) evaluations of Australian consumers find that more knowledgeable consumers are found to base evaluations on intrinsic attributes rather than extrinsic cues such as COO cues and country cues. When consumers have sufficient knowledge of a particular product, the influence of COO becomes weak. Under a situation where COO information is available, consumers with high levels of product experience and knowledge would likely to use intrinsic attributes when evaluating familiar hybrid brands rather than extrinsic uses of COO. This demonstrates consumer's ability to separate beliefs, attitudes and emotions towards a country from their assessment of that country's product (Kinra, 2006).

The focal products of many COO studies become emphasising on the more complex and ambiguous aspects of the COO information which is called as hybrid or bi-national products (Andersen and Chao, 2003). Researchers such as Samiee et al., (2005) study the impact of hybrid products weaken the COO information because the 'made-in' cue becomes less dominant or relevant due to the increase in consumers' confusion in determining the multiplicity of COO information (e.g., County of Assembly, Country of Design, Country of Manufacture). Thus, the suggestions from this study in line with many scholars (Phau and Prendergast, 2000; Hui and Zhou, 2003; Samiee et al., 2005; Koubaa, 2008) who suggest the concept of de-origin or decomposition of COO from made-in cue to brand-cue. Since the utilisation of COO cue does not impact on consumer product evaluation of hybrid products (i.e., mobile phones in this study), it is more effective to focus on 'non-manufacturing' based nationality as a product origin indicator for product evaluation, in the case of hybrid products.

For the theoretical perspectives, this study takes the standpoint of the concept of COO information as the entire dependence on explicit and direct measurement of 'country stereotypes.' The practice of stereotype literature is conceptually more fluent because the information consistency with stereotypes can provide consumers and respondents of research with more convenient information processing (Lee and Aaker 2004; Macrae et al. 1994;

Sherman et al. 1998). Therefore, in this research context, the product origin is the same as the brand origin to achieve the consistency and fluency of product information with consumer stereotypes (i.e., brand information), helping consumers to have more readily process information. Due to the practice of correct processing fluency in this study, it can lead to more positive evaluation of a product and more positive attitude toward the brand. It has been found that the fit of the country of brand origin and product origin has an impact on attitude toward the brand. Despite the fact that the study follows this practice with the aim of research consistency, the results still show that the COO fit does not show the significant impact on product evaluation and brand attitude of Myanmar consumers.

7.1.2. Product Country Image

The concept of country image includes three levels –overall country image, aggregate product-country image and specific product-country image (Roth and Diamantopoulos, 2009). This study takes the perspective of product-related country image, which defined as “the overall perception consumers’ form of products from a particular country, based on their prior perceptions of the country’s production and marketing strength and weakness” (Roth and Romeo 1992, p.480) and tests its influence on consumer product evaluation. The results show that *H2a: Country image of a product (PCI) has a direct positive impact on product evaluation of Myanmar consumers in buying their mobile phones* is accepted (p-value < 0.05, the highest weight of path coefficient 0.439). In this sense, Myanmar consumers’ perception of mobile phones from the USA, China, and South Korea shows the positive influence. The product image of each country is measured by the criteria including innovativeness, design, prestige and workmanship. This finding proves that Myanmar young professionals consider their previous perceptions of the country’s production and marketing strengths in their product evaluation.

One notable finding is that the product-related country image of China is generally portrayed as an unfavourable figure in many studies in terms of product use or media coverage. Typically, Chinese products are famously linked to low cost and low quality along with general issues such risky product safety, exploited human rights and US-China trade disputes. Differ from previous studies, this research shows the favourable influence of the product-related (i.e., mobile phones) country image of China.

Although several explanations can emerge for different product categories, this study finds two main reasons to explain the possibilities of favouring on Chinese mobile phones – Myanmar’s

economic situation and politically alliance with China government. After many western and developed countries enacted the economic sanctions due to the military government, Myanmar trade system heavily relies on China and consequently, Chinese products dominant in the consumer market. Despite negative reputation of China-made, the majority of country population is low-income household and the low price of China-made products become the favourable choice for consumers. Similarly in mobile phones market, Chinese phones hold the large numbers of users due to its affordable price with sophisticated functions, practice of promotion strategies tailored to fit with local consumers. On the political level, the diplomacy between China and Myanmar has long been positive in term of trade, defence, security relations and other political alliance issues.

7.1.3. Brand image

Brand image has three dimensions – functional, symbolic and usage situation based dimensions – which include physical aspects including the reliability of companies' products or psychological brand attributes (Kotler et al., 2003). The consumer perception of brand image form bases on two factors: consumer's characteristics as an internal factor and the product features and country image perceptions as an external factor. In literature, the construct of brand image is testified under the association with country image or country of origin. The 'umbrella concept' of brand image refers to the influence of country image on brand image perception in consumers' perception. Similarly, Yamen and Koubaa (2008) reported that COO information has a significant direct effect on the brand image as well as an indirect effect on brand image perception due to the moderating effect of brand and country reputation.

In this study, brand image is investigated as an independent construct along with other independent variables of product-related country image and country of origin. It is found that *H3a: Brand image has a direct positive impact on the evaluation of Myanmar consumers on foreign mobile phones brands* is proved (p-value < 0.05, the second-highest weight of path coefficient 0.361).

The existing literature indicates that consumers have stereotyping perceptions of brands; for instance, Eastern brands versus Western brands. Thus, it is expected that the western model and eastern model comparison can indicate some differences, as in the COO effect. However, this study proves that brand image can influence consumer product evaluation independently without any association with country image or country of origin. Results from the interviews indicate that the stereotypical effect becomes diminish due to the globalisation effect, complex

logistics and diverse manufacturing locations. Particularly for the evaluation of mobile phones, consumers mainly consider product-related attributes as brand image rather than general country-based dimensions.

In addition, the relationships of PCI \rightarrow PE (0.437), and BI \rightarrow PE (0.361) show the strongest path of all the relationships in the conceptual model. It is shown that the construct of product evaluation plays a more important role than willingness to buy in the association with images cues of mobile phones. Simply put, the use of product-related country image and brand image are more influential as product evaluation tools than encouraging consumers' willingness to buy.

7.2. Understanding the influence of origin and image cues of country and brand on Myanmar consumers' buying intention

7.2.1. COO information

Many researchers, including Papadopoulos et al. (1990), Laroche et al. (2005), Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009) and Maher and Carter (2011), state that COO construct consists of three components. A cognitive component as a quality sign of the product, an affective component as a product representing the emotional and symbolic value for consumers, and a normative component as a social and personal relationship between consumer and COO. Each component shows a particular effect on product evaluation and consequently, on consumers' buying decisions.

Contradict to these assumptions, the results from the current study show that although COO does not influence product evaluation, it has a direct influence on consumers' willingness to buy. *H1b: COO information will affect significantly on Myanmar consumers' willingness to buy mobile phones* is accepted (p-value < 0.05). Supporting the results from the current study, Wang and Yang (2008) indicate that COO image may both directly impact purchase intention as well as indirectly influence the impact of brand personality on purchase intention. Wang and Yang (2008) also point out that COO effect depends mainly on the product category.

One possible explanation of the interestingly contradicts result from the previous studies is due to the type of research product (i.e., mobile phones). In previous studies, country of origin information, in general, does not have influence on the choice of product unless consumers have lack of access in intrinsic cues or the low level of consumer expertise (Shahzad, 2014). Besides, consumers' perceived level of product involvement influences their consideration of

COO information and they tend to choose simple evaluation tactics for low involvement products by making quick decisions (Shahzad, 2014). Ahmed et al. (2012) find that factors such as brand price was more important than the origin of the product in the case of low product involvement.

However, it is widely accepted in the literature that the effect of the COO cue on consumers is not homogenous. The effect can be different based on other contextual factors such as product involvement, product knowledge or familiarity, and product category (Lee, Yun, and Lee 2005; Papadopoulos and Heslop 1993; Roth and Romeo, 1992). In the process of buying mobile phones, the majority of consumers focus on both intrinsic attributes such as the battery, storage, camera, display, model and extrinsic attributes such as COO information and the company's reputation of product itself.

This study also aligns with Papadopoulos and Heslop, (2005) who prove that country of origin, brand name, price and quality assurance are more important for high-involvement products, relative to low-involvement products. Considering this, the purchase of mobile phones can be assumed as being a high involvement for Myanmar consumers. Also, this study rejects the assumption of Pharr (2005) stating that the influence of COO is more likely to operate through other variables rather than directly on purchase intentions. Instead, it clearly shows that a positive COO information can influence a favourable purchase intention for consumers and a negative COO information can cause the adverse behaviour.

7.2.2. Product Country Image

The approach of country image's influence on consumer behaviour in this study is different from the previous ones – a) it considers the constructs of COO and country image separately as individual variables, b) it takes the perspective of product-related country image amongst three categories of country image concept. These considerations of product-specific country image can be one explanation of the proved relationship between PCI and consumers' willingness to buy.

Verlegh (2001) indicates that consumers' mental association with affective and cognitive attributes of a country can influence on the image of the product from that country. However, the influence of country image on examining willingness to buy foreign brands has less research attention from scholars. Instead, it has been accepted as an influential factor on product and brand evaluation of consumers. Li et al., (2009) examine the influence of product's

country image on consumers' purchase intention and find no impact of on purchase intention. Many previous studies state that country image has no direct impact on purchase intention but indirect impact through consumers' attitudes and product evaluation (Li et al, 2009). Lee and Chen (2008) also state that country image has no direct influence on consumer's willingness to buy but has an indirect influence on WTB through product beliefs.

However, this study proves that PCI have a significant impact on consumers' purchase intention by accepting *H2b: County image of a product shows a direct impact on Myanmar consumers' willingness to buy mobile phones*, which in line with the findings of Papadopoulos and Heslop (2000). Papadopoulos (1992) suggest that the higher the level of globalisation, the greater the significance of product country image.

Focusing on the micro-level (i.e., product level) country image, a consumer can determine the product's country image in four factors – the level of innovativeness, the design of products, the level of prestige, and the level of country workmanship which are the main attributes in consideration of buying mobile phones. Interestingly, the results of quantitative data show that the product country images of brands as Xiaomi and Samsung linked with higher willingness to buy than that of developed country's origin of brands as Apple. The main influences of this outcome are due to brand familiarity, and the convenient accessibility to products.

In literature, there are two effects of country image; *summary effect* which consumers stereotype the origin of products by using either past experience with similar products and *halo effect* which is a general impression of the country. In Myanmar consumers' context, the summary effect of country image is more influential on consumers than halo effect because they mainly consider the recommendations of other users of the product, their previous experience with the product, and their expectations on the product's performance. Although an overall impression of one country has an impact to some extent on consumers' product evaluation, it is not applicable for the intention of buying a particular product such as mobile phones.

On the other hand, this study agrees with the view that the perceptiveness of the country image effect is 'product category-specific' and the findings also prove that it is more applicable to consumers' product evaluation and willingness to buy. The results from the qualitative data show that general country image is not as effective or influential as a specific country image of a product. Many participants indicate the fact that every country has its own national and unique products and the influence of country image is vary depending on the type of products.

7.2.3. Brand image

The influence of brand image is largely examined in the context relating to brand loyalty and other brand-related attributes (Hanaysha and Hilman, 2015). The study examines the influence of brand image on willingness to buy and finds the relationship between these variables have been proven, by accepting *H3b: Brand image of a product show a direct impact on Myanmar consumers' willingness to buy mobile phones*. Also, the multigroup analysis's data reveal that there is a significant difference in the brand image of Apple and that of Xiaomi. Initially, the brand image is measured by its creation of distinct image in consumer mind, the company's ability to deliver its promises, a brand's support for their ideal image, a brand's manufacturer image, used by scholars including Nigam and Kaushik (2011) and Hanaysh and Hilman (2015).

However, after conducting the pilot study, it is found that omitting a brand's manufacturer image item can increase the overall reliability of the brand image scales and thus, three items are selected to measure consumers' perception on brand image in the final survey. The qualitative data of interviews also show that Myanmar consumers do not consider the country of manufacture as an important influence in determining the brand image. Depending on the consumer's levels of product knowledge, participants in this study reveal that a brand's manufacturer image has little impact on brand image as long as the company's guidance on quality control (QC) on its products. In addition, it is not practical to consider an image of brand's manufacturer nowadays due to the movement of global supply chain and manufacturing process where many businesses shift their factory locations to more profitable countries.

The research product of the study – mobile phones – can sometimes be considered as high involvement product in terms of moderate financial risk, high technical complexity, significant differences between alternatives, and representation of users' self-image. However, Myanmar young professionals do not perceive the purchase of mobile phones as high involvement decision-making process. In fact, it relies on the purpose of usage; for example, the data from this study reveal that it is not uncommon for Myanmar young consumers to occupy two mobile phones for work and personal purpose. The mobile phone purchased for work-related purpose is mainly to focus on the functionality of it whereas the purchase of their personal phone is focused on the brand name and image. Regardless of this phenomenon, the direct relationship between brand image and consumers' willingness to buy is proven. The results of the study are in line with previous studies including (Koschate-Fischer, 2012; Shahzad, 2014; Gürhan-Canli,

2018) who stated that brand has a significant impact on evaluation of a product by consumers regardless of being low or high-involvement products.

It is crucial for companies to uncovering their position in the marketplace for the growth and understanding consumers' perceptions of their products/services. The interview data reveal that consumers consider the brand position within the market instead of considering country of origin or brand origin per se. Depending on the brand's value proposition to consumers identified by individual company main philosophy, missions and values, it is found that the brand image of product and its popularity can be vary amongst different target consumers (Toldos-Romeo and Orozco-Gomez, 2015). Myanmar consumers form their perceived brand image in their mind by the reputation of brand name in the marketplace, the recommendations from the existing users, the previous experience of their own, as well as their motives of buying a new phone. This finding is in line with other studies which state that consumers' purchase decisions can be dependent upon brand images which is previously created in consumers' minds rather than from original attributes or characteristics of the product itself (Toldos-Romeo and Orozco-Gomez, 2015).

As an independent construct, many scholars underpin the brand image with theories of Goffman (1956) and Belk (1988). Escalas and Bettman (2003) examined that consumers use narratives stories to understand the role of brands in their lives. For example, Goffman's "life is a stage" metaphor can be extended as the concept that actors use the brand in order to develop their characters. Also, self-brand connections can measure how individuals incorporate brands into their self-concept (Escalas and Bettman, 2003). People use brands and products to create and represent desired self-images to others as well as to themselves. This process clearly shows the linkage between the brand and the self (Ratneshwar, Mick and Huffman, 2003)

Schouten (2015) confirm that Belk's theory is one of the most influential concepts in marketing research relating to the nature of consumer self and identity, consumer-brand relationships, product symbolism and consumer collectives. Two self-concepts have been used in consumer research: actual self-image and ideal self-image. The individual social self-concept, which is the image he or she would like others to have of him or herself has obtained research attention. Advertising that appeals positively to consumer's self-image tends to be effective (DeSarbo and Harshman, 1985; cited in Schouten, 2015). Consumers tend to choose products as the representation of their perceptions of selves and reject those which are inconsistent with them. As one of the limitations of the 'extended self' theory, Belk recognised that his metaphor is

mainly conceptualised in the Western and masculine background, resulting in the need for testing in multi-cultural perspective and alternative postmodern perspectives on self and possessions. For example, consumers from collectivist cultures can have good perceptions of a specific product but tendency to buy another due to social pressure.

Similarly, Myanmar consumers rely on the brand image in their purchase decision because of a number of reasons, according to the qualitative interviews. Firstly, consumers believe that a good image of the brand is the representation of user self-image. This phenomenon can be supported by the theory of 'extended self' introduced by Belk (1988; cited in Sichtmann et al., 2019). Belk claims that consumers' possessions play a major role in reflections of their identities. The premise is mainly emphasised on the relationship between self-concept and consumer brand choice which has been underpinned by many scholars. In this study, the relationship between brand image and consumers' purchase intention has posited in the form of buyer behaviour rather than consumer behaviour. For companies, it can be more effective to imply the market strategy that enhances consumer's self-image in a positive way.

Secondly, a positive brand image perceived by Myanmar consumers boost the brand prestige and confidence and consumers show the trust in the brand's capability of delivering companies' values. To support more, scholars including Nguyen et al., (2013) point out that a good brand image can deliver a perceived value because consumers decide to buy a product with the expectation that specific attributes of the product help to achieve the desired values as a consequence of using that product. However, consumers' devotion to a specific brand derives from emotional perceptions and include both functional and symbolic brand beliefs (Keller, 2000). Especially, brand image is the determinant of the emotional impact of the brand on consumers based on their perceptions of brand attributes.

It is widely acknowledged that consumers' perceptions are rather subjective. In this study, a good brand image perceived by consumers can be a representation of brand popularity and brand name. The majority of Myanmar consumers are trend followers who tend to buy popular brands and familiar brands in their social environment. Being in the culture of collectivism, the opinion of others matters to consumers and mobile phones are sometimes considered as users' social display.

Hence, brand image influences on Myanmar consumers' purchase intention in two manners – a) the consideration of practicality and feasibility, b) the representation of social display and user's image. Myanmar consumers believe that the successful image of a brand can save their

time in buying process because they can trust its capability of delivering what it supposes to fulfil their needs. On the other hand, the prestigious image of a particular brand can apparently indicate which social status of users and which consumers' group they belong to. This results is in line with Wu et al. (2019) study which suggested that consumer can have good perceptions on a specific product but will buy another due to social pressure.

7.3. The role of product evaluation on the relationships between origins-images ascendants and consumers' willingness to buy

Consumers' evaluation of products play the main role in determining of their attitudes and consumption of a certain product. Prior to the actual buying decision, it is common for consumers to evaluate a product in terms of its efficiency, durability and reliability. Exploring consumers' product evaluation is beneficial for companies and manufacturers by assisting in developing product designs and improving experience of product users. This study acts as the user research (i.e., obtaining users' responses to questions on mobile phones product evaluation) and data is collected both and quantitative and qualitative way. In the marketing literature, the ultimate intention of product evaluation is to influence decision making after consideration of different issues such as cost, safety, function, materials and so on.

Based on Theory of Planned Behaviour concept, the relationship between consumers' certain beliefs (i.e., origins and cues in the model), attitudes (i.e., product evaluation) and intention (i.e., willingness to buy) is assumed the result as a linear decision-making process. However, the mediation role of product evaluation is tested to bridge the theoretical limitation of the theory, along with the examination of attitude-behaviour relationship (PE → WTB).

According to the theoretical assumption, certain external factors or stimuli can contribute to the degree of a person's a favourable or unfavourable evaluation of interest and subsequently, influence on the outcomes to perform the behaviour according to the degree of his/her strong intention to perform (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1989). Thus, the conceptual model of this research assumes the outcomes of Myanmar consumers' behaviour as following – the influence of three external factors, a) country of origin, b) product's country image, c) brand image, on consumers' evaluation of certain products' can arbitrate their outcomes of purchasing a certain product – which is testified as three hypothesis relationships.

7.3.1. The mediation role of product evaluation between COO and WTB

As the first hypothesis relationship of product evaluation role between country of origin and consumer's purchase intention, it is found that *H1c: Product evaluation construct can mediate the relationship between COO and willingness to buy* is rejected. This result is predictable because COO does not influence on PE (H1a), instead the direct relationship between COO and WTB is found. Khan and Bamber (2008) mention that COO effect occur unconsciously among consumers which they utilise as a cue in their product evaluation, product perceptions

and the buying behaviour. However, when consumers 'need for cognition' is high, the effect of COO becomes diminish in product evaluation as COO acts as an influential extrinsic cue for consumers' product judgement in the cognitive process. There is a possibility when consumers heavily rely on the intrinsic cues in their product judgment, consumers' product evaluation is disconnected to COO information but influenced by other attributes in their buying process.

The finding from this study contradicts with some of the previous studies (such as Bloemer et al., 2009) which indicate that COO has the interrelated link with product evaluation which consequently leads to willingness to buy. However, it is in line with other well-known studies which also find that COO effects sometimes show less domination for the consumer preference or buying decision (Kim and Bamber, 2008). However, Ahmed et al., (2012) propose that the likelihood of COO consideration in product evaluation is higher for high involvement products than low-involvement products. Since this study proves that the product evaluation cannot be able to mediate the relationship between COO and willingness to buy, the purchase of mobile phones can be noted as the low level of involvement for Myanmar young consumers.

7.3.2. The mediation role of product evaluation between PCI and WTB

Secondly, the role of product evaluation between country image of that product and consumers' willingness to buy is proven as mediation, accepting *H2c: Product evaluation construct can mediate the relationship between PCI and willingness to buy*. However, it is a partial mediation since the direct influence on PCI on consumers' purchase intention is approved in H2b. Despite this research is not able to approve consumers' consideration of general country origin information on their evaluation, an individual product's country image has in a significant influence on consumer purchase intention. It adds a further confirmation to the literature that consumers (consciously or unconsciously) response to a foreign product based on the alignment of their norms and values with a product's source country image (Ettenson and Klein, 2005).

The influence of consumers' evaluation of product country image on their purchase intention rely on a number of reasons. Although consumers' acknowledge of country stereotypes as one of the influential factors on their attitudes, the focus is solely dependent upon an individual product's utility for their own purposes. The survey results show that many Myanmar consumers score higher and more positive attitudes towards the USA in terms of individual country image than China. However, the actual market data (by Mileage Communications Myanmar) shows that the market shares of mid-priced mobile device brands such as Oppo,

Xiaomi, Meizu and Lenovo was found to have increased its share remarkably in recent years (Aung, 2016).

Respondents of interviews reveal that many of consumers purchase Chinese phones for the purpose of functionality and practicality whereas expensive mobile phones from favourable country image (as Apple) are bought for the purpose of social status and image display. In Myanmar consumers' product evaluation, the consideration of product's country image is assumed to provide the product's perceived intrinsic attributes such as performance specifications and physical attributes for them. This leads to a consumer's performed purchase based on their prioritised need or desires of buying a certain brand.

7.3.3. The mediation role of product evaluation between BI and WTB

On the other hand, consumers evaluate brands by accessing not only intrinsic attributes but extrinsic attributes such as brand name, image and COO (Dekhili and Achabou, 2014). Cordell (1997; cited in Cilingir and Basfirinci, 2014) notes that consumers utilise the intangibles attributes when tangible attributes are difficult to evaluate. In many studies, the role of product evaluation is mainly served as a dependent variable while the moderator role of variables such as product knowledge and product involvement (Cilingir and Basfirinci, 2014).

Apparently, more work is needed to clarify the product evaluation as a mediator variable of the origins-images cues and willingness to buy relationship. Thus, another relationship is tested and proved a partial mediation of product evaluation by accepting *H3c: Product evaluation construct can mediate the relationship between brand image and willingness to buy*. Moreover, one important finding from interviews show that the evaluation of Myanmar mobile phones users are brand-oriented. The brand name of smartphones are found to significantly affect mobile phone users' purchasing behaviors while price and practicality factors also effect to a large extent. For example, the intensive market competition shows the domination in the mid-priced category despite the premium market has a significant change. The category of mid-priced brands include Huawei, Samsung, Oppo and Vivo as well as Asus and other Chinese brands whereas the premium tier brands are Apple, Samsung and Huawei (Aung, 2014).

7.3.4. The impact of product evaluation on consumers' purchase intention

In marketing field, however, the purchase intention data are important for making strategic decisions by marketers regarding to new and existing products as well as the marketing plans (Barber et al., 2012). Testing the relationship of product evaluation and purchase intention of mobile phones for Myanmar consumers can make a contribution of consumers' buying behaviour context, along with accepting of *H4: Product evaluation will have a significant, positive relationship with consumers' willingness to buy foreign brands in Myanmar mobile phones market.*

From the perspective of *Theory of Planned Behaviour*, Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) note that the actual behaviour of consumer can be predicted by their behavioural intention whereas Morwitz (2001) also indicates the attitude-behaviour gap by stating that consumers' answers to intention questions cannot always be the correct predictor of their actual purchases. Therefore, the relationship between product evaluation and purchase intention is tested to validate for Myanmar consumers' behaviour. According to Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), consumers' stated intentions can possibly be the predictors of their actual behaviour of purchasing that product. However, many scholars including Backhaus et al., (2005), Sun and Morwitz, (2005), Young et al., (1998) point out that consumer's stated intentions are not ideally correlated with their actual purchases because it can create a halo-effect which cause respondents to over-report behaviours which they may not follow through in actual (Barber et al., 2009).

In addition, purchase decision-making of consumers is a complex process as it is influenced by a combination of consumers' needs and desires which are influenced by their societal role, value system, as well as cultural and environmental norms. In this study, consumers' purchase intention is found to have influential factors of both external and internal. Concerning the qualitative data, the internal factors can be classified as consumers' level of knowledge, their attitudes and personality types whilst external influences include marketing strategies of companies, recommendations (word-of-mouth), and the role of final decision makers.

It is obvious that the knowledge level of consumers who are technology enthusiasts will be different from tech-laggards. The focal participants of this study are pragmatic professionals (i.e., the business savvy people) and the roles of testified relationships are discussed from their attitudes, perspectives which are reflected by individual's personality. On the other hand, the level of external influence are significantly higher for Myanmar due to its conservative culture. Consumers are more likely to listen to authoritative figures in this society. For example, an

advertisement with doctor recommendations is likely to work better in this society. Myanmar culture is more feminism, i.e. caring and quality of life oriented and men are still household decision makers.

To sum up, it has widely recognised that the measurement of expressed purchase intentions and the comparison between expressed purchase intentions and actual purchase behavior have been difficult (Follows and Jobber, 2000; Lange et al., 2002). Yet, the discussed information provide the evidence of purchase intentions data can make strategic decisions concerning both new and existing products and the marketing programs that support for marketing managers.

7.4. Conclusion

This chapter have critically discussed under the extant literature review discussed in Chapter 3 to improve the credibility of the study as well as contribute the new knowledge to the COO research field. The chapter then focuses on the discussion of the findings accumulate the conceptual model and hypotheses developed for this research. The following chapter, *Chapter 8* is the last chapter of the research and presents as 'conclusion and recommendations' sections. All things undertaken in the previous chapters will be re-examined in order to ensure the research aim and objectives formulated in Chapter 1 have achieved as well as the research question has answered accordingly. Beyond the outlining of the limitations of the research, the appropriate recommendations are suggested for the research community and the practitioners of both inside and outside academia.

Chapter 8: Conclusion and recommendations

Main contents

- **Re-examination of research aim and objectives**
- **Recommendations and contributions**
- **The study's limitations**
- **Areas for further research**

This chapter re-examines the research aim and objectives that have been set at the beginning of study by considering theories of the COO, consumer attitude and behaviour. It has been divided into four sections. The first section overviews the research process to affirm whether the research question and objectives have been answered. Then, the second section provides the recommendations and the contributions to the knowledge field of country of origin, consumer perceptions and consumer behaviour of Myanmar. Like any other study, this research is not exceptional from limitations and thus, the section of areas for further research suggests some thought-provoking ideas that the current study have left.

8.1. To what extent do the country of origin and brand origin influence Myanmar consumers' product evaluations and willingness-to-buy foreign brands of mobile phones?

The studies on the effect of country of origin on consumers' behaviour have been a significantly diversified field and caused the major debate amongst scholars with different perspectives. Many scholars take different standpoints to explore and expand knowledge in the COO field. It is reconceptualised to some extent by many scholars including Han and Terpstra (1988), Papadopoulos and Heslop (1993) and Ahmed and d'Astous (2004), continuously regarding Country of Manufacture (COM) and Country of Assembly (COA) as the main pillars of COO effects.

Different conceptualisations of COO shift from country-based definitions to brand-based perspectives with the explosion of cross-border business in the 1990s. The globalisation movement becomes influence on manufacturing process of goods that involve more than one countries to reduce costs which make consumers challenging to define the product' origin. This study advocates the alternative definition of product's country of origin proposed by Thakor and Kohli (1996), as the country where the headquarters of that product or brand's company placed. Having said that, the study defines and introduces COO concept from a new perspective of considering brand origin as a product's COO origin as well as considers having an essential impact on consumer's attitudes towards the products.

Moreover, it has become increasingly questionable whether the COO effect is still relevant in consumers' product evaluation and purchase intentions. According to Herz and Diamantopoulos (2017), consumers are often reluctant to admit the COO information usage and its influence despite extensive evidence that a brand's country-of-origin (COO) affects consumers' brand evaluations and behavioural intentions. With intention of contributing knowledge in the literature pool, this study assesses the influence of country- and brand-related origins on Southeast Asian (Myanmar) consumers behaviour in the mobile phones industry.

Drawing on the classic Attitude Theory of Ajzen and Fishbein (1985) and complimentary mixed-methods approach, this study found interesting patterns of consumer behaviour regarding the effects of a brand's COO information. The core concept of the study relies on the theoretical and empirical assumptions that three elements (i.e., country of origin/ brand origin, product's country image and brand image) play an important role in influencing Myanmar

consumers' product evaluation and their purchase intention of foreign mobile phones brands. The findings show that the majority of relationships are correlated and significant to each other and have significant impact on Myanmar consumers' behaviour.

Firstly, Myanmar consumers pay considerable attention to the cues of the country of origin in their purchase intention but not in their product evaluation. This finding provided evidence that the impact of country of origin has a weak influence on Myanmar consumers' perceptions and evaluation of products. Compared to other factors tested in the model (i.e., brand image, product's country image), the influence of COO on consumers' willingness is weak, and consumers tend to ignore the COO cue in their product evaluation.

Consumers pay attention to country of origin to some extent, yet other factors are found to be more critical at the time of product selection and purchase. Similar to this study, Samiee (2010) suggests that the COO effect is weak and neglected by consumers in their purchasing practices. However, it is contrary to the findings of some previous studies such as Ahmed and D'Astous (2008) who found that the phenomenon of COO concept is essential in attracting consumers and influential in their product choices.

In this study, Myanmar consumers acknowledge the effect of country of origin stereotypes and show the favourable perception on products from developed countries and the less favourable attitude on those from developing counterparts. Consumers associate the COO information as the indicators of the product's quality and price. In particular, Myanmar young professions who are the focused consumers of the study showed a significant knowledge of COO cue.

As the initial definition of country of origin concept in the literature, COO is regarded as the country where the products' manufacturing or assembling occurred and simply described as the use of 'made in' label on products (Ahmed et al., 2010). Based on the findings from this study, the assumption of COO cue as a place where products manufactured does not affect consumers' perception of products they purchased. Consumers express the well-understanding of globalisation movement and its effect on supply chain system of companies, resulting in the perception that products with reputable brands will be standardised by the quality control (QC) regardless of where they manufactured.

In quantitative data, the study used the scales developed by Pisharodi and Parameswaran (1992), which include the dimensions of general country attributes, specific country attributes and specific product attributes. It has demonstrated that COO still have significant influence

on consumers' willingness to buy, although it does not show effect on product evaluation. Findings from this study strongly recommended that reconceptualising the concept of COO cue from a brand perspective instead of a general country perspective can be beneficial on Myanmar consumers' consideration of COO cue in their product evaluation. This leads to the second justification for evaluating the research question.

As demonstrated in Chapter 6, the study also conducts follow-up interviews for an in-depth understanding of consumers' perception of brand origin. The results showed the brand origin's considerable influence on product evaluation but no influence on their buying decisions. This finding approved of Samiee et al., (2005) recommendation that brand origin encourages the country influences on choice behaviour in an accurate and realistic approach as well as assist in developing an international marketing strategy. Interestingly, the results of qualitative data were contrary to the findings of some previous studies including Wu and Fu (2007) and Lee, Johnson and He (2009) suggested that brand origin cues influence on purchase intention more prominently than on quality evaluation.

The findings showed that Myanmar consumers use brand origin cue for product evaluation along with other factors such as brand image, price, to name a few. However, consumers become less prioritised brand origin consideration in the purchase intention; instead, they consider brand name, convenience of use, other product's functionality in buying mobile phones. Magnusson et al., (2011) suggested that education can afford consumers by informing true brand origin, which can also result in changing attitude. Their research focused on the influence of brand origin perceptions on actual buying behaviour, separately from brand attitude.

Thakor and Kohli (1996) stated that perceived brand origin influences brand attitude when consumers can correctly identify a product's correct origin based on their knowledge. In this research, a product's exact brand origin is revealed to avoid the potential effect of different level of consumer knowledge yet it is shown the different results with Magnusson et al., (2011). However, both the effect of country of origin and brand origin are product-category specific in nature which means the findings of each research can be differed according to the researchers' choice of product category.

Thirdly, amongst all three factors that are tested in the conceptual model, this research found that a product's country image in the mobile phones category is the most significant factor for

Myanmar consumers' product evaluation that they relate it to different countries of mobile phones product. These findings were in line with the previous studies such as Canli and Maheswaran (2000) and Yasin and Noor (2007) who have proved that country image of a product is important in consumers' evaluation of quality, risk, the level of superiority of the product based on the competence of a particular country image.

Adapting the measurement scales of Roth and Romeo (1992), the country image of a product is measured by that country's innovativeness, prestige, workmanship, and design. Based on the findings from this study, it is strongly recommended that the linkage of country image dimensions to product categories (i.e., product's country image) is more practical and influential on consumers' product evaluation than the usage of general country perceptions (i.e., COO) to evaluate a specific product.

In this study, a product's country image showed an impact on consumers' willingness to buy toward foreign mobile phones brands. Myanmar consumers portrayed all four countries tested in this research (America, South Korea and China) in the favourable perceptions in terms of product innovation, high country status and durability of their products. Similar to this research, Lee and Lee (2009), Chuin and Mohamad (2012) found that consumers consider Japanese products as durable, and German products are associated with high quality, workmanship, precision and technology.

Interestingly, consumers did not show a negative outlook on Chinese brands in the mobile phones industry, unlike Chinese brands in other product categories. They acknowledged that China's technology is the imitation of western counterparts yet these Chinese brands can tailor consumers' needs in the developing country as Myanmar. Despite the highest relevance of product's country image on consumers' evaluation of that product, consumers show their willingness to buy towards developing countries' brands, which have slightly lower scores of country image than developed counterparts, due to their availability in the market, convenient access to servicing and affordability.

Fourthly, a brand image of the mobile phones is found to be a highly significant factor for Myanmar consumers' product evaluation, and they pay great attention to the reputation of the brand, mainly to ensure whether the product is originated from a developed or a developing country. In general, they perceived brands from developed countries or western countries can bring a higher social status and presentable self-image of its users than those from developing

countries. Supporting this fact, Rezvani et al. (2012) indicated that the level of economic development, stability, and growth of a country's economy are the factors that positively affect the consumer evaluation of product's brand image.

It is proved that the brand image of a product shows a direct impact on Myanmar consumers' willingness to buy mobile phones. Specifically, Myanmar consumers show the brand image of Apple's iPhones is significantly higher than that of a Xiaomi's phones. Ahmed et al., (2012) found that consumers from developing countries (Lebanese consumers) are more inclined to buy foreign brands from developed countries. Although Myanmar can be categorised as a newly emerging economy, its consumer practices portray the similar traits as in developing countries. Another interesting trait of Myanmar young professionals is that, brand image not only affects their perceptions of quality, risk, and product's competence but also endorse the expectations of their friends, family and social circle in working environment.

Finally, as mentioned above, Myanmar consumers evaluate mobile phones based on its country image and brand image information, and they perceive a favorable country and brand images in the product category as the determinants of product's workmanship, durability, reliability, technological advancement, value for price, prestige and overall quality. Three factors (country of origin, product's country image, and brand image) show significant influence in consumers' willingness to buy toward foreign mobile phones brands.

Notably, consumers' product evaluation of developing countries' brands shows a higher tendency of their willingness to buy than developed countries' brands. This finding, in fact, aligns with consumers' ignorance of COO information on product evaluation and elimination of information about manufacturing locations. The results from this study prove a perspective that consumers believe that it is not necessary to know the COO cue of a brand (Samiee et al. 2005; 2010, Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2008; 2011, Usnier 2011) and thus, propose that it would be beneficial for scholars in the COO field and practitioners in mobile phones industry to consider the following recommendations.

8.2. Managerial implications

Since the discussion chapter stands the focal point for theoretical and literature-related explanations of the study, this recommendation section aims to emphasise on the practicality of the current research in terms of its beneficial suggestions for various stakeholders including the marketers, mobile phones manufacturers, investors, and the government.

First of all, the majority of Myanmar consumers tends to contribute the market growth of mobile phones category and the purchasing power of consumers in the market is seen as a growth potential for international firms and marketers due to the traits of optimistic and middle-income consumers. Through the lens of the country's general economy, Myanmar market initiates the liberalisation, and since then, its strategic geo-economics location of between two fastest-growing countries of the world (China and India) attracts many potential investors into the market. Its relaxed attitudes on foreign investment in terms of taxation, labour and production costs and booming consumer market put Myanmar in the more advantageous position than a relatively mature market of other Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand and Vietnam. However, Myanmar still faces with the challenges derived from the previous Military dictatorship including the inadequate infrastructure for supply chain, the corruption within the government as well as the relatively low consumers' market knowledge (Channel NewsAsia, 2015).

The mobile phones and telecommunications sector, in particular, has witnessed rapid development in recent years. According to The Daily Star News (2015), Myanmar consumers are defined as the "fastest mobile phone adopters" amongst all Asia countries. The mobile penetration rate in Myanmar has increased nearly ten times from 2010 (Digital News Asia, 2015). It is clear that Myanmar leads to the revolution from a traditional economy towards a digital economy beyond 2015 and thus, the telecom and mobile phones sector is currently the most intriguing business for the experts and create attractive opportunities in the Southeast Asia region for retailers and marketers.

Secondly, it is crucial for the companies to successfully manage the popularity of their brand by focusing on how the brand to be positioned in the market. Many of Myanmar consumers are price-conscious in their purchase decision making since they prioritise product attributes and basic functionality compared to superior features and attributes. Thus, the foreign companies which intend to gain a strong market position will need not only to monitor the product quality and range but also to customise the offerings to local consumers' needs.

This study finds that Chinese brands hold a significant market share compared to prestigious brand as Apple because the latter has weakness in terms of providing customer service, availability of its accessories (spare parts). Although this study finds the significant consumers' knowledge of product and brand familiarity, the main participants of the research are based in one urban area and metropolitan city of Yangon which can be able to represent only 30 percent of the Union's population. In fact, Myanmar is significantly diverse groups of 135 ethnicities and the influence of culture and the values of ethnic groups shape their identification in terms of consumer preferences.

Thirdly, for the majority of Myanmar consumers, 'word of mouth' channel is still found to be more effective than others and consumers believe it as the most influential source of information. Communicating with the family is the main priority for Myanmar consumers as the influence of collectivist culture. The primary motivation of purchasing a mobile phone is to get easier and more affordable communication access to stay in touch with family members who live in abroad or in different cities, based on the qualitative findings in this study.

As another perspective of collectivistic community, the recommendation from family members is found to be important in major decisions, and seniors approve the final purchase decisions. For example, when a decision is made to buy a new mobile phone, another step of decisions need to be made, such as type of handset, brand name, SIM provider. The female participants from the interviews in this study reveal that women would not involve in these decisions, they perceive that they have limited product knowledge and tend to agree with men's decisions (i.e., their brothers, boyfriends, male friends) who are supposed to have better knowledge on technical issues and product functions. Thus, the companies should perform activities such as online/in-store promotions, events, and other incentives should target the influencers in the potential consumers' circle of trust.

Finally, the study finds that the influence of using the country of origin and brand origin cue significantly limited to Myanmar consumers. It is more advantageous to use the developmental status of countries than regional geography for better perspective as Myanmar young professionals show their evaluations on developed and developing countries stereotypes in the qualitative investigation. Similarly, the quantitative data does not show the remarkable difference in testing the models for eastern and western brands. It indicates that the effect of COO/BO is not influential on well-known or existing brands; however, this effect can be beneficial for new brands. Based on an individual company's policy and strategy of expanding

into new markets, applying country attributes can more or less be influential on the brand origin of a product. For instance, when a new electronics brand from Taiwan penetrates international market, there is a chance to succeed due to the positive outlook on Taiwanese electronic products.

8.3. Research Contributions

Following the recommendations section, the study shows some significant contributions to the COO and branding field along with substantial theoretical and practical implications. This study mainly contributes to the knowledge of the COO field in a way that applying the COO concept into a newly emerging country context where very little research attention is received. Thus, the findings provide a significant impact in an empirical manner and this section presents practical impacts, theoretical impacts, and methodological impacts of the study. (*The research contributions of study are also mentioned as the 'impact statement' in Appendix 1.1*).

8.3.1. The empirical impacts

By extending the boundary of COO concept application into a new research context, the findings are beneficial for international marketers by highlighting the importance of product country image, COO, and brand image as predictors of consumer purchase behaviour. One main contribution of this study is that it empirically examines the consumer-level determinants of COO in a newly emerging country context where consumer behaviour research is limited relative to advanced economies. As there are very few accesses of consumer research regarding Myanmar consumers behaviour, this study indicates a significant contribution for practitioners, market researchers and potential investors in this newly emerging market (*section 8.2 mentions in details*).

In recent years, many multinational companies show the fundamental premise for entering the Myanmar market after the country's political and economic reforms. It is a profound country to take the first-mover advantages for international investors because its economic development is the inceptive stage with good opportunities compared to other ASEAN countries with a mature economy such as Singapore. Results from this current can comply with practical implications as it explains both favourable and unfavourable situation of the Myanmar consumer market. The findings are believed to assist the researchers and marketers in achieving a better understanding of the phenomenon of COO from the branding perspective and other factors that are influential in attitudes and behaviour in buying mobile phones.

First, in general, the coronavirus pandemic negatively impacts on the major developed economies of 2020. Globally, the economic growth declines 9.1 percent in Italy, 5.2 percent in Japan, 6.5 percent in the UK, 5.9 percent in the US, and 7.5 percent for the euro areas as well as 1.2 percent in China (International Monetary Fund, 2020). However, emerging Southeast

Asia shows a positive growth rate for 2020 and the forecast for 2021. Subsequently, Myanmar seems to continue as one of the attractive locations for investment with its mainly supply-driven economy.

Second, the dramatic use of high-technology products including mobile phones increases in Myanmar and it becomes the indicator of a booming economy. The fact that the majority of the population can afford to buy mobile phones becomes the visible symbol of change for a country with its limited exposure to the outside world previously. Myanmar consumers find to be in favour of specifications and functions of mobile phones which is consistent with the previous studies' findings in a similar economy as Myanmar. It is found that the importance of these specifications declines in step with economic growth. The fact that Myanmar consumers' major interest in specifications and functions of phones could adversely affect in establishing brand loyalty or creating a brand-customer relationship. In the current situation, it is found to practice the strategies of either price premises or market share. For example, brands as Apple in Myanmar focus on its brand prestige with upscale, high-quality products users of minority whereas others such as Samsung and Xiaomi tend to occupy the majority consumers.

Thus, international brands entering to Myanmar market need to consider the following factors whether to do localisation or standardising its image. Despite using different approaches, there are common traits of Myanmar people regardless of their various income and purchasing power. Myanmar consumers highly value their family unit and values and therefore, highlighting these concepts and values can easily establish a strong customer relationship. This study found that consumers significantly rely on the recommendations and brand choices of their friends and family. Similar to other Asian cultures, Myanmar consumers significantly display collective family pride and emphasis the concept of losing "face" or gaining face which plays a significant role in their consumption. Especially, the origins of a product or brand are important in the gift-giving context.

Another characteristic of Myanmar consumers is their interest in bargains as well as price sensitivity. The historical influence of both socialism and an autocratic military regime shapes the consumer behaviour of the country. It is crucial to consider not only the economic but also the cultural demographic environment as findings in the interviews indicated. As mentioned above, the budget constraints can lead to less loyalty from consumers as they tend to easily switch one brand from another. As a newly emerging country, Myanmar is still en route to a stable economy relative to other mature economies. The issues such as complicated investment

rules, supply problems, and inflation issues still need to be tackled. The current market condition is mainly a supply-driven economy and it will take time to move forward as a demand-driven one for the international investors.

8.3.2. The theoretical impacts

The main theoretical significance of this study is expanding the cross-cultural context of the COO field in the limited research area. The majority of COO studies have been conducted in developed countries such as the US as well as the developing countries such as India and Indonesia. However, some regions in Southeast Asia including Myanmar, Lao, Cambodia, and newly emerged economy as Myanmar do not receive sufficient research attention. Hence, this study provides the novel contribution in the sense of cross-cultural representation which can enhance the COO concept's comparability and generalisation of outcomes.

Another theoretical significance is that the study testifies the intersecting influence of COO and brand on the product evaluation and purchase behaviour of a specific product category (i.e., mobile phones). The majority of studies focus on either COO or brand factors in a separate manner. As an alternative approach, brand is considered as one of the factors that associate the COO or vice versa. This study emphasises the effects of both COO and brand origin on consumers' willingness to buy simultaneously, along with the Product Country Image and Brand Image of a product. It builds on and challenges the existing prevailing definitions of country of origin by developing a theoretically grounded definition of COO at brand level (Thakor and Kohli, 1996) and identifying other extrinsic constructs' dimensionality, thus providing cumulative insight to the COO literature.

Pharr (2005) report that the post-1995 studies explore a variety of cues and factors which can increase or decrease the COO influence on product purchase intention. Cai et al. (2004) point out that the percentage of global production shifted as the worldwide trade during the 1990s. Thus, this study represents as the multiple-cue study to investigate the complex phenomenon of contemporary COO effects.

The further theoretical contribution of this study is to bridge the gap in the COO research, in which there is less clarity of its role in hybrid product studies. The choice of product category is significantly important in differentiation of the COO effect. The COO influence on consumer perception is dependent on the different types of research products. The majority of inconsistency findings in the COO studies are partially ascribed to the choice of product

category for a particular study. Despite other studies such as Cervino et al. (2005) consider the country of origin and country image as an identical and use interchangeable constructs, this study evaluates these two constructs as separate variables.

Moreover, the study applies one of the attitude theories (TBP) in Myanmar consumers' behaviour context. It also integrates the county- and brand-related images of a product in one conceptual model to testify their influence on product evaluation and purchase intention. Very few studies have taken both brand and country levels into account. However, the current study extended previous research by examining the influences and drawing a comparison between the effects of both brand and country levels of the product origins and images on consumer perception.

Finally, the study argues that the source of COO can be viewed as brand-place origin specific to the evaluative situation rather than from a general made-in country origin. This is a significant theoretical implication of the conclusions of the current research as it added to the body of existing research. It also argues that country-of-brand origin is perhaps the most potent definitions of COO and therefore, the scope of COO research is extended beyond a country-specific approach. Future studies on the determination of product origin can use these conclusions to base their selection of related variables.

8.3.3. The methodological impacts

Methodologically, the study fills the void that has been lacked to conduct by previous studies. This study effectively proposes the examination of situations in which “origins” and “images” testify the evaluation consumption using multi-research methods. Firstly, it implements the research design of real-world settings with the use of actual brands and correct origins from the active users of research product. With the practice of complementary mixed methods, it provides a new insight of measurement instruments with the use of primary quantitative method which is supported and followed by the in-depth interviews. It also applies the contemporary analysis method of Structural Equation Modelling which has been widely practising in the marketing studies in recent years.

In addition, the study contributes to testing the assessment of reliability and validity of the COO, product country image, and brand image measurement scales by applying these scales in a somewhat different culture. One of the widely-discussed limitations of the COO is that its measurement scales are not standardisable for different cultures as well as the reliability and

validity of them are not constant. The concept of COO requires particular adaptations in order to fit in the different countries with unique consumer culture and use for different types of products (Han, 2019). In order to conduct the usability testing of the measurement scales of COO, PCI and BI constructs, this study will adopt these scales to Myanmar, a Southeast Asia country with under-researched context in consumer behaviour field. The testified conceptual model provide a more refined understanding of the way each variable functions in consumers' consumption.

Another methodological contribution is that the sample of the study is young professionals in a newly emerging economy. This sample population represents not only the technology-driven generation but also the thriving workforce and demanding consumers of the market. Focusing on mobile phone as research product can contribute the contemporary consumer behaviour of flourishing research product to the practitioners, researchers and policymakers. Besides, another methodological significance of the study is the practice of both qualitative research methods (interviews with key informants) as well as quantitative research methods (surveys) is practised in a complementary manner to collect data and obtain a better insightful understanding of the factors influencing on Myanmar consumers' attitudes and behaviour.

8.4. Further research directions

Basfirinci (2013) calls for the research gap of the contemporary studies examining the role of country origin of brand information on only brand perceptions, and hence, more studies need to investigate whether and how these perceptions interact with consumers' attitudes and behaviour. Despite the fact that the current study has accomplished this research aim, there is always an area for further improvements in every study and the following section indicates some flaws and limitations that have left to explore from this study, with an intent to guide some helpful tips for future research.

Firstly, this study has explored consumers product evaluation of mobile phones by utilising the origins and images information of specific countries and brands and their impact on consumers' willingness to buy. Consumers' intention to buy a product has measured by asking consumers' to rate a scale consisted of three positively worded statements of intention to buy behaviour. This technique is widely practised by previous researchers such as Barber et al., (2012). This measurement technique is, however, subjected to one limitation; that is producing a so-called 'halo effect' that encourages participants to offer over-report behaviour which can

be different from what they act in reality (Barber et al., 2009). On the other hand, the practice of self-report in the quantitative survey is susceptible to social desirability bias in a way that participants tend to create 'impression management.' To solve this issue, further research should conduct a comparison study of consumers' expressed purchase intention and their actual market behaviour.

Secondly, the current research has analysed consumers' perceptions and behaviour related to the effects of the COO and brand origin on their product evaluation and purchase intention in a given period (2-3 months). For further studies, it would be more effective to conduct a longitudinal study over some time to analyse the patterns of their actual behaviour. It could improve a reliable assessment of intention behaviour. For example, Follows and Jobber (2000) conducted consumers' values-attitudes-intentions on purchase behaviour of environmentally friendly product by doing two self-report measures by contacting follow-up phone interviews after three months later by asking participants whether they purchased the product.

Another alternative method is to measure the data from actual market transaction data or auctions. Lee and Lee (2018) introduce in their research about the Vickery method which can access participants actual purchase behaviour as in a real transaction when their bid (as willingness to pay for a product) wins the auction. This Vickery auction method is practised by some researchers such as Lange et al., (2002); Wertenbroch and Skiera, (2002). Vickery (1961) suggest that using the same participants for both the survey and auction process can offer an accurate prediction and understanding of consumers' purchase intention and willingness to pay.

Thirdly, four popular brands of mobile phone are selected from Anholt-GfK Nation Brands Index with a high ranking of country index. This choice of research standpoint – being tie to specific product (i.e., mobile phones) and focus on particularly four countries and four brands – can limit the generalisability of study. Thakor and Kohli (1996) mention that the effect of brand image and country image on developing consumers' attitude is difficult to describe for new products. This study does not consider either product knowledge or COO fit (i.e., the process of testing consumer knowledge on correct or incorrect match between product origin and brand origin). Instead, the survey has utilised correct product origin and brand origin are informed to avoid the inconsistency and misleading COO cue for participants as well as the famous brands and well-known countries. This act of pre-selected countries and brands can also affect on some generalisability issues. Future research can expand this limitation by

conducting the type of comparison research such as comparing amongst different product categories and different level of brands (prominent brands versus new entrants).

Fourthly, the current research employed young adults and professions as the sample of the study, due to their relevance to the research aim and nature of the research product. This sampling approach helped to minimise the influence of various confounding variables and allowed the comparison of relationships among all the variables across controlled demographic characteristics, but the findings may not be generalised to the overall population of Myanmar. It is desirable to conduct further research with a variety of respondent groups to generalise the results of this study.

Regardless of the researchers' effort to practise the most suitable data collection method, there will be limitations for any method, and the interview technique has no exception. There are some practical limitations of using interview technique, considering unbalanced proportions of interviewees (15 females: 5 males) and time durations where the longest interview lasted 47 minutes and the shortest one lasted 18 minutes. However, the complementary practice of quantitative techniques considered as the primary method can compensate these limitations by offering cross-validation for the data.

A new theoretically thought-provoking concept of COO as the final suggestion for further studies, another interesting topic to explore is that the corporate heritage link to the country of origin or brand origin. Based on the literature review, the research focus on brand origin is still under-developed area in the COO field and many studies related to brand origin emphasis on consumer level. This study explores the COO concept from the perspective of brand origin, and thus, it can only give insight into the consumer-focused data rather than the corporate-level focus. By linking the concept of corporate heritage with COO/BO at the organisational level, it is helpful to the brand origin usefulness in the market positioning. On the other hand, the effect of COO and BO on brand attitude and consumer purchasing behaviour can conduct in the form of between-subjects experiment (e.g., multi-brand origins x multi-country of origins) as in Lee et al., (2009) study.

Aside from some limitations mentioned above, this study illustrates the differentiation from previous studies by mean of context, sample and research approach. Further, it provides extensive knowledge in the COO field along with the insightful analysis of quantitative and qualitative techniques, alternative ideas for future research as well as some contemporary literature and methods.

8.5. Conclusion

In short, the current research's implications for marketing and consumer behaviour knowledge include – a) providing with legitimate recommendations for marketing practitioners, b) expanding new knowledge in consumer buying behaviour of mobile phones in Southeast Asian cultural context, c) informing the updated market situation and consumers trends in Myanmar mobile market with insightful analysis and suggestions for implementation of effective marketing strategies. Based on the findings and recommendations of the study, international investors and marketers can learn how Myanmar consumers evaluate a brand or product and what motivates them.

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Appendices

Appendix 1.1: The impact statement of the current study

The impact statement intends to fulfill the requirement of the research on the current knowledge in the COO field along with the contribution to the socio-economic outcomes. The statement includes the theoretical impact, the methodological impact, and the practical implication of the current study.

Before the implementation of this current study in 2015, there are the ongoing debates amongst the marketing scholars upon the issue of whether the country of origin (COO) concept is still relevant or not. As a concept introduced by Schooler in 1965, the development of cross-border cooperation in the product manufacturing process makes the definition of COO weaken as 'made-in label' approach. There are the calls for the reconceptualisation of COO concept into modified constructs, including country of assembly (COA), country of design (COD) and so forth. Amongst these constructs, the author takes the COO concept from the perspective of the country of a brand (i.e., brand origin) as a novel approach in the investigation of its influence on consumers' attitudes and behaviour. Unlike previous stand-alone studies focused either on the product-level or the brand-level, the current research mainly acknowledges both product- and brand-level as well as product by considering the constructs of product-related country image and brand image. As the theoretical foundation for the investigation of consumers' attitudes and behaviour, one of the classic and notorious attitude theories, Theory of Planned Behaviour is underpinned for the conceptual framework of consumers' product evaluation and purchase intention.

This study develops a new conceptual model by relooking at the concept of COO from a country of brand perspective. Despite the proven relationships of the country- and brand-related images on consumers' product evaluation and consequently purchase intention, no study develops these concepts in one specific model. The previous models have been emphasised on either a product-level influence on consumers' behaviour or brand-level influence on consumers' perceptions. In this study, the researcher combines the individual established relationships into an interactive model of the product's origins and images of brand and country based on contemporary issues.

Methodologically, this research practices the mixed methods, considering the survey as the primary quantitative method and the interview as the qualitative follow-up method. The majority of COO studies receive the criticism for using the student sample, the experimental research design instead of the real-world settings, the fictitious brand names for products

instead of the original brands. Thus, the product evaluation of actual brands in the market is researched by using survey and interviews with the active users of the product. The measurement instruments also offer new insight into the study, using the primary quantitative method supported and followed by the in-depth interview. Traditionally, the qualitative methods initiate as an exploratory study followed by the quantitative methods in many COO studies. However, the current study borrows measurement items from individual previous studies and test in the pilot study before the main survey. By providing trustworthiness of the study, the study also focuses on the quality of follow-up interviews that can explain the insightful findings amongst the construct's relationships, and the reasons behind the consumers' justifications of answered choices. In terms of data analysis, the study practices the contemporary analysis method of Structural Equation Modelling which is sophisticated in the COO research field.

Another advantage of the study is focusing on solving the trending issues in the literature as well as society. The constructive arguments on the relevance/irrelevance issue of COO are justified in the study, and the results of the research provide the way of adding to existing knowledge and literature. On the other hand, the research observes overlooked consumers of a newly emerging market which gains the attention of international investors and multinational companies. The findings of this study provide with the legitimate recommendations for marketing practitioners to enter into Myanmar and other countries in similar situations in terms of commercial activity, social enterprise, and professional practices. Overall, the analysis and insightful knowledge presented in this thesis have beneficial use of both inside and outside academia and impact on understanding the consumers' behaviour of developing market for local and international organisations in the long term as well as applying in the context of a broader field of research.

Appendix 3.1: illustration of single- and multi-cue studies

Authors	Research Themes
<u>Single-cue studies</u>	
Schooler, 1971; Tongberg, 1972; Krishnakumar, 1974; Hampton, 1977; Wang, 1978	The effect of the COO level of economic development
Gaedeke, 1973; Nagashima, 1970 and 1977; Lillis and Narayane 1974; Bannister and Saunders, 1978	Ethnocentrism effect
Dornoff et al., 1974; Nagashima, 1970; Nagashima, 1977	Change of consumers' attitude about a specific country
Schooler, 1971; Tongberg, 1972; Anderson and Cunningham, 1972; Dornoff et al., 1974; and Wang, 1978	The effect of consumers' demographic characteristics on their perception of COO
<u>Multiple-cue studies</u>	
Biehal, 1983; Eroglu and Machleit, 1988; Hong and Wyer, 1989	Previous knowledge and experience can influence the COO effect
Hooley and Shipley, 1988	Different levels of the COO effects
Kaynak and Cavusgil, 1983	The effect of COO differs according to product complexity
Kaynak and Cavusgil, 1983; Ettenson et al., 1988; Han and Terpstra, 1988; Hong and Wyer, 1989; Wall et al. 1991	Different country stereotypes prevail depending on the different product categories

Appendix 3.2: Key definitions of country image

<u>Definitions on the (overall) country image (CoI)</u>	
Bannister and Saunders (1978, p. 562)	“Generalized images, created by variables such as representative products, economic and political maturity, historical events and relationships, traditions, industrialization, and the degree of technological virtuosity.”
Desborde (1990, p. 44)	“Country-of-origin image refers to the overall impression of a country present in a consumer's mind as conveyed by its culture, political system, and level of economic and technological development.”
Martin and Eroglu (1993, p. 193)	“Accordingly, the country image was defined as the total of all descriptive, inferential, and informational beliefs one has about a particular country.”
Kotler et al. (1993, p. 141)	“The sum of beliefs and impressions people hold about places. Images represent a simplification of a large number of associations and pieces of information connected with a place. They are a product of the mind trying to process and pick out essential information from huge amounts of data about a place.”
Askegaard and Ger (1998, p. 52)	“Schema, or a network of interrelated elements that define the country, a knowledge structure that synthesises what we know of a country, together with its evaluative significance or schema-triggered effect.”
Allred et al. (1999, p. 36)	“The perception or impression that organizations and consumers have about a country. This impression or perception of a country depends on the country's economic condition, political structure, culture, conflict with other countries, labor conditions, and stand on environmental issues.”
Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999, p. 525)	“Mental representations of a country's people, products, culture, and national symbols. Product-country images contain widely shared cultural stereotypes.”
Verlegh (2001, p. 25)	“A mental network of affective and cognitive associations connected to the country.”
<u>Definitions on product-country image (PCI)</u>	
Hooley et al. (1988, p. 67)	“Stereotype images of countries and/or their outputs [...] that [...] impact on behaviour.”
Li et al. (1997, p. 116)	“Consumers' images of different countries and products made in these countries.”
Knight and Calantone (2000, p. 127).	“Country-of-origin image (COI) reflects a consumer's perceptions about the quality of products made in a particular country and the nature of people from that country.”

Jaffe and Nebenzahl (2001, p. 13).	“Brand and country images are similarly defined as the mental pictures of brands and countries, respectively.”
Nebenzahl et al. (2003, p. 388)	“Consumers' perceptions about the attributes of products made in a certain country; emotions toward the country and resulted in perceptions about the social desirability of owning products made in the country.”
Papadopoulos and Heslop (2003, p. 404)	“Product-country images (PCIs), or the place-related images with which buyers and/or sellers may associate a product.”
<u>Definitions on (country-related) product image (PI)</u>	
Nagashima (1970, p. 68)	“Image” means ideas, emotional background, and connotation associated with a concept. Thus, the ‘made in’ image is the picture, the reputation, the stereotype that businessmen and consumers attach to products of a specific country.”
Narayana (1981, p. 32)	“The aggregate image for any particular country's product refers to the entire connotative field associated with that country's product offerings, as perceived by consumers.”
Han (1989, p. 222)	“Consumers' general perceptions of quality for products made in a given country.”
Roth and Romeo (1992, p. 480)	“Country image is the overall perception consumers' form of products from a particular country, based on their prior perceptions of the country's production and marketing strengths and weaknesses.”
Bilkey (1993, p. xix)	“Buyers' opinions regarding the relative qualities of goods and services produced in various countries.”
Strutton et al. (1995, p. 79)	“Composite ‘made in’ image consisting of the mental facsimiles, reputations and stereotypes associated with goods originating from each country of interest.”

Source: Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009)

Appendix 4.1: Typologies of research philosophy – ontology

Ontological philosophy	Benefits and meanings of assumptions
Constructionism (constructivism)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a constructionist's belief regarding the social world is that researchers' accounts of the social world interact with the reality (i.e., the researcher is more likely to represent a particular interpretation of social reality than a definitive one) • constructionists view that the knowledge of the social world is indeterminate, socially-constructed and subjective in research (i.e., social knowledge is created through social interactions and is subject to constant changes)
Objectivism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • objectivists believe that social actors can not influence the existence of objective (independent) knowledge and the role of the researcher is impartial in research (i.e., social phenomenon and their meanings in a daily basis exist independently, being separate from actors) • "objectivism is on the ontological position that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors. It implies that social phenomena and the categories that we use in everyday discourse have an existence that is independent or separate from actors" (p.21)

Source: Bryman and Bell (2011)

Appendix 4.2: Typologies of research philosophy – epistemology

Epistemological philosophy	Benefits and meanings of assumptions
Realism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "realism shares two features with positivism: a belief that the natural and the social sciences can and should apply the same kind of approach to the collection of data and to explanation; and a commitment to the view that there is an external reality to which scientists direct their attention and that is separate from researchers' descriptions of it" (Bryman and Bell, 2007, p.18) • critical realists accept the reality as external and independent but not directly accessible through the observation and knowledge of it • empirical realism argues that the use of appropriate methods can lead the understanding of reality.

Interpretivism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accepts the utilisation of the scientific model to the study of the social world and the influence of various intellectual traditions on the researchers • the role of researchers' values and beliefs is essential in the interpretation of research materials and data • decreases the gap between the researchers and their research by including different forms of participative inquiry • the philosophy of phenomenology draws the question of how individuals justify the world around them
Positivism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • follows the scientific methods of inquiry which regard the researcher and participants as two different entities and do not influence each other during research processes • believes that these objects have been existing before the initiation of investigation and their existence will continue although the study has been accomplished • sees the organisations and other social entities as real in the same way as physical objects and natural phenomena are real

Source: Saunders et al. (2016)

Appendix 2.3: The essence of deduction and induction approaches

Deduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • occurs “when the conclusion is derived logically from a set of premises, the conclusion being true when all the premises are true” (Saunders et al., 2016, p.144) • roots in post-positivism and knowledge are established in terms of cause and effect thinking, studying variables, testing hypothesis and verifying theories (Creswell, 2013) • “observation is necessarily selective, and science is a combination of inspiration and deduction... Explanations do not emerge from vast collections of facts but from ideas incorporating concepts that provide a criterion of what to look for” (O’Shaughnessy, 1995, p. 272) • is appropriated to use in social sciences since it can serve as a justifiable method of research to develop knowledge (Crowther and Lancaster, 2008) • <i>Measurement limitation</i>: the deductive approach is predominantly linear, meaning that each step follows another in a logical sequence despite these sequences require being altered in some cases (Bryman and Bell, 2018)
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Induction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • generates premises that are used to analyse untested conclusions and its generalisations come from the specific to the general as well as the theory is the outcome of the research (Bryman and Bell, 2018) • practises a qualitative approach by applying cause-and-effect links and focusing more on ‘words’ than quantifying ‘numbers’ in the data collection and analysis process • focuses on the constructivist perspective where knowledge is acquired by studying circumstances in natural settings (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) • requires a) generating theories by collecting and analysing qualitative data, in order to describe and explain a phenomenon in its context; b) using case study methods such as descriptive, illustrative, experimental and explanatory methodology (Hussay and Hussay, 1997; Creswell, 2013)
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Appendix 4.4: Different types of research strategies based on research methodology choice

There are different types of research strategies based on the researcher's choice of research methodology including experiment, survey, case study, action research, grounded theory and ethnography. The experiment is a popular form of research and accepts the effect of change, which means an independent variable can bring in another dependent variable (Hakim, 2000). The case study can be defined as “a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence” (Robson, 2000, p. 178). Action research attempts to find techniques to accomplish a change in a controlled environment (Saunders et al., 2016). Grounded theory is regarded as the best example of inductive approach, and it develops the propositions (also referred as a hypothesis) by generating data from a series of observations (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Ethnography is a research strategy which attempts to gain social knowledge for understanding the observed patterns of human activity (Hussey and Hussey, 1997). A survey is regarded as the best example of deductive approach and is related to collecting data from large participants on an economic practice (Saunders et al., 2016).

Appendix 4.5. Definitions of 'back translation' and 'parallel translation'

Back translation means one translator translates the questionnaires from the source language into a target language. Then, a second translator interprets the first translator's target language questionnaires back into the source language. In this sense, the second translator is ignorant of the source language questionnaires. After comparing two versions, the errors and misinterpretations are corrected, and the process is repeated if necessary.

The parallel translation, on the other hand, includes the several translators who are fluent in both languages, work individually or as a team and then, the questionnaires are translated from the source language into the target language. After comparing the results and discussing the differences, the most appropriate version is chosen.

Appendix 4.6: Strengths and weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative approaches

Approach	Positivistic (Quantitative)	Phenomenological(Qualitative)
Strength	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -speed in data collection, -ease of analysis, -providing extensive coverage of the range of situations, -appropriate for testing hypotheses and determining relations between variables and establishing the reliability and general application of data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -ability to detect the change process over time, -ability to understand peoples' understanding and way of thinking, -contributes to theory generation, -ability to issue and create new ideas as they emerge
Weakness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -the methods used tend to be inflexible and artificial, -ineffective in understanding processors of significance that people attach to actions, -unhelpful in generating theories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -time-consuming -costly -analysis and interpretation of data may be arduous -policymakers may provide low credibility that results from qualitative approach

Source: Hussay and Hussay (1997); Easterby-Smith et al. (2002)

Appendix 4.7: Differentiation of Likert scales and items

Likert items	Likert scales
-individual items	-scales consist of multiple Likert items
-representation of an item format not a scale	-totals or averages of answers to multiple items
-Likert items can be either interval or ordinal	-more reliable than single items
-it is optional to presents the means and standard deviations (interval scale statistics for individual items	-the reliability should be checked using Cronbach's Alpha or another suitable estimate
-should not rely on single items as they are relatively unreliable.	-can be taken to be interval scales and applied descriptive statistics, correlational analyses, factor analysis and variance procedures

Source: Brown (2011)

Appendix 5.1: The Format of Online Survey (Final Version)

<p>1. How do you determine the country of origin of a product? *</p> <p>The country where a product's manufacturing or assembling took place</p> <p>The country where the headquarter of a product's company is located</p> <p>The country which a manufacturer's product is associated with</p> <p>The country where the design of a product is produced</p> <p>2. How do you determine the brand origin of a product? *</p> <p>The spelling and pronunciation of a brand name</p> <p>The actual geographical origin of a brand</p> <p>A place, region or country where you think a brand is belong to</p> <p>3. To what extent do you think the following attributes related to 'Country of Origin' information are appropriate in your mind? *</p> <p>Note: Country-of-origin information refers to attributes on a country from which products originated.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Very appropriate Appropriate Neither appropriate or inappropriate Inappropriate Very inappropriate</p> <p>A country's level of education standard</p> <p>A country's level of hard working</p> <p>Achieving high standards in their products</p> <p>A country's level of living standard</p> <p>A country's level of technical skills</p> <p>Sharing similar political views with your own country</p> <p>Economically similar to your own country</p> <p>Culturally similar to your own country</p> <p>Generally, its products are unreasonably expensive</p> <p>Its products has limitations</p> <p>Its products are not attractive</p> <p>Its products need frequent repairs</p> <p>Its product are cheaply put together</p> <p>Its products are sold in many countries</p> <p>A country intensely advertise for its products</p> <p>Its advertisements are full of useful and interesting information</p> <p>Its products are easily available</p>
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Its products are long lasting
Its products have good value
Its products are prestigious (i.e. status, brand name reputation) products
When you buy a mobile phone, the phone's exterior style and design should be attractive
When you buy a mobile phone, the workmanship (i.e. reliability and durability of phone) should be good.
When you buy a mobile phone, it should be very comfortable to use
When you buy a mobile phone, it should have good quality service
When you buy a mobile phone, it should be made to last long.
A country's level of education standard
A country's level of hard working
Achieving high standards in their products
A country's level of living standard
A country's level of technical skills
Sharing similar political views with your own country
Economically similar to your own country
Culturally similar to your own country
Generally, its products are unreasonably expensive
Its products has limitations
Its products are not attractive
Its products need frequent repairs
Its product are cheaply put together
Its products are sold in many countries
A country intensely advertise for its products
Its advertisements are full of useful and interesting information
Its products are easily available
Its products are long lasting
Its products have good value
Its products are prestigious (i.e. status, brand name reputation) products
When you buy a mobile phone, the phone's exterior style and design should be attractive
When you buy a mobile phone, the workmanship (i.e. reliability and durability of phone) should be good.
When you buy a mobile phone, it should be very comfortable to use
When you buy a mobile phone, it should have good quality service
When you buy a mobile phone, it should be made to last long.
4. To what extent do you agree with the following statements related to brand origin information of a mobile phone? *
Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree
When you buy a mobile phone, the brand origin information is important for you in making the final choice.
If the brand origin is from a country of which you have a positive perception, you will be more inclined to buy that brand (of mobile phone).
When you buy a mobile phone, the brand origin information is important for you in making the final choice.
If the brand origin is from a country of which you have a positive perception, you will be more inclined to buy that brand (of mobile phone).
5. To what extent do you agree with the following statements related to brand image of 4 different mobile phone brands - Apple, Samsung and Xiaomi? *
Their brand origins are - Apple (the USA), Samsung (South Korea), Xiaomi (China)
Strongly agree

Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree
Apple has created a distinct image in my mind.
I believe Apple will deliver me their promises.
I believe using Apple brand will make me look impressed.
Apple brand is associated with the manufacturer's image (iPhone's manufacturers are mainly from China, Taiwan).
Samsung has created a distinct image in my mind.
I believe Samsung will deliver me their promises.
I believe using Samsung brand will make me look impressed.
Samsung brand is associated with the manufacturer's image (Samsung's manufacturers are mainly from South Korea, Vietnam, China).
Xiaomi has created a distinct image in my mind.
I believe Xiaomi will deliver me their promises.
I believe using Xiaomi brand will make me look impressed.
Xiaomi brand is associated with the manufacturer's image (Xiaomi's manufacturers are from Taiwan, China).
Apple has created a distinct image in my mind.
I believe Apple will deliver me their promises.
I believe using Apple brand will make me look impressed.
Apple brand is associated with the manufacturer's image (iPhone's manufacturers are mainly from China, Taiwan).
Samsung has created a distinct image in my mind.
I believe Samsung will deliver me their promises.
I believe using Samsung brand will make me look impressed.
Samsung brand is associated with the manufacturer's image (Samsung's manufacturers are mainly from South Korea, Vietnam, China).
Xiaomi has created a distinct image in my mind.
I believe Xiaomi will deliver me their promises.
I believe using Xiaomi brand will make me look impressed.
Xiaomi brand is associated with the manufacturer's image (Xiaomi's manufacturers are from Taiwan, China).
6. To what extent do you agree with the following statements related to country image of 4 different countries - the USA, South Korea, China? *
Very good Good Neutral Poor Very poor
China: The level of product innovativeness (i.e. the use of new technology and engineering advances) of thier products is
China: The design of products (i.e. the product appearance, variety, styles) made in China is
China: The level of the prestige (i.e. status, brand name reputation) of thier products is
China: The level of the country workmanship (i.e. its products reliability, durability) of their products is
The USA: The level of product innovativeness (i.e. the use of new technology and engineering advances) of thier products is
The USA: The design of products (i.e. the product appearance, variety, styles) made in USA is
The USA: The level of the prestige (i.e. status, brand name reputation) of thier products is
The USA: The level of the country workmanship (i.e. its products reliability, durability) of their products is

South Korea: The level of product innovativeness (i.e. the use of new technology and engineering advances) of thier products is

South Korea: The design of products (i.e. the product appearance, variety, styles) made in South Korea is

South Korea: The level of the prestige (i.e. status, brand name reputation) of thier products is

South Korea: The level of the country workmanship (i.e. its products reliability, durability) of their products is

China: The level of product innovativeness (i.e. the use of new technology and engineering advances) of thier products is

China: The design of products (i.e. the product appearance, variety, styles) made in China is

China: The level of the prestige (i.e. status, brand name reputation) of thier products is

China: The level of the country workmanship (i.e. its products reliability, durability) of their products is

The USA: The level of product innovativeness (i.e. the use of new technology and engineering advances) of thier products is

The USA: The design of products (i.e. the product appearance, variety, styles) made in USA is

The USA: The level of the prestige (i.e. status, brand name reputation) of thier products is

The USA: The level of the country workmanship (i.e. its products reliability, durability) of their products is

South Korea: The level of product innovativeness (i.e. the use of new technology and engineering advances) of thier products is

South Korea: The design of products (i.e. the product appearance, variety, styles) made in South Korea is

South Korea: The level of the prestige (i.e. status, brand name reputation) of thier products is

South Korea: The level of the country workmanship (i.e. its products reliability, durability) of their products is

7 (a). How would you describe your level of agreement with the following information about Apple brand? *

Very high

high

neutral

low

Very low

Apple product's workmanship (i.e. the degree of skill with which a product is made)

Apple product's durability

Apple product's reliability

Apple product's the level of technically advanced

Apple product's value of price

Apple product's prestigious (i.e. having high status)

Apple product's overall quality

Apple product's workmanship (i.e. the degree of skill with which a product is made)

Apple product's durability

Apple product's reliability

Apple product's the level of technically advanced

Apple product's value of price

Apple product's prestigious (i.e. having high status)

Apple product's overall quality

7 (b). How would you describe your level of agreement with the following information about Samsung brand? *

Very high

high

neutral

low

Very low

Samsung product's workmanship (i.e. the degree of skill with which a product is made)
 Samsung product's durability
 Samsung product's reliability
 Samsung product's the level of technically advanced
 Samsung product's value of price
 Samsung product's prestigious (i.e. having high status)
 Samsung product's overall quality
 Samsung product's workmanship (i.e. the degree of skill with which a product is made)
 Samsung product's durability
 Samsung product's reliability
 Samsung product's the level of technically advanced
 Samsung product's value of price
 Samsung product's prestigious (i.e. having high status)
 Samsung product's overall quality
 7 (c). How would you describe your level of agreement with the following information about
 Xiaomi brand? *

Very high
 high
 neutral
 low
 Very low

Xiaomi product's workmanship (i.e. the degree of skill with which a product is made)
 Xiaomi product's durability
 Xiaomi product's reliability
 Xiaomi product's the level of technically advanced
 Xiaomi product's value of price
 Xiaomi product's prestigious (i.e. having high status)
 Xiaomi product's overall quality
 Xiaomi product's workmanship (i.e. the degree of skill with which a product is made)
 Xiaomi product's durability
 Xiaomi product's reliability
 Xiaomi product's the level of technically advanced
 Xiaomi product's value of price
 Xiaomi product's prestigious (i.e. having high status)
 Xiaomi product's overall quality

8 (a). To what extent do you agree with the following statements related to your 'willingness to buy'
 mobile phones brands with western brand origins? (e.g. Apple, Blackberry, etc.) *

Very likely
 Likely
 Neutral
 Unlikely
 Very unlikely

I am considering purchasing a mobile phone (western brand origin) now
 I am seriously interested in buying a mobile phone with western brand origin.
 It is likely that I am going to buy a mobile phone (western brand origin) in future.
 I am considering purchasing a mobile phone (western brand origin) now
 I am seriously interested in buying a mobile phone with western brand origin.
 It is likely that I am going to buy a mobile phone (western brand origin) in future.

8 (b). To what extent do you agree with the following statements related to your 'willingness to buy'
 mobile phones brands with eastern brand origins? (e.g. Samsung, Xiaomi, etc.) *

Very likely
 Likely
 Neutral
 Unlikely

Very unlikely

I am considering purchasing a mobile phone (eastern brand origin) now

I am seriously interested in buying a mobile phone with eastern brand origin.

It is likely that I am going to buy a mobile phone (eastern brand origin) in future.

I am considering purchasing a mobile phone (eastern brand origin) now

I am seriously interested in buying a mobile phone with eastern brand origin.

It is likely that I am going to buy a mobile phone (eastern brand origin) in future.

9. Which mobile phone brand are you currently using? *

Your answer

10. My gender is *

Male

Female

Prefer not to say

11. My age group is *

18-24 years old

25-35 years old

36-45 years old

46-55 years old

56 and over

12. My education is *

High school/ Below high school

College/ University degree

Post graduate degree (i.e. Masters, Doctorates)

13. My average income (per month) *

Less than 500,000 Ks

500,000 - 10,000,000 Ks

10,000,000 - 15,000,000 Ks

15,000,000 or more

Appendix 5.2: Online Consent Form

Section 1 of 2

The impact of Country-of-origin and brand-origin on Myanmar consumers' product evaluation and willingness-to-buy western and eastern brands: The case of mobile phones market

Information about the study
You are being invited to take part in a study which will provide the research focus for the thesis which needs to submit in fulfillment of the requirement for my degree.
It will attempt to investigate Myanmar consumers' preferences and perceptions of Country-of-origin and brand origin on their product evaluation and willingness-to-buy towards western and eastern brands. In addition, it will determine the influence of country image and brand image on Myanmar consumers' product evaluation.

Why I have been approached?
You have been asked to participate because a) you are a Myanmar nationality, b) you have an experience of using mobile phones, and c) you are familiar with mobile phone brands in the market.

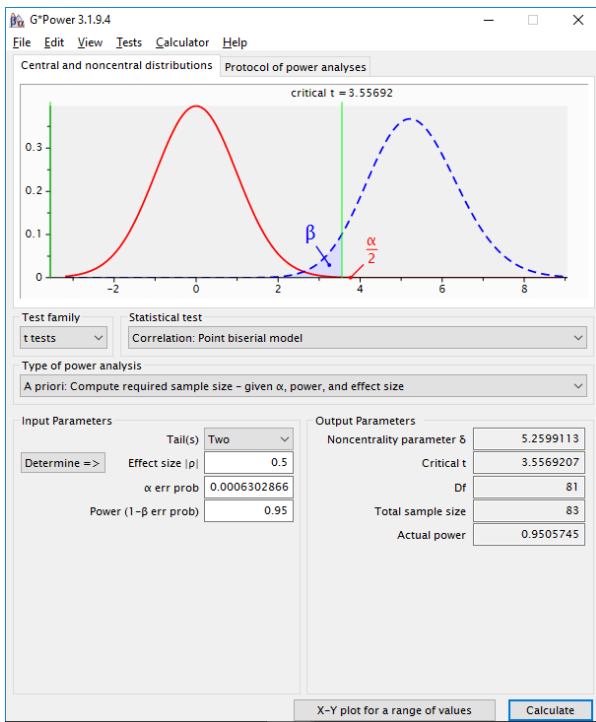
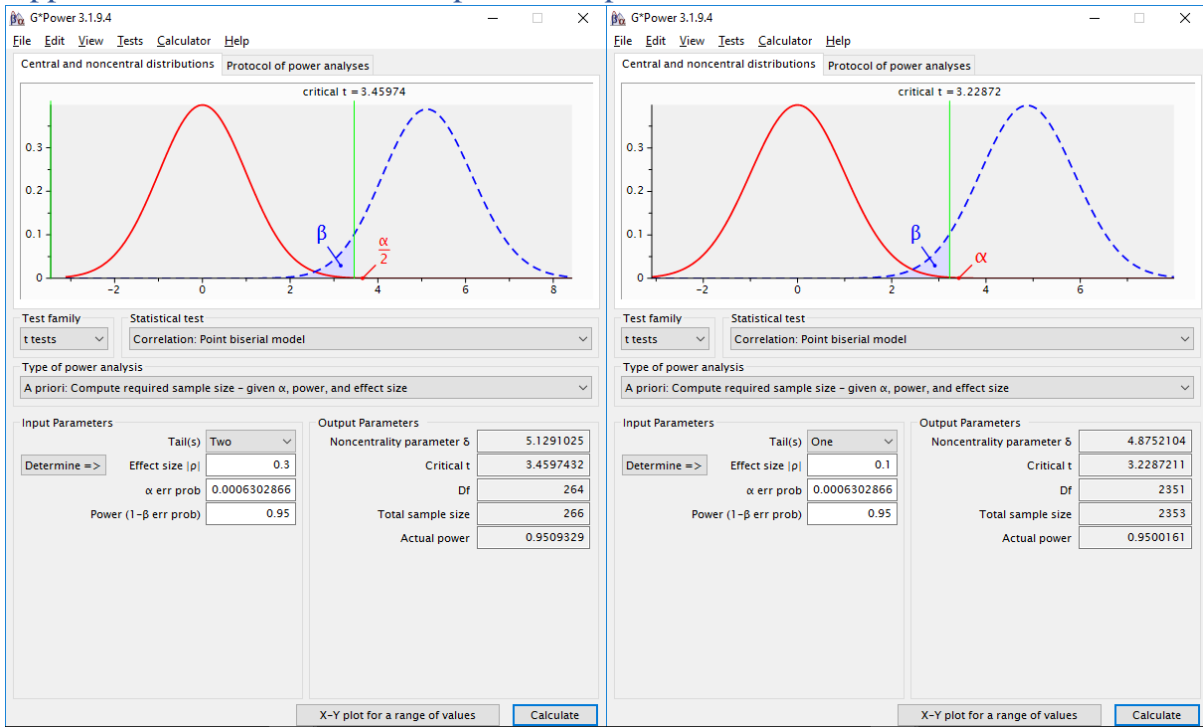
Do I have to take part?
This research is for individuals over the age of 18 years. Participation on this study is entirely voluntary, so please do not feel obliged to take part and you have the right to withdraw at any time. The questions in the survey are about your perceptions on country-of-origin and brand origin information, your attitudes on brand image and country image, how you evaluate a product and your purchase intention on western and eastern mobile phone brands. This should take no more than 15 minutes of your time.
By continuing this questionnaire you are confirming that you have provided informed consent for me to review your answers and that you are 18 years old or over.

Will my identity be disclosed?
All collected information will be strictly confidential and anonymised before the data is presented in any work, in compliance with the Data Protection Act and ethical research guidelines and principles.

Complaints.
If you have any complaints about this process, you can also contact my University Supervisor:
Name: Dr. Qing Shan Qing (Senior Lecturer in Marketing)
Email: q.s.ding@hud.ac.uk

Who can I contact for further information?
If you need further information about the research, please contact me on:
Name: Miss Arnt Kyawt Ni

Appendix 5.3: The results of G*power sample size calculator



Appendix 5.4: The Codes book for SPSS data entry

Mobile phone brands Apple = 1 Samsung = 2 Xiaomi = 3	5a. BI1 Strongly agree = 1 Agree = 2 Neither agree nor disagree = 3 Disagree = 4 Strongly disagree = 5
Country of Origins USA = 1 South Korea = 2 China = 3	6a. CI1 Very good = 1 Good = 2 Neutral = 3 Poor = 4 Very poor = 5
3a. COO1 Very appropriate = 1 Appropriate = 2 Neither appropriate nor inappropriate = 3 Inappropriate = 4 Very inappropriate = 5	7a. PE1 Very high = 1 High = 2 Neutral = 3 Low = 4 Very low = 5
4a. BO1 Strongly agree = 1 Agree = 2 Neither agree nor disagree = 3 Disagree = 4 Strongly disagree = 5	8a. WTB1 Very likely = 1 Likely = 2 Neutral = 3 Unlikely = 4 Very unlikely = 5

Appendix 5.5: Participant Consent Form



The University of Huddersfield

Business School Research Ethics Committee

Title of Research Project: Origin, Product Evaluation and Willingness to Buy: A Study of Young Myanmar Consumers' Mobile Phone Choices

Name of Researcher: Miss Arnt Kyawt Ni

Participant ID Number: #0

It is important that you read, understand and sign the consent form. Your contribution to this research is entirely voluntary and you are not obliged in any way to participate, if you require any further details please contact the researcher verbally or via email to Arnt.Ni@hud.ac.uk

I have been fully informed of the nature and aims of this study as outlined in the participant information sheet.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to taking part in this the study	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that I can withdraw any time prior to submitting my completed answers.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I give permission for members the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that the information collected will be in kept secure conditions for a period of 3-5 years at the University of Huddersfield	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that no person other than the researcher/s and facilitator/s will have access to the information provided	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my identity will be protected by the use of participant's ID numbers individually (no names will be mentioned) in the report and that no written information that could lead to my being identified will be included in any report	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you are satisfied that you understand the information and are happy to take part in this project please put a tick in the box aligned to each sentence and print and sign below.

Signature of Participant: <hr/> Print: <hr/> Date: <hr/>	Signature of Researcher: <hr/> Print: <hr/> Date: <hr/>
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Appendix 5.6: Participant Information Sheet



Research Project Title: Origin, Product Evaluation and Willingness to Buy: A Study of Young Myanmar Consumers' Mobile Phone Choices

The University of Huddersfield

Business School Research Ethics Committee

Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide to take part, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with me if you wish. Please do not hesitate to ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. May I take this opportunity to thank you for taking time to read this.

What is the purpose of the study?

The research project is intended to provide the research focus for the thesis which needs to be submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for my degree. It will attempt to investigate Myanmar consumers' preferences and perceptions of Country-of-origin and brand origin on their product evaluation and willingness-to-buy towards foreign brands. In addition, it will determine the influence of country image and brand image on Myanmar consumers' product evaluation.

Why I have been approached?

You have been asked to participate because the researcher considers the participants to fulfil a number of criteria: a participant must be Myanmar Nationality, he/she must have an experience of consuming a research product (mobile phones), he/she must be familiar with mobile phone brands within the market, and the age of the participant must be over 18 for the research ethical purpose. As I believe you are an eligible and knowledgeable participant who can answer the research questions properly, you have been chosen to take part in.

Do I have to take part?

Participation on this study is entirely voluntary, so please do not feel obliged to take part. Refusal will involve no penalty whatsoever and you can withdraw any time prior to submitting your completed answers. Recording a completed interview is an indication of your consent to participate in the study. Once you have submitted your recorded interview anonymously, your responses cannot be withdrawn.

What will I need to do?

If you agree to take part in the research, you will be asked to take part in the in-depth interview. The questions are simply about your perceptions on country-of-origin and brand origin information, your attitudes on brand image and country image, how you evaluate a product and your purchase intention on foreign mobile phone brands. This should take no more than 60 minutes of your time.

Are there any disadvantages to taking part?

There should be no foreseeable disadvantages to your participation. This research is for academic purpose only and your information will not be misused for any reason. If you are unhappy or have further questions at any stage in the process, please address your concerns initially to the researcher (contact is provided below). Alternatively, please contact Dr. Qing Shan Ding, Senior lecturer in Marketing, University of Huddersfield.

Will my identity be disclosed?

All information which is collected will be strictly confidential and anonymised before the data is presented in any work, in compliance with the Data Protection Act and ethical research guidelines and principles.

What will happen to the information?

All information collected from you during this research will be kept secure and any identifying material, such as names will be removed in order to ensure anonymity. It is anticipated that the research may, at some point, be published in a journal or report. However, should this happen, your anonymity will be ensured although it may be necessary to use your words in the presentation of the findings and your permission for this is included in the consent form.

Who can I contact for further information?

If you require any further information about the research, please contact me on:

Name: Miss Arnt Kyawt Ni

E-mail: Arnt.Ni@hud.ac.uk

Telephone: +44 7598 655 350

Appendix 5.7: Research Survey (Paper Version -English)

1. How do you determine the country of origin of a product?
 - The country where a product's manufacturing or assembling took place
 - The country where the headquarter of a product's company is located
 - The country which a manufacturer's product is associated with
 - The country where the design of a product is produced
2. How do you determine the brand origin of a product?
 - The spelling and pronunciation of a brand name
 - The actual geographical origin of a brand
 - A place, region or country where you think a brand is belong to
3. To what extent do you think the following attributes related to 'Country of Origin' information are appropriate in your mind? * Note: Country-of-origin information refers to attributes on a country from which products originated.

	Very appropriate	Appropriate	Neither appropriate or inappropriate	Inappropriate	Very inappropriate
--	------------------	-------------	--------------------------------------	---------------	--------------------

 - A country's level of education standard
 - A country's level of hard working
 - A country's level of living standard
 - Sharing similar political views with your own country
 - Economically similar to your own country
 - Culturally similar to your own country

Generally, its products are unreasonably expensive
 Its products has limitations
 Its products are not attractive
 Its products need frequent repairs
 Its product are cheaply put together

4. To what extent do you agree with the following statements related to brand image of 4 different mobile phone brands - Apple, Samsung, Xiaomi? * Their brand origins are - Apple (the USA), Samsung (South Korea), Xiaomi (China)

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------------------------	----------	-------------------

Apple has created a distinct image in my mind.
 I believe Apple will deliver me their promises.
 I believe using Apple brand will make me look impressed.
 Samsung has created a distinct image in my mind.
 I believe Samsung will deliver me their promises.
 I believe using Samsung brand will make me look impressed.
 Xiaomi has created a distinct image in my mind.
 I believe Xiaomi will deliver me their promises.
 I believe using Xiaomi brand will make me look impressed.

5. To what extent do you agree with the following statements related to country image of 4 different countries - the USA, South Korea, China?

Very good	Good	Neutral	Poor	Very poor
-----------	------	---------	------	-----------

China: The level of product innovativeness (i.e. the use of new technology and engineering advances) of thier products is
 China: The design of products (i.e. the product

appearance, variety, styles)

made in China is

China: The level of the prestige (i.e. status, brand name reputation) of thier products is

China: The level of the country workmanship (i.e. its products reliability, durability) of their products is

The USA: The level of product innovativeness (i.e. the use of new technology and engineering advances) of thier products is

The USA: The design of products (i.e. the product appearance, variety, styles) made in USA is

The USA: The level of the prestige (i.e. status, brand name reputation) of thier products is

The USA: The level of the country workmanship (i.e. its products reliability, durability) of their products is

South Korea: The level of product innovativeness (i.e. the use of new technology and engineering advances) of thier products is

South Korea: The design of products (i.e. the product appearance, variety, styles) made in South Korea is

South Korea: The level of the prestige (i.e. status, brand name reputation) of thier products is

South Korea: The level of the country workmanship (i.e. its products reliability, durability) of their products is

China: The level of product innovativeness (i.e. the use of new technology and engineering advances) of thier products is

China: The design of products (i.e. the product

appearance, variety, styles)
 made in China is
 China: The level of the
 prestige (i.e. status, brand
 name reputation) of thier
 products is
 China: The level of the
 country workmanship (i.e.
 its products reliability,
 durability) of their products
 is
 The USA: The level of
 product innovativeness (i.e.
 the use of new technology
 and engineering advances)
 of thier products is
 The USA: The design of
 products (i.e. the product
 appearance, variety, styles)
 made in USA is
 The USA: The level of the
 prestige (i.e. status, brand
 name reputation) of thier
 products is
 The USA: The level of the
 country workmanship (i.e.
 its products reliability,
 durability) of their products
 is
 South Korea: The level of
 product innovativeness (i.e.
 the use of new technology
 and engineering advances)
 of thier products is
 South Korea: The design of
 products (i.e. the product
 appearance, variety, styles)
 made in South Korea is
 South Korea: The level of
 the prestige (i.e. status,
 brand name reputation) of
 thier products is
 South Korea: The level of
 the country workmanship
 (i.e. its products reliability,
 durability) of their products
 is

6 (a). How would you describe your level of agreement with the following information about Apple brand?

Very high High Neutral Low Very low

Apple product's
 workmanship (i.e. the

degree of skill with which a product is made)

Apple product's durability

Apple product's reliability

Apple product's the level of technically advanced

Apple product's value of price

Apple product's prestigious (i.e. having high status)

Apple product's overall quality

6 (b). How would you describe your level of agreement with the following information about Samsung brand?

Very high High Neutral Low Very low

Samsung product's

workmanship (i.e. the degree of skill with which a product is made)

Samsung product's durability

Samsung product's reliability

Samsung product's the level of technically advanced

Samsung product's value of price

Samsung product's prestigious (i.e. having high status)

Samsung product's overall quality

6 (c). How would you describe your level of agreement with the following information about Xiaomi brand?

Very high High Neutral Low Very low

Xiaomi product's

workmanship (i.e. the degree of skill with which a product is made)

Xiaomi product's durability

Xiaomi product's reliability

Xiaomi product's the level of technically advanced

Xiaomiproduct's value of price

Xiaomi product's prestigious (i.e. having high status)

Xiaomi product's overall quality

7 (a). To what extent do you agree with the following statements related to your 'willingness to buy' mobile phones brands with western brand origins? (e.g. Apple, Blackberry, etc.,)

	Very likely	Likely	Neutral	Unlikely	Very unlikely
<p>I am considering purchasing a mobile phone (western brand origin) now</p> <p>I am seriously interested in buying a mobile phone with western brand origin.</p> <p>It is likely that I am going to buy a mobile phone (western brand origin) in future.</p>					
<p>7 (b). To what extent do you agree with the following statements related to your 'willingness to buy' mobile phones brands with eastern brand origins? (e.g. Samsung, Xiaomi, etc.)</p>	Very likely	Likely	Neutral	Unlikely	Very unlikely
<p>I am considering purchasing a mobile phone (eastern brand origin) now</p> <p>I am seriously interested in buying a mobile phone with eastern brand origin.</p> <p>It is likely that I am going to buy a mobile phone (eastern brand origin) in future.</p>					
<p>8. Which mobile phone brand are you currently using?</p> <p><input type="text"/></p>					
<p>9. My gender is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male • Female • Prefer not to say 					
<p>10. My age group is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18-24 years old • 25-35 years old • 36-45 years old • 46-55 years old • 56 and over 					
<p>11. My education is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High school/ Below high school • College/ University degree • Post graduate degree (i.e. Masters, Doctorates) 					
<p>12. My average income (per month)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less than 500,000 Ks • 500,000 - 10,000,000 Ks • 10,000,000 - 15,000,000 Ks • 15,000,000 or more 					

Appendix 6.1: Interview Guides

Research Aim: To investigate Myanmar consumers' preferences and perceptions of brand origin on their product evaluation and willingness-to-buy towards foreign brands

Research Objective: To examine the effects of brand origin on Myanmar consumers' product evaluation of foreign mobile phone brands

Section 1: General questions about brand origin

1. What does a brand mean to you or to your consumption?
 - a. Probe: your perception of a brand on different product categories, Is consumption of a brand important in your life? Can consumption of a certain brand represent a status in your daily life?
2. How do you perceive an origin of a brand?
 - a. Probe: Antecedents of brand origin (location of ownership/ manufacture/ assembly, origin of top management, other (travel, press reports), marketing communications)
3. In your own opinion, why should we consider a brand origin of a product we purchase or intend to purchase?
 - a. Probe: Consequences of brand origin (overall quality perceptions, perceived dimensions of quality, brand-related attitudes, price expectations, perceived value, purchase intentions)
4. How is your perception of country stereotyping (developed vs. developing countries) effect on products?
5. How do you think the impact of a country's certain attributes on brand origin perception?
 - a. Probe: A country's technological and economic advancement levels, level of market penetration internationally
 - b. Probe: Do you favour on a country that has similar culture, economy and politics as your own country?
6. Do you have a brand's preference on any product categories (IT products preferably)? Why do you prefer it?
 - a. Probe: which factors do you consider for a brand to become your favourite?
7. Do you think a brand origin of a product influence in your purchase intention?
 - a. Probe: a difference between low vs. high involvement, hedonic vs. utilitarian, personal purchase vs. gift
 - b. Probe: what kind of marketing communications strategies that you think will influence on your perception of brand origin?
8. Tell me about your perceptions on products come from western countries and eastern countries?
 - a. Probe: Quality, Familiarity, Brand status, preferences,
 - b. How do you evaluate their products generally? Positive or Negative?

Section 2: Product specific questions about brand origin

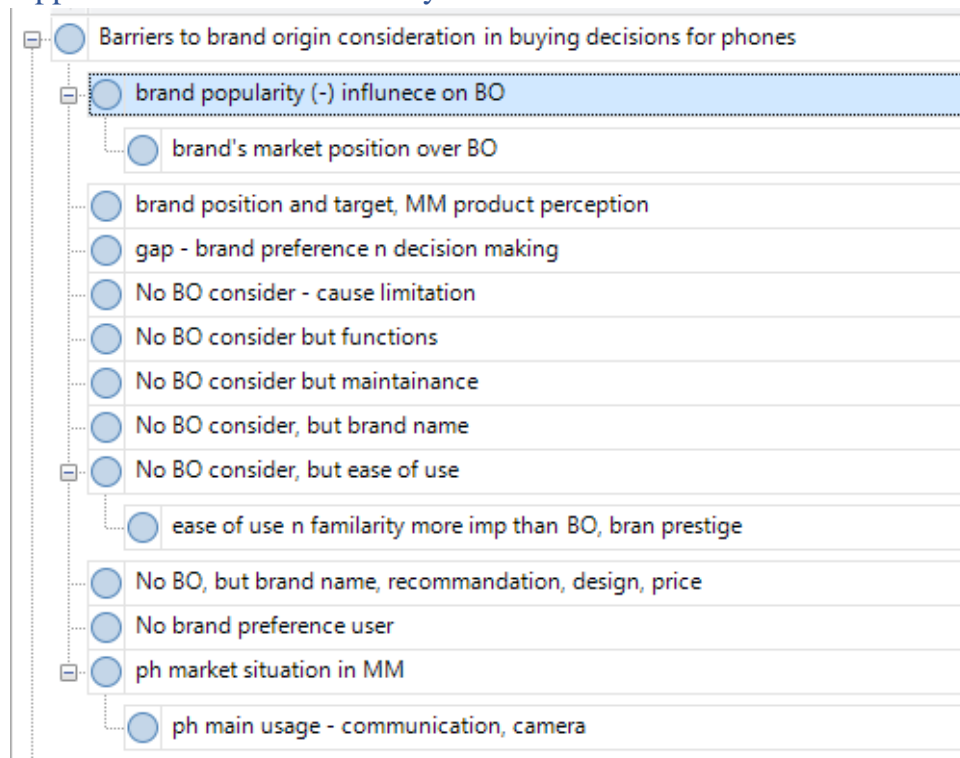
1. Tell me about your story of using mobile phones?
 - a. Probe: what is the brand name of your first mobile phone? Why did you buy it? Did you change to different brands? Why?
2. Do you think that a country where a mobile phone's brand originated from is important when you evaluate it for purchasing? (Note: Original country of a brand is different from a country a product is made-in) Why?
3. What is your opinion on the important of brand origin in purchasing mobile phones?
 - a. Probe: A product's tangible attributes (design, functions, etc.), intangible attributes (quality, price, etc.)
4. Do you think that the origin of a brand that mobile phones originated from has influence in your purchase decision making?

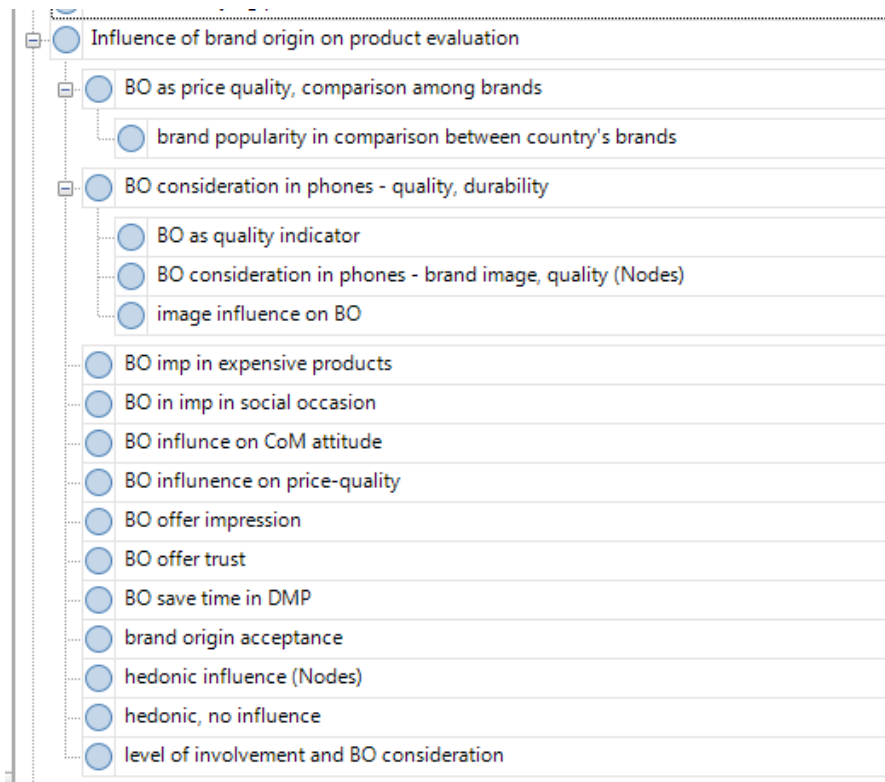
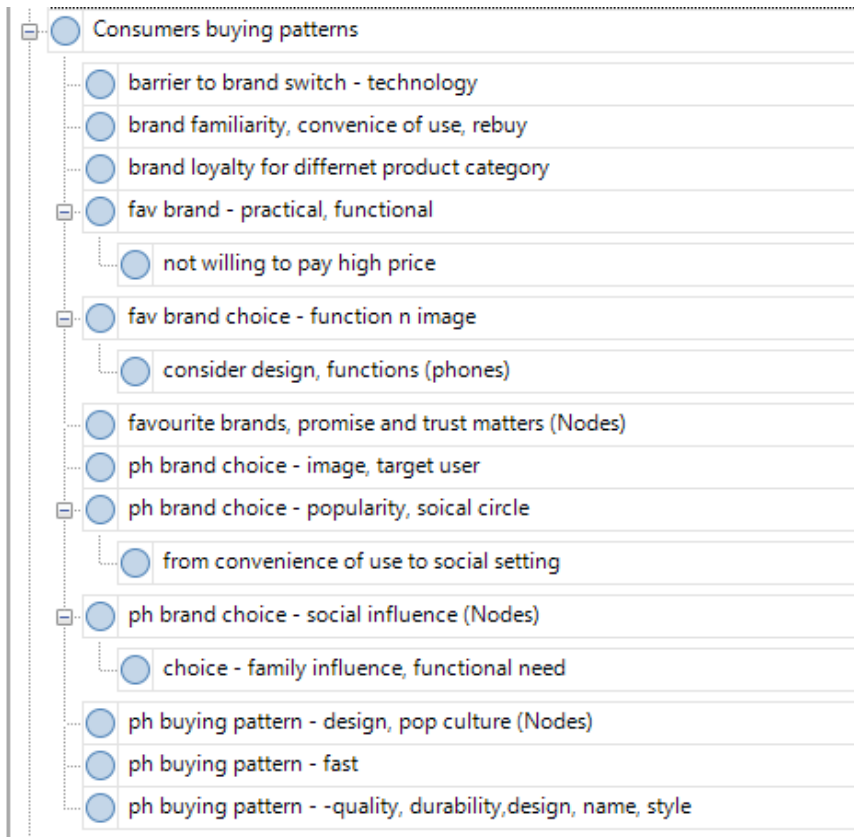
- a. Probe: If yes, is it the most important factor? What other factors do you also consider? If no, tell me the reason why? What factor is influential then?
5. What is your perception mobile phones brands from western and eastern countries? Do you consider a product origin when you buy phones?
 - a. Probe: If yes, which countries are your preferences of brands? If no, why is it not important in your evaluation?
6. Tell me the reasons why did you purchase your current mobile phone?
 - a. Probe: did you consider brand-related information? Does brand name important for you? What is your favourite brand and why do you like it?
7. How do you evaluate a brand name and its origin in mobile phone market?
 - a. Probe: workmanship, durability, reliability, technically advanced, price value, overall quality, prestigious

Section 3: Specific brands and countries in the research

1. What is your own opinions on each brand name of mobile phones in the market? (Apple, Samsung, Xiomi)
2. Do you aware that these mobile phones are mostly manufactured in Asia countries? What is your perception on the different locations of manufacture versus brand origin?
3. Do you think that origins of (Apple, Samsung, Xiomi) brands will influence in your evaluation of a mobile phone or in your willingness to buy it? Why?

Appendix 6.2: Nvivo 11 Analysis





☐	●	Myanmar consumers' perceptions on brands
	●	brand and self-image representation
	●	brand choice
	●	brand evaluation
	●	brand position prestige
	●	brand represent (no) status (Nodes)
	●	brand represent confidence
	●	brand represent quality
	●	brand represent status
	●	product category (no) matters (Nodes)
☐	●	product category matters, brand status (Nodes)
	●	product category matters

☐	●	Preferences of western and eastern branded products
	●	chinese ph brands strong
	●	chinese ph brands strong - negative perception (Nodes)
	●	developed country perception
	●	developing country perception, trust
	●	false perception due to education level
	●	familiarity, depend on product category
	●	Perception on Home country
	●	product preference - product type matter
	●	RS in price-quality
	●	west and east brand comparison - aftersale
	●	western brand perception, quality
	●	western brand preference user

