Investigating the country of origin effect on consumers’ perception regarding consumer products – the case of India

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate the country of origin effect on consumers’ perception regarding consumer products from India. Indian consumer products are not well known in Europe and other Western countries. Therefore this research is focusing on the expectations consumers have about a certain product from a certain country and not on the experience. In order to understand those expectations, four interviews were conducted on potential Western European consumers. Those interviews were analysed using a framework which consists of a combination between a country of origin effect model and the brand equity model. The combination of the two models helped to understand the expectations which Western consumers can have regarding foreign products, in the case of this study, consumer products from India. It can be seen that three country of origin mechanisms were existent but not very strongly developed. As an example the cognitive country of origin mechanism had almost no direct influence on the brand awareness, as the interviewees were not able to recall or recognize any Indian brand logo which was shown during the interview. This means that the consumers interviewed in this paper are not extremely negatively nor positively influenced by the country of origin effect of India.

Keywords:

Country of origin effect, brand equity, Indian consumer products, product perception
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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Nowadays the world has turned into a large trading place. This urge to trade, one can argue, is caused by the demand for products one cannot find in its own boundaries or by the possibility to obtain the desired product for a lesser price elsewhere (O'Rourke & Williamson, 2002). However, the possibility to trade is often more complicated as it seems. On a macro level many companies have to deal with rules and regulations such as; Intellectual Property rights in certain countries, trade barriers, import and/or export duties and the list continues (World Trade Organisation, 2014).

Some researchers argue that the intense globalization that we are currently experiencing really took off in the 90’s (O'Rourke & Williamson, 2002). Reasons for that may be the increase of production, the improvements of the infrastructure, increase of population (O'Rourke & Williamson, 2002). However a group of researchers associated with the Fraser institute worked since 1986 on a concept that compared the contribution of economic freedom of a country to the world economic growth (Cole, 2003). Interesting is that they found that the degree of economic integration is correlated to the GDP of a country (Cole, 2003). That basically means the higher the economic integration a country experiences the more likely it is to have a high GDP. Note that this economic integration does not necessarily say something about the growth rate of a country (Cole, 2003). There is a possibility of the convergence effect which explains that poorer countries will “catch-up” to richer countries due to the fact that diminishing returns (to capital) are less in developing countries than they are in developed countries (Cole, 2003). Also the developing countries can reach a higher growth relatively easy as they can copy the existing technology from the richer countries, which have spent a lot of time on research in the past (Cole, 2003).

Looking at the fast developing countries one can see an incredible increase in GDP and overall economic growth with the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) (Polodoo, Seetanah, Sannasee, & Padachi, 2012). According to Wilson and Purushothaman (2003) the BRIC economies will increase so much when it comes to GDP, income per capita and currency movements that they become true world economic powers in the next 50 years. Moreover in less than 40 years the GDP of these four countries will be just as high as the GDP of the G6 all together (Wilson & Purushothaman, 2003). These incredible developments make it interesting to examine the export and import movements from these countries. To
illustrate, by examining European countries (within the European Union) one can discover many Chinese products already existing in the market, as China is the European Union’s 2nd trading partner (European Commission, 2014).

On a micro level it is clear that a company has to take into account many factors that influence a consumers buying behavior. It is logical that once a company has gone through all the effort of researching the external environment of the desired market place, it wants to be somehow guaranteed that the products will actually sell to consumers. However finding out which processes are involved in consumer buying behavior is a complicated process. This is in accordance with Pfister and Böhm (2008) who have researched that in a market where there are many choices in products and many variations of the same products (as is the case in Europe which is a strongly developed market) it becomes increasingly difficult for a consumer to make a decision regarding their purchase. It is not only difficult it is also time consuming; therefore consumers are easily influenced by external factors such as advertisement, opinions heard from other people and opinions about the country of origin (Pfister & Böhm, 2008). The country of origin effect was assessed on its intensity by Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999) by measuring product evaluations using three categories. The perceived quality a consumer has about a product, the attitude the consumer has towards a product and the purchase intention a consumer has (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). In addition to this, it is not enough to understand what the decision making process is of a consumer; a company should be able to implement it in practice. A useful tool for a company to establish its brands and products is by using the brand equity model. The brand equity model focuses on several concrete aspects that can be used with implementing a company’s product strategy. However, let it be clear that in order to create a holistic product strategy, external factors as stated above like the country of origin effect matter and need to be considered in the development of such a strategy. Before a company can develop such a strategy, it should be aware of the perception consumers in a specific region have regarding the country of origin.

1.2 Problem and research area

It is clear that developing countries are attractive for foreign investing companies from developed countries to expand their business too. However as the previous mentioned researchers already discussed it is clear that there is a rising trend of developing countries such as the BRIC countries having the potential to compete strongly in the international trade market. This would lead into the option for this group of countries to expand their businesses and invest in developed countries. Because these BRIC countries are relatively new and
unknown to the consumers from developed countries it is clear that doing business in
developed countries comes with a risk. As described, consumers are often influenced by a lot
of external factors in their decision making processes. Brand equity is one concept which
explains the value of a brand directly related to certain factors. Those factors are mainly
controlled by the producer itself, for example the used marketing mix.; however there are
factors that a company cannot influence to a great extent because of the perception a
consumer might have due to the country of origin effect.

It is noticeable that just little attention has been focused on how BRIC-state consumer brand
companies can expand to Western countries. However it is not just doing research regarding
macro factors, the consumer market should be investigated from the consumer’s perspective.
Looking at macro versus micro factors it is clear that the research that has been done focuses
less on the factors that include consumer buying behavior and consumer perceptions.

1.3 Purpose
In order to discover the factors that influence a consumers buying behavior regarding the
country of origin effect; the purpose of this research is to understand the perception which
consumers from developed countries have regarding consumer products from developing
countries.

This will be investigated using the following research question:

“How does the country of origin effect influence the perception consumers have regarding
consumer products?”

This research will help to fill the knowledge gap in understanding consumers’ expectations
and perceptions regarding specific products.

1.4 Delimitations
Regarding the BRIC countries, one can see that China is already very present in the European
market. Russia mainly exports oil, gas (together good for 58% of the total export), nickel,
steel and other raw materials (Trading economics, 2013). Brazil is mostly famous for its
export in soybeans, orange juice and raw cane sugar (Trading economics, 2013). Finally India
is big in exporting engineering goods, textile, gems and jewelry (Trading economics, 2014).
Therefore, India has a big potential to export consumer goods into the European market.
However it is uncertain if consumers in the European market are willing to buy these
products. Looking deeper into the Indian development and potential exporting it is noticeable
that little attention has been paid to the potential of Indian brands to go abroad. Because of the
potential India has in exporting to Europe in combination with the lack of research that is
done in this area of country of origin effect regarding India, India will be the investigated
country in this research.

In order to find out if it is possible for these producers and brands to expand outside India this
study will focus on the perception of consumers regarding the country of origin and how this
influences brand equity. However in order to make the consumer market smaller this study
will focus on the Western European markets: The Netherlands, Germany, Sweden and
Norway. Other countries such as the United Kingdom, Portugal and France have long colonial
history with India. Therefore those countries were not part of the sample, as it can be assumed
that the perception of consumers of those countries is different than to countries with non-
colonial history. The chosen countries have mature consumer markets, entering these markets
is therefore in theory already quite difficult. By investigating the perception Western
Europeans have about Indian consumer products a clear conclusion can be drawn if it is
possible for Indian producers to expand to other mature markets.

1.5 Thesis layout

Literature review

A review of the available literature is described to get the reader more acquainted with
the subject and to clearly emphasize on the gap and the new model.

Theoretical framework

A new theoretical framework is developed which is a combination between two
already existing models in order to bridge the literature gap and provide support in analyzing
the empirical data in order to answer the research question.

Methodology

The first part of the method chapter will deal with the chosen deductive research
approach. It is followed by the research strategy, explaining why the qualitative research
method was chosen. The chapter about the research design and data collection will focus on
the four chosen cases and will illustrate how empirical data will be collected through
qualitative interviews. The chapter research design and data collection will connect the initial
research question, how the country of origin effect influences the perception of Indian consumer brands of western European consumers, and the concrete data which will be extracted through the qualitative interviews. The following chapter about the data analysis will explain how the cross case analysis and an explanation building analyzing strategy will be used in order to get results.

**Empirical Findings**

The empirical findings of the four interviews will be discussed. The findings will start with the country of origin effect followed by the concrete factors of the brand equity model providing the possibility to analyze the factors influencing the perception of consumers under the analysis section.

**Analysis**

The focus in the first part of the analysis will lie on the decision making processes and the Country of Origin Effect. The second part will use the three country of origin mechanism (cognitive, affective and normative) to address each dimension of the brand equity model (brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand associations and perceived quality). Some mechanisms, are very closely linked with each other, therefore some empirical findings only relate to the most apparent mechanisms.

**Conclusion**

In the conclusion chapter conclusions will be drawn from the analyzed data.

**Implications**

The implications part will describe the practical and theoretical benefits the thesis can have for companies in with regard to the academic field.

**Limitations and suggestions for further research**

Limitations of the study will be discussed followed by suggestions for further research.
2. Literature Review

In order to find out how this perception of Indian consumer products among Western consumers is formed, three aspects are taken into consideration.

Before one can analyze why consumers buy something, the decision making processes need to be explained. The next step is to consider the external factors which are influencing this decision making process, namely the country of origin effects. Finally the brand equity model will be explained to illustrate the effects of the country of origin mechanisms and will result in the theoretical framework.

2.1 Decision making processes

In a world where there are so many choices in products and so many variations of the same product, the decision making process from the customer is becoming increasingly difficult (Pfister & Böhm, 2008). Decision making is not just difficult it is also quite time consuming (Pfister & Böhm, 2008). According to Pfister and Böhm (2008) the decision making processes of individuals are always complicated, as individuals mostly try to avoid decision making. Most consumers are not just gathering technical information regarding a product, and think logically about that product. Consumers are emotionally influence-able by external factors in their decision making process due to lack of information, time, relevance ambiguity or need of social coordination (Pfister & Böhm, 2008). The higher the involvement of the consumers with a certain product or brand the more likely a consumer is to buy a product (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). In the research of Azjen and Fishbein (1977) the researchers discovered that the higher the correspondence of the producer is with the consumer the more likely there is a high attitude-behavior relation with that product (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). This high involvement of the producers with the consumers takes away the above mentioned issue from Pfister and Böhm (2008), namely that individuals/consumers are unwilling to put a lot of time and effort in information gathering about the product. As is described in “brand equity” the correspondence between companies and consumer is often high as many companies have an active brand strategy to distinguish themselves from other companies (Jung & Sung, 2008). Also the strong brand image will support the consumer to differentiate between various offerings, making the decision making process easier and thus resulting in the desired purchase (Yasin, Noor, & Mohamad, 2007). Most of the emotional factors that can influence a consumer’s purchase behavior are known among companies. (Zhang, 1996) What is less obvious and thus more complicated for the producer to control is consumer’s perspective on the country of origin effect (Zhang, 1996). This information could be valuable
to producers as it could influence the strategies regarding sourcing and marketing the products elsewhere (Zhang, 1996).

As the literature describes consumers are easy to be influenced by external factors. However when it comes to emotions, feelings and social pressure the factors are utterly vague. The previous literature points that out but does not provide the audience with a clear measurement. Therefore it is a clear that there is a need for a measurement to enlighten the factors in order for companies to use them in the future.

2.2 Country of origin effect

The term “country of origin” refers to the country where the product is developed (Zhang, 1996). The country of origin effect in addition to that refers to the mental image this mentioned country of origin might have on a consumer’s perception about the product. We do recognize the difference between the country where the product is developed and where it is manufactured as nowadays a lot of companies outsource their production to other countries (Zhang, 1996). Therefore when discussing the country of origin and the country of origin effect we recognize the country that the product might be designed and developed and where the marketing activities take place, and not necessarily the manufacturing (Zhang, 1996). This results in the following definition:

“...The country of origin 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” (Roth and Romeo, 1992 in Zhang, Yong 1996).

According to Zhang (1996) the country of origin effect exists only on an individual level, making the creation of one specific formula or definition difficult. The country of origin effect describes the individual’s perception on the country of origin of the product. So does the best fashion comes from France; the best cars are produced in Germany; high-technology products come from Japan and Chinese products have a bad quality (Yasin, Noor, & Mohamad, 2007).

Dinnie (2003) explains in his article the general development of the research regarding the country-of-origin effect. What is interesting is to see that after the ending of the Second World War and the economic development that came with that ending, researchers started to get interested in the country-of-origin effect (Dinnie, 2003). Schooler and Sunoo (1969) and Nagashima (1970, 1977) already found that consumers responded in a different way towards
regional and national labeling of products, which was more dynamic than static (Dinnie, 2003). However in these times the country-of-origin effect was not yet so important in comparison with the economic development in the late 80’s, early 90’s when the world economic was booming (Cole, 2003). In this period of time the economic freedom (i.e. removal of trade barriers, different tax mechanisms) that occurred in many countries in the world encouraged the overall global trade (Cole, 2003), which makes the country-of-origin effect that products have on the perception of consumers more and more relevant to marketers (Dinnie, 2003).

Because of this importance for companies wishing to have a successful international marketing strategy to increase the brand image and brand equity, many researchers have tried to establish a theory regarding the country of origin effect.

Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999) combined the results of existing studies with a quantitative meta-analysis while focusing on cognitive, affective, and normative aspects of country of origin. They have assessed within the country of origin effects three types of product evaluations being: perceived quality, attitude and purchase intention (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). They have developed several hypotheses in which statements regarding the economic development in combination with the impact of multi-national development and the difference between consumers and industrial purchasers are tested (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). They have found that the country of origin effect has a large influence in the perceived quality of a product rather than the purchase intention (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). This perceived quality is according to Yoo et al. (2000) important to establish brand equity. By researching the country of origin effect Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999) describe that the country of origin effect is influenced by three factors: cognitive, affective and normative. The cognitive mechanism often is a cue or signal related to a certain product (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999), this could be the knowledge a person has about a product or brand. This knowledge reflects strongly on the perceived quality of a brand and attributes such as durability and reliability (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). The affective mechanism is related to emotional and symbolic values (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999), this could be caused by personal relations or feelings regarding a product or brand. With personal feelings one can think about the social status a person desires to achieve with purchasing certain products (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). Finally the normative mechanism is related to norms, or how something should be according to a person’s norms and social environments (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). According to Shimp and Sharma (1987) an important influence of this
mechanism is the consumer’s desire to purchase local products as it will benefit the local economy and is “the right thing to do” (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999).

Although this aspect of the country of origin effect is known to exist and has been researched by the abovementioned authors, it is not a widely common tool to use for companies to establish the demand for their products in a certain market.

2.3 Brand equity
A common tool for companies to establish their brand and products in a country is by evaluating the brand equity model.

In order to differentiate the own company from other companies, many companies build brands (Jung & Sung, 2008). Brand marketing strategies are developed to improve the company’s sales and with the goal to stand out among other companies (Jung & Sung, 2008). From the customer perspective, brands help the customer to differentiate between various offerings, and the choice of the customer can be seen as a critical success factor of the different companies. It is suggested that the management of brands is important for companies and this special form of management should be approached strategically (Wood, 2000). Yasin, Noor and Mohamad (2007) complement the necessity of building brands by adding following advantages for brands: the firm is less vulnerable with a brand, compared to another company without a brand, larger margins can be achieved with a brand, greater cooperation with intermediaries and more opportunities can be developed with brand extension (Yasin, Noor & Mohamad, 2007).

As it was shown that the value of a brand can be one success factor for a company in terms of profitability (Jung & Sung, 2008), a lot of research has been carried out in recent years into the field of valuation and measuring brands (Aaker, 1996; Jung & Sung, 2008; Wood, 2000; Eagle, Kitchen & Moyle, 2003; Yasin, Noor & Mohamad, 2007; Yoo, Donthu & Lee, 2000). The most common theoretical construct for brand valuation in this research field, originated by Aaker (1991), is the brand equity model. Aaker (1991) defines brand equity as:

“...A set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, which add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm’s customers.” Aaker (1991, p. 15)

As the focus of this definition is the firm’s customer, this model can be seen within the range of consumer-oriented brand equity definitions (Wood, 2000). In this consumer-oriented brand
equity approach the focal attention is paid to the impact of marketing communication as part of the marketing activities of a company (Eagle et al., 2003). The research field of consumer-oriented brand equity also aims to understand the consumers’ knowledge of the brand and with this new knowledge about the consumer; the company develops appropriate brand strategies (Jung & Sung, 2008).

Although this study will not focus on the other perspective, in order to understand the whole picture of brand equity, at this point it is necessary to mention, that brand equity can be defined from two perspectives (Jung & Sung, 2008). The first perspective, the abovementioned consumer oriented approach, focuses on the relationship between the customer and the brand, the second perspective focuses on the brand owner and those definitions can be counted to the company-oriented definitions (Wood, 2000). For example for mergers and acquisitions, the brand of a company must be evaluated in concrete numbers (Jung & Sung, 2008). In addition, this separation became necessary, as from the accounting perspective, brands can be seen as financial intangible company assets and changes in international accounting standards, required a new way of measuring the financial value of brands (Eagle, Kitchen & Moyle, 2003).

According to Aaker (1991) and Jung and Sung (2008), consumer oriented brand equity is composed by the following elements: brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association, and other brand assets. Most of the consumer oriented brand equity researchers however mainly use only the four elements: brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand association (Jung & Sung, 2008; Yoo & Donthu, 2000).

The following part will describe the four elements of the brand equity model, as an understanding of these elements is essential for the framework which will be presented in the next chapter.

According to Yasin et al. (2007), brand loyalty within the construct of brand equity is directly related to the number of people who purchase the product regularly. Those regular buyers are very important for the company as those buyers mean a vital revenue stream for the company (Yasin et al., 2007). Research has shown that brand loyalty has a positive and direct function in forming the brand equity (Yasin et al., 2007). Yasin et al. (2007) carry the concept of brand loyalty to an extreme by describing a situation, in which a customer is loyal to a certain brand, even though another product with superior features exists from a competitor.
The second element of the consumer brand equity is brand awareness. Brand awareness has a positive function on brand equity, as a high level of brand awareness increases the chance of the brand being selected in purchase situations by the customer (Yasin et al., 2007). A high level of brand awareness means that the consumer recognizes the brand and is familiar to this brand (Yasin et al., 2007).

Consumers can perceive the quality of a product differently. The best case for a company is when the consumer recognizes the disparity and advantages of a specific brand compared to a competing brand or product (Yasin et al., 2007). Furthermore, a high perceived quality of a product will positively affect the brand equity (Yasin et al., 2007). As an example, if the perceived quality of a product is very high, the marketer can sell the product for a higher price, and this will have a positive effect on the brand equity (Yasin et al., 2007). To view this element in its entity, the consumers’ perceived quality is strongly connected to the perception process of the consumer towards the product and the brand. In the end, the perceived quality will lead to the consumers’ decision-making process (Yasin et al., 2007).

All consumers have associations towards a specific brand. Those associations form the fourth element of the brand equity model, namely brand associations. The associations which a consumer can have about a specific product or a brand are complex, as they are entangled with each other (Yasin et al., 2007). At this point, it is important to mention that the brand associations on one hand can be formed with the help of the marketer and on the other hand they can be formed by the consumer himself (Yasin et al., 2007). In the second situation, in which the consumer creates the associations himself, often they are based on existing associations (Aaker, 1991). It was shown that the brand image which the consumer has towards the brand and product is important to explain purchase decisions and the choice of brands (Yasin et al., 2007).

The brand equity framework by Yoo et al. (2000) illustrates the brand equity structure and shows how marketing efforts, brand equity dimensions, brand equity, value to the customer and value to the firm can be related to each other. The novel idea of Yoo et al. (2000) is to combine the two different approaches mentioned earlier, consumer-based brand equity and company-based brand equity, by stating that a positive brand value to the customer results in a higher brand value to the firm and again those higher margins can be used to increase the marketing efforts with the goal to increase the brand equity by influencing positively the various elements of the brand equity (Yoo et al., 2000).
A different approach of conceptualizing brand equity is explained by Wood (2000). She introduces the simple concept of the brand equity chain. Compared to the brand equity circle by Yoo et al. (2000), the brand equity chain by Wood (2000) starts with the brand description. By using product, price, place, and promotion as tools of the marketing mix, the company can tailor its brand to the specific needs of a market, which results into the brand description (or: identity or image) (Wood, 2000). After this first step of brand description, the next step is brand strength (Wood, 2000). The outcome of the brand description can result in brand loyalty and in brand strength (Wood, 2000). The degree of the brand loyalty results in the brand value (Wood, 2000). This construct of the brand equity chain explains the resulting brand value by using the brand loyalty as a main factor to determine its value. Previous constructs (e.g. Yasin et al., (2007)) also highlight the importance of brand loyalty for brand equity. All presented models basically use the same four factors and elements, but each of them attaches different importance to the various factors or elements.

2.4 The gap
As the literature describes consumers are easy to be influenced by external factors. However when it comes to emotions, feelings and social pressure the factors are utterly vague. The subject of consumer perceptions regarding the country of origin effect is not completely until satisfaction addressed by previous studies. Despite the findings of notable authors like Verlegh and Steenkamp, Zhang, and Jung, little attention has been paid to which mechanisms of the country of origin effect influence the way consumers perceive products and brands from developing countries like India. The previous literature does not provide the audience with a clear measurement to address this matter. Therefore it is a clear that there is a need for a measurement to enlighten the factors in order for companies to use them in the future. As is described in the previous paragraphs the brand equity model is a handy tool for companies to develop their strategies on. It is recognized in this study as a tool to measure the mechanisms which influence and are influenced by the country of origin effect. Especially in the case of India there has been no research conducted on in what way the country of origin effect influences the perception of consumers regarding consumer products.
3. Theoretical Framework

To bridge the gap of consumer perceptions the following presented theoretical model is based on the abovementioned theories all combined in one clear and simple model.

The brand equity model described by Aaker (1991) is one part of it. The brand equity in Aaker’s (1991) model already includes four elements: brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality and brand association. This model can be seen from the perspective that the company has the full power to influence all those four factors by using tools from the marketing mix (Yoo et al., 2000). It was explained earlier, that the decision making process is complicated and consumers are also emotionally influenced in this process (Pfister & Böhm, 2008). A company can influence the consumer in this decision making by offering a strong brand (Yasin, Noor, & Mohamad, 2007). Zhang (1996) explains that the consumer perspective on the country of origin is very hard to control and therefore this effect can be seen as something which cannot be explained within the brand equity circle. The framework therefore consists of a modified brand equity model, including the impact which the country of origin effect can have in the consumer decision making process, namely cognitive, affective and normative mechanisms.

Figure 1 shows how the two constructs of brand equity and the mechanisms of the country of origin effect are merged into one model.

Figure 1: Country of Origin and Brand Equity (Model constructed from: Mechanisms by Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999) and Dimensions of Brand Equity by Aaker (1991))

The idea of using this framework is the following: Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999) affirm that the country of origin effect has three mechanisms: cognitive, affective and normative. The cognitive mechanism often is a cue or signal related to a certain product (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999), this could be the knowledge a person has about a product or brand. The affective mechanism is related to emotional and symbolic values (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999), this could be caused by personal relations or feelings regarding a product or brand.
Finally the normative mechanism is related to norms, or how something should be according to a person’s norms and social environments (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). By investigating the knowledge, feelings and norms consumers have it can be directly related on the brand equity model which shows the perception consumers have regarding brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality and brand associations.

*Cognitive mechanism:* The cognitive country of origin mechanisms (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999) could affect the brand equity model (Aaker, 1991) in a way, that the brand loyalty between a consumer and a certain product or brand is based on knowledge a person has about a product or brand. The cognitive perceived quality combination could exist if the consumer researches the specific product or brand in the internet before purchasing it.

*Affective mechanism:* The affective mechanism is based on feelings or emotions (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). In combination with the brand equity model (Aaker, 1991), this means that the perceived quality of a specific product or brand, is not based on knowledge, but on feelings or emotions (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). A person could become loyal to a certain brand because the product or brand is associated in a positive way, based on feelings or emotions.

*Normative mechanism:* The normative mechanism is related to norms, or how something should be (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). Related to the brand equity model and the perception of consumers regarding consumer products, the normative country of origin mechanism can explain how certain believes regarding how a certain society is or should be, could result in various brand associations (Aaker, 1991). A perceived fast and modern developing country can have a positive synergy effect respective the perceived quality of the products produced in this specific country.

The expected outcome of this research is to understand the influences of the country of origin effect on the four dimensions of the brand equity model. It can be assumed that consumers hold different country of origin beliefs regarding consumer products. The above mentioned framework will help to understand those effects by categorizing them in the three different mechanisms of cognitive, affective and normative. With these mechanisms the four dimensions of brand equity can be analyzed. Then the relationship among those factors can be concluded.
4. Methodology

4.1 Research approach
With some restrictions, the research of this study followed a deductive approach. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), the deductive research approach creates a hypothesis, in the case of this research a research question, and based on the level of knowledge which exists in this domain, conducts research, with the desired outcome of an answer to the initial question. By using the principles of two existing models, the domain of the country of origin effect and the domain of the brand equity, this research aims to answer the question, how the country of origin effect influences the perception of Indian consumer products of Western European consumers. The country of origin effect is translated into researchable entities (Bryman & Bell, 2011), within the complex set of interactions of the country of origin effect model and the brand equity model.

The restrictions of the deductive research approach are linked to the desired outcome of this study. This study aims to give answers to a specific question, inevitably there will be also an inductive part (Bryman and Bell, 2011), as the findings of this research are fed back into the pool of theories within the domain of country of origin effect and the brand equity research.

4.2 Research strategy
Yin (2014) illustrates which method should be used depending on the three dependent dimensions: the form of the research question (a), if the method requires control of behavioral events (b) and the third dimension, if the research focuses on contemporary events (c).

As this study aims to explain a certain phenomenon or behavior of consumers, this research can be considered as an explanatory research approach. As the research question includes the term “how”, according to Yin (2014) a case study is the preferred research method. In addition a contemporary event is analyzed, the behavior of Western European consumers towards Indian products nowadays, in which the relevant behaviors cannot or only very difficult be manipulated. This makes the research also suitable for a case study.

Yin (2014) defines the situation, in which a researcher asks a “how” or “why” question, focuses on a contemporary set of events and has little or no control over the event, as the perfect conditions for conducting a case study research. As the research question of this study,
how the country of origin effect influences the perception of Indian consumer products of Western European consumers, (a) includes the term “how”, (b) does not require and kind of control of behavioral events and (c) focuses on a contemporary event, the qualitative case study was chosen as the main method for this research project, as all the three criteria for the case study research niche mentioned by Yin (2014) seem to be fulfilled.

4.3 Research design and Data collection

Four semi structured interviews were done in order to create four single case studies. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), semi structured interviews refer to a situation, in which the interviewer has a list of questions, which are similar to an interview schedule. The main difference to a structured interview is that the interviewer has the freedom to change the order of the questions and can focus more on different parts of the interview. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), the interviewer has a maneuvering room, and within this room he can ask extra questions. The semi structured interview has been chosen as the method to create the empirical data, as the research question already implies that it is not clear what drives the consumer to think in a specific way, and the semi structured interviews leaves freedom to focus on relevant answers (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The interview process is flexible (Bryman & Bell, 2011), which allows to change the wording from interviewee to interviewee. This form of interview has been chosen, as the aim is to understand the specific phenomenon, patterns and the form of behavior (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

The research question is operationalized in the interview guide, by using the theoretical framework as the structure for the various items. The interview guide gives an overview of the topics which should be addressed (Bryman & Bell, 2011) and helps during the interview to remember the issues which needs to be addressed.

Rudestam and Newton (2007) highlight the importance of the way how the data is collected. According to them, the data collection can be described with two dimensions: fidelity and structure. As described by Bryman and Bell (2011), the semi structured interview does not necessarily follow a strict question order. This lacking structure should be compensated with a high degree of fidelity (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). The high degree of fidelity can be reached by using tape recorders and not by be dependent on field notes (Rudestam & Newton, 2007).

The interviews were held by both the researchers. One of the researchers asked the questions while the other researcher recorded the interviews, made additional notes and had an
overview of the general process of the interview. The observing researcher was able to ask questions if the interviewer missed out on a certain theme. This overview ensured the objectivity of the interview and also complemented the prescribed semi-structured interview questions. The recordings were analysed and transcribed after the interview by both the researchers in order to get a clear overview of which answers were given related to the themes.

4.4 Case selection

The four interviewees were selected based on their age, their nationality and their gender. As this study focuses on Western countries, Sweden, Norway, Netherlands and Germany were selected. In order to collect comparable data, the interviewees were selected from the same age group namely young adults who are highly educated and just graduated and working, or about to graduate with working experience. The youngest interviewee was 24 and the oldest was 28 at the time of the interview. The reason behind this selection is the fact that this group of young adults is going through significant changes in their lives: they have moved out of their parent’s house; they have just started working or they could have started thinking about making their own family (moving in with partner or having children for example). This segment probably doesn’t have a high income initially, but the income will grow rapidly as they are working on their career. Therefore this segment is more likely to be willing to experience with different brands and products that they are used to. Therefore this segment is interesting for new producers and brands.

The interviews took place in different comfortable private conference rooms in a hotel. The rooms were able to be closed, resulting into nobody entering the room, creating a relaxed atmosphere with no room for disturbance. The interviews started off with a short introduction about the researchers and a short introduction of the interviewee. The four interviewees grew up in four different countries. One 24 year old woman was born and raised in the Netherlands, has a M.Sc. degree in Psychology and law, has been working since one year and lives currently in the Netherlands. This interview took place on April 7th, 2014 and the interview lasted 60 minutes. The 24 year old woman from Norway was born and raised in Norway and lives since one year in Sweden. Because culturally speaking there are not many differences between Sweden and Norway and due to the short time she has been living in Sweden (less than one year) it can be assumed that the answers are minor influenced by her change of country. Her educational background is a B.Sc. in Public Relations. She currently works part time as a marketing manager and studies a M.Sc. in International Marketing. This interview
took place on March 28th, 2014 and the interview lasted 60 minutes. To create a correct balance in our data gathering the other two interviewees were male. One man, 28, was born, raised and currently lives in Sweden. His background is a B.Sc. in Electrical Engineering and he currently is about to graduate with a M.Sc. in Technical Project and Business management. This interview took place on March 27th, 2014 and the interview lasted 60 minutes. Finally, a German man, 25, who currently lives in Germany was interviewed. He has a B.A. in Film History. This interview took place on March 21st, 2014 and the interview lasted 60 minutes.

4.5 Data analysis

Those single case study reports will be presented as separate chapters. According to Yin (2014) it is also necessary to include an additional chapter or section which includes the cross-case analysis and the results. The data is analyzed using a cross case analysis which examines themes, similarities and differences between the case studies: the four interviews with young adults from 24 – 28 coming from Norway, Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands. The transcribed text from the interviews was analysed in several ways. The interviews were categorized in several themes such as: Country of origin, brand loyalty, perceived quality, brand awareness and brand associations. By using the theoretical model described in the chapter “Theoretical Framework” the findings were divided into cognitive, affective and normative mechanisms. Once the information was categorized in these three mechanisms the brand equity model could be added which provided the results for the analysis part.

The analysis of the cases will follow a linear-analytical structure. Yin (2014) describes this form of analysis as the standard approach for research reports. Following the last chapters, in which the issue has been demonstrated, followed by the review of relevant literature in the research area of country of origin effect and brand equity, the new empirical data will be used to answer the question how the country of origin effect influences the perception western Europeans have about Indian products, using the theoretical framework with the three mechanisms of the country-of-origin effect and the four elements of the brand equity model. As the goal of this study is to find an explanation for an existing phenomenon, the analysis chapter will follow an explanation building analyzing approach (Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) states, that in most of case studies, the explanation building is written down in narrative form. As narratives very often are not precise, the explanation building analysis in this study will follow the structure of the theoretical framework which is based on existing findings and literature of the specific domain.
4.6 Research validity and reliability

In order to increase the validity and reliability of this study, different forms of triangulation have been chosen. Yin (2014) states four different types of triangulation. This study will use data triangulation and investigator triangulation: Data triangulation implies that the empirical data used for this study is not based on a single case study of one single person, but by using multiple case studies and in total by four individual interviews. It was decided to create four different case studies in order to increase the overall quality and validity of the research project. Existing theories and four different people from four different countries were used to increase the reliability of this research. Yin (2014) states that the findings and conclusions of a case study become more convincing and accurate by using multiple case studies. The influencing force of the country of origin effect can be seen as a phenomenon and the data triangulation will ensure that more than one measurement is used to analyze this complex construct (Yin, 2014). Investigator triangulation means that more than one researcher analyzes the data (Yin, 2014). As this research is done by two researchers this form of investigator triangulation will also increase the validity and reliability of this study.
5. Empirical Findings

5.1 Country of origin effect

The interviewees were asked questions regarding their travelling: what their motivation is to travel and how often they travel. Knowing if the interviewees have actually been to India, or Asia, was necessary, as this could influence the perception of the interviewees have on consumer goods from India.

Three out of four interviewees have travelled to Asia for a longer period of time (1 – 6 months). The Norwegian woman had personal affiliations with Indians because her friends and neighbours in Norway came from India. The Dutch woman (24) travelled to India. The interviewee who has not been to Asia or India is interested to go there. All four respondents gave cultural experience as a main motivation factor to go to Asia and India. Low cost holidays and increasing experience within the educational background (engineering) were two other main factors.

To find out the opinion of the interviewees regarding India, they were asked what their image was of India and how this image was formed. All four interviewees had very different images of India, however they all answered that India was: “populist”, “very crowded”, “crazy in traffic, crazy in the crowd” referring to the atmosphere in the streets of big cities.

The person with the most positive image of India was the Norwegian woman who had a personal relation to Indian people: she used to live next to an Indian couple. In addition to that she heard stories from her father who worked for an international company and travelled to India a lot to work with the people there. Her image was positive because she experienced that Indian people are hardworking, kind, hospitable, motivated and have a high focus on education. This high focus on education shows itself in the fact that the neighbours all had several jobs and the neighbour’s children were studying to become doctors.

The Dutch woman was the only one from the interviewees who had actually been to India. Her image of India changed after her visit. Initially she expected the country to be relaxed, easy going and beautiful and the people to be nice and honest. However she experienced a lot of chaos and people not being straightforward, which she experienced as lying. The lack of order and dangerous situations in the traffic are made even worse by the possibility to bribe the police officers when they stop you or try to create order. The overall living circumstances in India were bad due to the high pollution, chaos and the amount of people. The social
pressure on individuals to behave in a certain way (influenced by social status and mostly by their friend and family) is enormous, much more than in the Netherlands.

The image of India for the Swedish man (28) was more practical. His image has been formed at the University where he studied his Bachelor in Electronic Engineering. The master program that followed this Bachelor specialization was filled with students from India and Pakistan. This is what created the image of India being a country of very hard working students within the IT- and Engineering oriented industry.

Finally the German man was the only interviewee that never been to Asia or to India nor has a personal relation with anybody from India could not really imagine anything with India. He knows from the media that India has a lot of people, poverty and big, often much polluted, cities. The special buildings and architecture you can find in India he has seen before in the media as well. Because of his educational background in film industry he has heard about the Bollywood industry, he knows that a lot of money is involved in that industry, however he does not like the movies. The things he has heard about India is both positive and negative and relates to respectively the culture and the poverty. As described previously he would be interested in experiencing this culture.

5.2 Country of Origin and Brand Equity

5.2.1 Country of origin and Brand Loyalty

To research the brand loyalty the interviewees have towards consumer products they were asked questions regarding several factors influencing this brand loyalty: to what extent is it important to buy local products? Is there a place for Indian products in the consumer market? What does a product need to have in order to encourage repeated purchasing?

Regarding the importance of buying local products the Norwegian woman said: “It is not important for me to buy a product from Norway. I would rather buy a product from India, in order to increase the wealth of that country.” The Dutch woman and the German man did also not give importance to buying local consumer products, however the German man did buy local food products. The Swedish man preferred to buy local products as it gives him a safe feeling.

The answers regarding the demand for Indian consumer products were quite uniform. All four interviewees recognized there is a place for Indian consumer products in the market. The Norwegian woman thinks about technologies, doctors, development and service orientation if
she thinks about India. Therefore if she is well informed by the producer she would definitely consider buying an Indian consumer product. The Dutch woman recognizes that there is always a place in the market for a new product. However she emphasizes that a new brand should prove itself. She says about that: “I think that especially with products from India people are a bit more careful when buying them because they might think “oh it is from Asia therefore it is probably not good”, clearly Indian brands would have a lot to prove there. I think that if they are willing to do that then yes, there is a place in the market.”

The Swedish man imagines that Indian brands could benefit in terms of competitive advantage because they can produce cheap products. However a bad image of India could result into a reluctance to buy Indian products and therefore people will not become brand loyal so fast.

The German man, like the Dutch woman, likes to be well informed about the qualitative aspects of the product in combination with a good price. If the producer has proven that the product is good he could definitely be encouraged to buy the product again. Furthermore, according to him there is a prejudice against products which are sold in Europe but produced in India. This made in India represents, according to him, produced under bad conditions. He says about that: “These bad working conditions are an important point that I would consider before I buy an Indian product.”

Factors regarding the repeated purchasing resulted into quite uniform answers. The interviewees stated that the price should be good, the packaging should be attractive and the overall consumer experience should be up to standard; i.e. the quality should be satisfying.

Because the Swedish man had no idea about products from India neither has he used before, he did a simulation with a product he used very often, namely shampoo. The brand he chose was P&G, a United States brand which he has frequently purchased before. The main reason for him to buy the product was the description of the bottle. The description should meet his needs. If he has dry hair the shampoo should be for dry hair. This way he is not loyal to any brands but chooses his product depending on his existing needs. Another factor to buy a certain product is if he has seen it before: “When I buy a product I go for recognized brands, like one that I have previously seen on TV or otherwise heard about.” Because he just has short hair he is not sure if he would be very brand loyal if a product seems to work. He does not really know or notice the difference between bad or good quality shampoos. He assumes that the more expensive the products are the better they would be.
Finally the Swedish man is more inclined to buy a product he is familiar with than to try something new. He would consider buying an Indian product if the price is lower and the quality is higher.

5.2.2 Country of origin and Brand Awareness

The PowerPoint simulation tried to test the brand awareness of the interviewees. The brands are not just randomly chosen, they are a selection of the most well-known brands of India in India according to Interbrands (2014). Also the researchers own experience has been taken into account since the researchers belong to the same target group regarding age and education as the interviewees.

The PowerPoint showed eight different brands.

The first slide was TATA. TATA is a company active in several sectors, probably known most because of the cars (Interbrand, 2014). The company has a value of US$10,907 million. Although all interviewees imagined the brand and logo to be one of cars, not one of them had ever heard of it or knew which country it would come from.

The second slide was Reliance Industry. Reliance Industry is a company active in several sectors: oil and refinement, retail such as shoes, jewellery, fashion and toys and even in the telecom industry. The retail branch of the company serves 2.5 million customers every week in India and has over 6.75 million customers in their loyalty program (Interbrand, 2014). The company has a value of US$6,247 million. Nobody of the interviewees knew either what it was, or where it came from. “An English speaking country” or “England” was mentioned by the women.

Slide 3 showed the Logo from FabIndia. FabIndia is a well-known fashion brand that sells products that are made from traditional techniques, skills and hand-based processes all over the world (Fabindia, 2013). The brand was not familiar to the interviewees. The Dutch woman and German man thought it had something to do with clothes. All four interviewees imagined the brand coming from India due to the name.

Slide 4 represented the logo of Airtel. Airtel is the world’s third-largest mobile telecommunications company (behind China Mobile and China Unicom) with over 261 million customers in 150 countries across the world (Interbrand, 2014). The company has a value of US$6,220 million (Interbrand, 2014). Only the Norwegian woman had no idea about this brand. The other three people said they might have seen it (the logo) somewhere. The
Swedish man was certain it was a mobile phone operator and the Dutch woman would assume it had something to do with a telephone company. All four interviewees could not relate the country of origin to this brand.

Slide 5 shows the logo of Axis Bank. Axis Bank is one of the leading Indian banks with a worth of US$1,481 million. All four interviewees imagined the logo to come from a bank. They did not know where the company came from.

On slide 6 the logo of the brand Kingfisher was showed. Kingfisher is the best selling beer brand in India with a value of US$444 million (Interbrand, 2014). The brand successfully competes in India with international giants like Budweiser, Miller, Tuborg, Carlsberg and Heineken (Interbrand, 2014). The Norwegian woman imagined it to be a drink coming from an English speaking country. The Dutch woman recognized it as a beer brand, coming from Scotland. The Swedish man has not seen it before and imagines it to be a shampoo brand. The German man did not know what this brand was but he said it looks like a beer company.

Slide 7 represented the logo of Mahindra. Mahindra is present in diverse industries including IT, Finance, Aerospace, Agribusiness, Farm Equipment, Hospitality and many more. It is operating in over 100 countries all over the globe and has a worth of US$ 2,576 million (Interbrand, 2014). Mahindra is mostly known by its SUV’s (Interbrand, 2014). All four interviewees related the logo to a company working with either roads or cars. Because of the sound of the name “Mahindra” they all thought it originated from India. Only the German man was sure the company was related to cars.

Slide 8 showed the logo of Incredible India. Incredible India is an initiative by the Ministry of Tourism of India to raise awareness outside of India about India as a holiday destination (Ministry of Tourism India, 2014). All of the four interviewees recognized it in some way as a marketing campaign to attract tourists to come to India on a holiday. The German man has seen advertisements in the cinema before and in posters on the streets. He says about the campaign: “I do not think my image of India is influenced by this commercial as I realize the main purpose is to attract people to India. Therefore it would just show the best of India and not necessarily the realistic situation.”

5.2.3 Country of origin and Perceived Quality

The product perception and/or experience of our interviewees resulted into different answers for everyone. Only the Dutch woman who had visited India before has experienced an Indian
product. The other interviewees have not tried an Indian product or are unaware of the fact if they have ever used one.

The Norwegian woman has tried a lot of Indian food when she grew up at her neighbour’s house. She is very fond of the cuisine. She does not have a clear image about products although she is sure many products she uses in her daily life come from India. She imagines Indian products to be of high quality because in her experience Indians are very hardworking people. The price is a factor she cannot describe; it is probably not very high.

Since the Norwegian woman has never consciously bought an Indian product she was asked to imagine her facial cream came from India and to describe what she thinks about it. She stated that if the product (facial cream) would come from India she would feel really secure because according to her Indian women are usually very considerate about their appearance and they are really delicate. Therefore a facial product coming from India would have to be safe and work very well. This in contrary to the image she has about China. If a facial cream would come from China she would not buy it because of the negative news about Chinese products. When she has to compare an Indian facial cream to a European facial cream she would imagine the European cream to be much more expensive. However the Indian cream would be much higher quality because India is much further in research and development.

If the facial cream she would buy would come from India and it would work well this would encourage her to buy it again. A first buy can be encouraged by advertising because this would lead to recognition in the shops. Also the design should be appealing to her and finally the price should not go over 200 SEK per bottle.

The Dutch woman was the interviewee that has been to India and tried many different Indian customs and bought Indian products. In daily life she had a positive experience with the cuisine as it was a combination between sweet and spicy. The basic facilities such as toilets and showers led to some discomfort as it is not as modern as in the west of Europe. She experienced a high amount of modern electronic equipment in daily life like the latest Smartphones and expensive cars.

Regarding quality the Swedish man thinks that a lot of consumer products like shampoo are basically the same. He says about it: “The only thing that distinguishes products from another is branding and smart marketing. If you compare an Indian bottle of shampoo and an
American bottle of shampoo, I think they are basically the same product but due to branding and smart marketing, the people would buy the American product.”

A typical Indian product according to the German man is the Bollywood movies produced in India. Bollywood movies are in his perception from very high quality because of the money that goes around in the business and the producers are very skilled. So the movies are produced very well. Even though his educational background is film history and he is familiar with Indian movies he does not like them. The story lines and the type of movies are not according to his liking.

Besides Bollywood movies the German man has experienced probably clothing products from India. In the news he has seen that India has very big textile factories that produce cheap clothes which are sold in Europe. However he could not tell which Indian brands are selling their products in Europe.

5.2.4 Country of origin and Brand Associations
The Norwegian woman had Indian neighbours when she grew up. All of her neighbour kids had several jobs and she reminds them as being well educated, hardworking and being doctors. She associates Indian brands with high quality, reliability and durability. So if the product would come from India she would feel really secure because according to her Indian women are usually very considered about their appearance and they are very delicate.

The Dutch woman is always considered about buying products which are modern, stylish and with a good quality-price ratio. From her experience being in India she noticed that people in India follow modern and Western culture, therefore she associates and believes that Indian products are comparable in terms of quality, price and appearance to Western products.

The product perception of the Swedish man of Indian consumer goods is vague because he usually buys products from the U.S.A. However he thinks it would be probably cheap because of the cheap labour. This way the products are able to be sold to the lower consumer segments for lower priced products. This lower price could be a motivation factor for him to buy Indian products. Finally he feels that after service is really important to convince him to buy a product.

Overall the Swedish man has a bad image about Indian consumer goods because of the bad working conditions in the country and the fact that it is a third world country. He explained that nowadays sustainability is getting more important in the developed world. That means:
buying products that are produced in a good and sustainable way. India does not meet these expectations.

Due to the Dutch woman visiting a wedding she let some clothes be made for her. She went to a shop, chose the fabric and the design and the tailor took her measurements. She says about it: “Because Europeans have very different sizes then Indians I had to come back two times for another fitting. After one week I had the clothes and they fitted perfectly, the quality was really good, the price was good and the dress looked beautiful”. However she would not buy it again in Europe because of the traditional style the dress had. So it is not possible for her to wear it in the Netherlands again. Regarding other products of India she imagines it to be of low price. However the products are good because in India the people are following modern (European) culture so the quality and design of Indian products would be good.
6. Analysis

6.1 Decision making processes and the Country of Origin Effect

As Pfister and Böhm (2008) describe decision making processes of consumers are becoming increasingly difficult due to the increase of product choices. As consumers often find it very difficult to make decisions they rather choose to avoid it (Pfister & Böhm, 2008). Thus consumers are more open for social influences rather than gathering technical information about a product (Pfister & Böhm, 2008). The higher the involvement of the consumers with a certain product or brand the more likely a consumer is to buy a product (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). In the research of Azjen and Fishbein (1977) the researchers discovered that the higher the correspondence of the producer is with the consumer the more likely there is a high attitude-behaviour relation with that product (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). These theories of Pfister and Böhm and Azjen and Fishbein are in accordance with the findings of the four interviews. Two out of four interviewees stated that the main influence behind purchasing a consumer product that they frequently use is the look of the product, the price of the product and the brand awareness they have about the product. The Norwegian woman stated that a first purchase can be encouraged by good advertising because this would lead to recognition in the shops. Also the design should be appealing to her and finally the price should be affordable. The Swedish man is more likely to buy a product he is familiar with or has heard a lot about. He prefers to buy products from the United States and he believes that the higher the price is the better the quality of the product is. He can be convinced to buy different products from countries like India if the price is very low. The German man is more inclined to buy local products when it comes to food. When it comes to other products he is willing to read online reviews before purchasing a product. However he does not really care about a certain brand or image, as long as the quality seems to be well rated by other consumers he is willing to buy the product. Almost the same goes for the Dutch woman. Only she clearly spend the most time reading reviews about the desired product online, regardless of the brand or country of origin of that product. Then she would make a sensible decision with the right price – quality ratio. As described by Zhang (1996), many companies can control the information a consumer receives about the product regarding packaging, advertising and price. For the two consumers who were more inclined to gather information about a product a company could give extensive information online as well. However, less obvious and more complicated to control is the country of origin effect that influences a consumer’s buying
behaviour (Zhang, 1996). To test this, the interviewees were asked to describe their image of India by thinking about a product they use and imagining it comes from India.

The Norwegian woman chose a facial cream as a product she would imagine to come from India. She imagines that this product when it comes from India would be of high quality because in her experience Indians are very hardworking people. The price is probably not very high. But the products would be reliable and of high quality. Therefore she would really buy an Indian product.

The Dutch woman is the only interviewee who has been to India and experienced Indian products. She described a tailor made dress that she bought: “The sizes are very different in India compared to Europe (...). When I received the clothes they fitted perfectly, the quality was really good, the price was good and the dress looked beautiful.” The woman was not inclined to repeat the purchase in India nor in Europe because of the style. The traditional Indian dress that was made for her would not fit into the Western fashion. Other products she experienced were low priced. Products are good and modern because in India people are nowadays following the European trends. Therefore quality and design of Indian products would be good. If the quality of Indian products appear to be good according to online reviews it would be possible to buy an Indian product if they are reasonably priced.

The Swedish man had a vague perception about Indian consumer goods as he usually only buys products from the United States. However, Indian products would be, according to him, cheap because of the cheap labour in the country. Therefore the main people who would buy these products would be in the lower consumer segments for lower priced products. He would probably only buy Indian products if the price is much lower than similar products of different brands.

According to the German man, there is a prejudice against products which are sold in Europe but produced in India. This made in India represents, according to him, produced under bad conditions. He says about that: “These bad working conditions are an important point that I would consider before I buy an Indian product.”

The empirical findings are in accordance with the findings of Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999). They have found that the country of origin effect has a large influence in the perceived quality of a product rather than the purchase intention (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). The interviewees had a strong opinion about the perceived quality of the product they had in mind.
regarding the country of origin: India. Less obvious was this country on origin effect on the purchase intention. In order for the interviewees to precede to purchasing behaviour other factors such as the appearance, brand awareness and price played an important role.

6.2 Brand Equity and cognitive, affective and normative mechanisms

The next part of the analysis will be divided in the three country-of-origin mechanisms of Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999), namely cognitive, affective and normative. They will be directly related to the four elements of the brand equity model (Yasin et al., 2007): Brand loyalty, Perceived quality, Brand awareness and Brand associations. The analysis will give answers how the perception of the four interviewees is influenced by the three country-of-origin mechanisms and to which extend those mechanisms can be related to the proposed brand equity model.

6.2.1 Brand Equity Dimensions – Cognitive Mechanisms

Cognitive mechanisms influencing brand loyalty

According to Yasin et al. (2007), Aaker (1991) and Jung and Sung (2008), brand loyalty, part of the brand equity construct, is related to the number of people who purchase the product regularly. As three of the four interviewees do not have any experience with Indian consumer brands or products, this construct was fitted to the conditions of this research and the purpose was to find out which country of origin related factors or mechanisms exist which could influence the brand loyalty to an Indian product. After analysing the answers of the Norwegian woman, she can be seen within the group of people which have a big potential of becoming loyal customers of Indian consumer products. The cue for her buying the product again or not is directly related to certain factors. In first place the most important criterion for her to become a loyal customer to the Indian consumer product, in her case the face cream, consists of serving the purpose of being a good face cream.

The Dutch woman is very keen on getting as much product relevant information as possible. For her chosen product, the television, it can be noted that buying the product from the same brand and therefore being loyal to this brand (Yasin et al., 2007), is possible, but only if the television has the best quality for the lowest price. In this case the observed cognitive mechanism related to the brand loyalty is almost non-existent, as the loyalty is always related to the perceived quality and not related to a specific country of origin.
Cognitive mechanisms influencing perceived quality

As Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999) state, the cognitive mechanism of the country-of-origin effect can be seen as a cue for product quality and is therefore directly related to the brand equity element ‘perceived quality’ (Yasin et al., 2007). After analysing the empirical findings, several evidences were found, in which the described cognitive mechanism (Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999), are directly influencing the perceived and expected quality of Indian consumer products.

The Norwegian woman believes that the quality of Indian products are higher than comparable European products, as she thinks, that India is further in development and research. Her expectation of the perceived quality of Indian consumer products therefore is directly based on her cognitive believes that India is more developed in research. This advancement in research will result in a better effect of the product which she chose, face cream.

The Dutch woman is certain of the good quality of Indian consumer products, as she has strong cognitive cues of the product quality, based on the image she has about India and also based on her own experience in India. By seeing other people in India who are happy with their own Indian products made her believe that the quality must be good. This can be seen in accordance with the cognitive mechanism (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999), as she relates this satisfaction of other people with their products to a good reliability and durability of Indian products and additionally relates her own positive experience with the tailor-made dress, as a cognitive cue, to a high quality of Indian consumer products.

The Swedish man stated that no quality differences will exist between the Indian and the Western version of his chosen product, the shampoo. In this case the observed cognitive clue is not clear, as this statement does not show exactly how this cognitive clue is influencing the perceived or expected quality. It can be assumed that, as he is satisfied with Western products and expects the same quality from the Indian product, according to Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999), the cognitive clue exists as he believes that the Indian product has the same quality level.

The German man also holds cognitive clues regarding the perceived quality of Indian consumer products. As someone who studied in the area of movies a cinema, he has a strong opinion about the quality of the Indian Bollywood film industry. During the interview he was
able to separate between his own taste of movies, he does not like Bollywood movies because they are too different, and his opinion about the quality of those movies. He knows that a lot of money is invested in those movies and they are produced very well. Therefore as a cognitive clue (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999) he concludes that the quality of those movies, even if he does not like them, is very high. Zooming-out from the Indian movie industry, he knows about the big factories and the cheap clothes which are produced in India and sold in Europe. This cognitive clue about the cheap working conditions is also forming his perception and expectations of Indian consumer products, as he expects them to be cheaper than Western products.

Cognitive mechanisms influencing brand awareness

All four respondents have a low brand awareness of Indian consumer brands. Recognizing a brand and being familiar to this brand (Yasin et al., 2007) is important for a high brand awareness. The German man affirmed that he knows that a lot of clothing products are being produced in India, but he did not know any real Indian consumer brand, this is an example of a very low brand awareness towards products from a specific country, in this case India.

For almost all the eight slides the interviewees were not able to know the company, nor where it came from. This shows that among the four interviewees exists very low Indian consumer brand awareness.

Cognitive mechanisms influencing brand associations

As explained by Aaker (1991) and Yasin et al. (2007), consumers have associations towards a specific brand. As Indian consumer products in general were the object of research, evidence was found in which the interviewees had specific brand associations towards those products, which can be explained by using cognitive mechanisms of the country of origin effect (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999).

The Norwegian woman sees India as a crazy region on one hand because of the things she heard about India, on the other hand, she has very strong cognitive brand associations, as her neighbours came from India, and she remembers those neighbours as very hard working, well-educated doctors. For her this is experience is reason enough to believe that Indian brands are of high quality. Her positive brand associations were formed by experiences in the past.
In line with the Norwegian woman, the Swedish man also has positive cognitive associations towards Indian products: He thinks that the big industry is very much IT related and related to engineering. This can be seen as a cognitive brand and product association, as this association was formed due to experience in the past: During his bachelor program he had a lot to do with students from India. On the other hand, because he knows that products can be produced in India at lower cost, he associated Indian products to lower price.

The Dutch woman imagines India very chaotic with a lot of traffic accidents. As she travelled to India she has a strong association to India, as she remembers India as not being peaceful at all. She mentions that her experience is based only on two cities and she assumes that other regions or cities are different. The negative experience she had in India regarding the infrastructure is another cognitive association. The associations which she has regarding general Indian products differ from the previously described negative associations: India for her is also a country in which modern culture is followed and a modern society is evolving. Those cognitive associations are reasons for her to believe that the design of Indian products these days could be very modern.

Most of the associations mentioned by the German man were also mentioned by the other interviewees, including the big cities and the poverty in those cities. Having studied film history, he sees India also through the eyes of a film maker and adds associations which are very specific for his educational background: Bollywood. Apart from the negative things, such as poverty, he mentions that even if he does not like them, the Bollywood industry and all related Bollywood movies as examples of a rich and diverse culture.

6.2.2 Brand Equity Dimensions – Affective Mechanisms

Affective mechanisms influencing brand loyalty

The Swedish man mainly buys the selected product, the shampoo, based on the description written on the package. He is happy to try out new products and brands. This opens the Indian shampoo the possibility of being chosen, but on the same hand it is quite likely that the Swedish man will try other brands, as he changes his shampoo, even if he was satisfied with one specific product. The reason for this is because he does not have very long hair which needs to be cured and therefore does not expect any bad results from a shampoo and is keen in trying out new products. This trying-out of new products, also from other countries can be seen as an affective mechanism (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). Trying out a new shampoo
from India could have emotional value to the Swedish man and is therefore an affective mechanism, influencing the brand loyalty of the consumer, in this case negatively.

Yasin et al. (2007) carry the concept of brand loyalty to an extreme, they describe the theoretical situation in which a consumer buys a certain product and is extremely loyal to this brand. Even though another product exists with superior features from a competitor for a similar price he chooses the known product or brand. The Swedish interviewee verifies the existence of this theoretical chain of thoughts, as he admits that he is inclined buying ‘known’ brands, instead of not known brands, even if the cost of the ‘known’ brand or product is a little bit higher. On the other hand he believes that the quality differences between various products are not that big and in the end consumer products are very much the same and only marketed in a different way. This shows that even by thinking so, he is very much influenced by the affective mechanism, as this known product gives him an additional emotional benefit (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999) but is not very much related to the specific country of origin. He says that the Indian product must be visible and must be marketed to him. Analysing his situation, it can be assumed that the Swedish interviewee needs this additional emotional value in order to consider buying this product.

Affective mechanisms influencing perceived quality

The Norwegian woman said that when she was young she tried a lot of Indian food from her neighbours. She really liked this food, therefore this experience from her past, can be seen as an emotional experience with an Indian product and can be therefore categorized in the group of a perceived quality, which is mainly influenced by an affective country of origin mechanism.

Affective mechanisms influencing brand awareness

As explained above, no evidence of cognitive brand awareness towards Indian consumer brands could be found. Regarding affective mechanisms, some answers from the interviewees will be explained below: The Norwegian woman said that an advertising showing an Indian product and also mentioning that this product is produced in India and from an Indian brand, would influence her positively to buy this product. This can be seen as one strategy of companies active in this field, not only producing in India, but also displaying the origin of the product. According to Yasin et al. (2007), a high level of brand awareness can only be reached when the consumer recognizes the brand and is familiar to this brand. The Swedish
man said that he usually buys only products which he has seen before on TV through other advertising channels. Also for him the condition to buy or consider buying this product would be to have it seen before in a commercial in TV or maybe heard about this product somewhere else.

**Affective mechanisms influencing brand associations**

The Norwegian woman stated that her father always told her that Indian people are very hardworking and very kind. This country of origin association gives her a symbolic and emotional value (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999).

As the Dutch woman travelled to India, her associations towards Indian products are mostly based on concrete experiences, rather than on feelings or emotions. The Swedish man explained that he believes that people could have a bad image of India, because of the negative aspects, such as poverty and big factories. This association is based on his feeling that people, including him, could have. Therefore his bad image, can be seen as an example as a brand association which is influenced by an affective country of origin mechanism. The answers of the German interviewee suit with the ones of the Swedish interviewee, as he also explains that people in Europe could have prejudices regarding products produced in India, as those products could be associated to bad working conditions and those bad working conditions could influence the association consumers have in Europe regarding Indian products negatively.

**6.2.3 Brand Equity Dimensions – Normative Mechanisms**

**Normative mechanisms influencing brand loyalty**

As described by Shimp and Sharma (1987) a normative mechanism regarding the country of origin effect can lead to a desire for purchasing domestic products as it will benefit the local area’s economy (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). Two out of four interviewees, the Norwegian woman and the Dutch woman, showed no interest in buying local products rather than products coming from other areas. As previously described the Dutch woman is mostly looking for the best price – quality ratio with a complete disregard of brands or country of origin. With the example of comparing India to Norway, the Norwegian woman prefers to buy the Indian products as she describes to: “*rather put my money in the Indian economy than the Norwegian economy, as Norway is already rich enough*”. The Swedish man and German man preferred to buy local products. The Swedish man feels safer when it comes to buying
local products so he knows where it comes from. The German man prefers to buy local products related to food, other consumer goods are less important. It is interesting to notice that buying local products is not necessarily that important for the interviewees who come from very wealthy countries in Europe. It appears that the interviewees do not feel strongly about improving their, already wealthy, economy. The chances of these consumers to be brand loyal towards a product from their country of origin is relatively low as it appears that the majority chooses the best products (when it comes to prices, quality, packaging, etc.) with a disregard of the country of origin.

**Normative mechanisms influencing perceived quality**

Consumers hold social and personal norms related to the country of origin (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). This means that a trade of a country can be seen as the norm for the entire population or matching to a consumer’s own believes about a situation. As the Norwegian woman addressed in the interview is that her image of India is formed by her Indian neighbours in Norway. They worked really hard and their children are really hard working and highly educated. In addition to her father’s stories from his experience with working in India she assumed that all Indians are hard working. Hard working is perceived by her as a norm and therefore the perceived quality of the Indian products will be of high quality. This is in accordance with the model created under the theoretical framework. The Dutch woman observes that the Indian products and brand follow Western European norms; therefore she assumes that the quality would be comparable to Western European products. The Swedish man links the factors price and quality to each other, meaning that the higher the price the higher the quality of the product would be.

**Normative mechanisms influencing brand awareness**

The normative mechanism is difficult to recognize related to the Brand Equity factor of “brand awareness”. A normative factor for a consumer would mean that he or she would pay more attention to brands that are in accordance with his or her own social or personal believes (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). For example if a person is very fashionable and prefers unique products it would be only logical that he or she would recognize brands that emphasize on that. To find the relation between these factors and the country of origin effect the interviewees were showed very famous brands in India which are related to a number of different sectors: automobile industry, telecom industry, fashion industry, tourism and food and beverages. The majority of brands were not recognized by the interviewees even if they
might have an interest in it. Brands that were recognized either had an obvious name such as: FabIndia (Fabulous- India which can be something with fashion) or AirTel (Air- Tel, “tel” from Telephone which could be a telephone operator). It is clear that a clear link between brand awareness, the normative mechanism and the country of origin effect could not be established.

Normative mechanisms influencing brand association

Two out of four interviewees associated India and Indian products with bad labour conditions. This was a normative factor for them to consider not buying products from India. Due to the bad labour conditions the labour costs are probably very low which according to the Swedish man will result into cheap products and brands. The Dutch woman who had been in India noticed that the society follows Western European trends therefore she associates brands to be modern in design like in Western Europe. The normative factor for her was that the norm is that products should be stylish. This was clear because once she bought a television only because it had lights on the side; so the design was the most important factor for her. As she associates Indian brands to be stylish, following western European trends, this is a normative mechanism for her. Finally the Norwegian woman relates hard working people as a norm to live by, and she associates this with Indian people and products. Therefore one can conclude that both the women are positively influenced by their normative mechanism to obtain a positive brand association. While the men are negatively influenced by the image of bad labour conditions for workers in India, this negatively influences the brand association leading them to doubt the purchase of any Indian product.
7. Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to understand the perception which consumers from developed countries have regarding consumer products from developing countries. This research specifically focused on Western European and their perception regarding Indian consumer products. To illustrate this, a theoretical framework was used consisting of the country of origin effect model and the brand equity model. By using this theoretical framework, the initial research question was investigated:

“How does the country of origin effect influence the perception consumers have regarding consumer products?”

Interviews were conducted with four people from four different European countries. More specifically from Norway, Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands.

Mechanisms that arise from the country of origin effect are cognitive, affective and normative. All these three mechanisms directly influence the four dimensions of brand equity and perception of the consumers regarding Indian products.

The results of the empirical findings showed that the perception of the sample of Western consumers between 24 and 28 years old was relatively positive regarding Indian consumer products. The interviewees were open to try Indian brands as long as the packaging was appealing, advertisement was present and they were able to track the quality of the product by reading reviews. Especially this last factor was an interesting result as it shows that the consumer segment between 24 and 28 as was investigated, are curious and interested in performing research regarding a new product or brand.

The interviewees had a strong opinion about the perceived quality of the product they had in mind regarding the country of origin: India. Less obvious was this country of origin effect on the purchase intention. In order for the interviewees to initiate purchasing behaviour other factors such as the appearance, brand awareness and price played an important role.

The cognitive country of origin mechanisms are influencing all the four dimensions of the brand equity model. Despite the fact that the interviewees had almost no knowledge of Indian brands or consumer products, evidence could be found in which a certain decision of the interviewee could be based on the cognitive knowledge an interviewee had about India: The perceived or expected quality for all the four cases is high to very high, based on individual cognitive knowledge the interviewees have.
On the other hand answers based on feelings or emotions were found as well. This means that affective country of origin mechanism influence the brand equity model as well. The Norwegian woman for example stated that she has the feeling that an India related advertising for a product would influence her positively towards buying this product.

The normative mechanisms regarding brand equity could influence a consumer’s desire to purchase domestic products as it will benefit the local area’s economy. The interviewees showed no interest in buying local products to benefit the local area’s economy as they felt their countries were already rich enough. The normative mechanism influencing perceived quality lead to various conceptions when it comes to products from India. The people who either had personal relations, or had visited India had a positive conception regarding quality because they experienced hard working people and modern culture. Interesting finding was that the people who have not been to India and know it mostly from the media associated bad working conditions to India and therefore bad quality products. This result was closely linked to brand associations. Interviewees who had a positive normative reflection on India had a positive brand association and a positive image of the perceived quality. The ones having a bad normative reflection had a negative brand association and a negative image of the perceived quality.

To conclude the country of origin effect influences a consumer’s perception of brand equity via three mechanisms: cognitive, affective and normative. In the case of India this meant that: The interviewees hold different believes about India but there is no conclusive answer if Indian consumer products are completely negatively or completely positively perceived. Opinions and experiences were very different. It can be seen that the three mechanisms were existent but not very strongly developed. Interviewees had an idea about India and Indian consumer products but these ideas were mostly very vague. The overall opinion however tended to be positive and this could have great implications.
8. Implications

Theoretical Implications: The aim of this study was to investigate the country of origin effect on consumer’s perception regarding consumer products. Two existing theoretical models have been used, the country of origin effect model and the brand equity model. Previous researchers have combined the two models by using a quantitative approach. By using a qualitative approach this research aimed to understand this phenomenon by analyzing the mechanisms.

Practical Implications: Marketers from emerging countries, but especially from India can use the findings of this report in order to understand which mechanisms exist and how they influence the perception of foreign products in the own country. One major finding of this research was that the four interviewees are expecting low priced products with a high quality from India. The research also showed that it is absolutely necessary that Indian products are marketed in a certain way. This could be especially important in Western European countries as the consumer markets there are matured and new products have to stand out. The results of this research show that, based on the perception of the interviewees of this research, there exists a high market potential for selling Indian products in Western European markets.

A company could influence the cognitive mechanism by providing the consumer with more information related to the brand or the product. Regarding the affective mechanism, companies could use advertising and attractive packing in order to influence the consumer’s feelings towards a brand or a specific product. As India was very often related to bad working conditions and a third world country, a company could influence those bad associations by focusing on corporate responsibility.
9. Limitations and suggestions for further research

In terms of generalization the research was limited by its nature being a qualitative research study with only four interviewees. It is not possible to generalize the findings. In order to generalize the findings, for example regarding the price expectations of real Indian products, it is necessary to conduct a quantitative study with the aim of delivering data which can be generalized.

This research focused on consumer products. Different results could be found for industrial products in the business-to-business area.

Furthermore this research focused only on the perception of Indian consumer products. Therefore in future research other developing countries could be studied.

In the delimitations it was described that this study would not use consumers from the United Kingdom, as they have a long colonial history with India and this could influence the perception of consumers living in this country. For further research this could be however an interesting research area in what way colonial history influences the country of origin effect.

In order to gain comparable data it was chosen to use four respondents from the same age group. Age and life experience could also be a factor influencing the country-of-origin effect, therefore it could be useful to conduct a similar study with an older or younger age group. Also the group of interviewees was highly educated with having minimal a Bachelor degree, so a recommendation could be to research perceptions of lower educated people as well.
References


A. Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Name   Time   Location

1) **Personal background**
   - Gender, Age
   - Educational Background
   - Country of Origin and residing country

2) **Traveling background**
   - Questions about frequency, places, motivation.

3) **Country of Origin: India**
   - Image of India
   - Products from India
   - Experience in India or Asia
   - Expectations about India
   - Do you think there is a place for Indian products in the consumer market?
   - Would you buy Indian consumer products?

4) **Brand equity: Brand Loyalty**
   - How important are local products?
   - What would convince you to buy an Indian product?
   - If an Indian product is not different from a Western product in any way, which product would you purchase?
   - What would convince you to buy an Indian product?
   - What would convince you to buy it again?

5) **Brand equity: Brand Awareness**
   - Show PowerPoint presentation with the eight best-selling Indian brands and ask if the interviewees recognize, know or have ever purchased the products?
   - Have you bought an Indian product before and why?

6) **Brand equity: Perceived Quality**
   - Questions regarding perceived or expected quality of Indian consumer products?
   - Questions regarding the expected quality, compared to Western consumer products?
   - Questions regarding the expected price which this Indian product should probably have?
   - Do you have any experience with Indian products?

7) **Brand equity: Brand Associations**
   - Do you have an opinion about Indian products?
   - What do you associate with Indian products?
   - Have you bought an Indian product before and why?
   - Did you know it was an Indian brand before you bought it? Or did you find out after?