

Nepali Consumer Perceptions of Country-of-Origin and Brand Trust: An Initial Investigation

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This paper reports the country of origin and brand trust perceptions of 102 Nepali consumers living in Kathmandu. The paper also explores these Nepali consumers' perceptions of global brands. Three major findings are reported: (1) For these Nepali consumers, the importance of buying a global brand is exceptionally important in their purchase decisions. (2) Nepali women consistently rate the importance of buying a global brand higher than Nepali men. (3) The set of global brands most trusted by these Nepali consumers show strong regional, Asian preferences. The paper also discusses the challenges of market research in Nepal.

Key words: Nepali, global brands, country of origin, brand trust, consumer behavior

This paper's primary purpose is to present a first look at the twin issues of country of origin (COO) and global brand trust, using Nepal as the focal country of interest. Country of origin studies have, in recent years, increased significantly. In mid-1997, Heslop, Papadopoulos and Bourke (1998) estimated that there were approximately 300 COO-related studies. By the time Pharr (2005) conducted her extensive literature review, the COO literature had expanded to well over 700 studies. Within that vast domain of research, Wong, Polonsky and Garma (2008) have recently noted the uneven distribution of countries studied in the extant COO literature. Most

COO studies, they note, have been conducted with individuals living in Western countries. While acknowledging that some COO research has involved non-western countries, "Asian markets [remain] less explored. Consequently, our knowledge of COO effects on consumer behavior in other parts of the world is less developed" (p. 456). By reporting on the COO perceptions of consumers living in Nepal, this research adds to the COO literature conducted in Asia, specifically South Asia.

Nepal is an interesting country to study. Nepal is one of the smaller countries in South Asia in terms of total population and total

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geography. Only the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Bhutan are smaller. Economic theory suggests that small countries like these have many intrinsic disadvantages when compared to larger, more populous countries (Katzenstein, 1995). Many small states are landlocked, as is Nepal. More importantly, small size often limits economic diversification, as is also true of Nepal. As a result, small countries manufacture a limited range of goods and import the rest. Because the domestic economy in these small states is both export oriented and "open," small countries are extremely vulnerable to trade shocks (Aiyar, 2008). Shrestha (2005), when summarizing the Nepali marketing macro-environment, supports these assertions. He notes that because Nepal's domestic market is small, "domestic industries do not enjoy cost and value effectiveness" (p. 50). As a result, foreign products dominate over local products and Nepalis "prefer to use [these] foreign goods rather domestically manufactured [ones]" (p. 50). The marketing of Lux soap in Nepal represents the challenge of changing consumer perceptions relative to foreign made versus domestically produced products. Lux is a leading, global soap brand manufactured by Unilever. Historically, HindustanLever (the Unilever subsidiary in South Asia), manufactured, marketed and exported Lux throughout South Asia. In 2001, Hindustan Lever opened a manufacturing plant in Nepal itself. Almost immediately, Lux faced strong resistance from Nepali consumers who negatively perceived the

soap's "made in Nepal" label. One shopkeeper summarized negative consumer sentiment by complaining, "We no longer get real Indian soap" (cited in Onkvist & Shaw, 2004, p. 256). The Lux soap marketing response was to have Karishma Manandhar, "a heart-throb of Nepali film industry, [endorse] the product, thus helping to localize the brand" (Lux with Nepali Karishma, 2001). The endorsement strategy worked, and "made-in-Nepal" Lux regained its position as a market leader.

Foreign brands dominate many product categories in Nepal. As the Lux soap example illustrates, Nepal's common border with India makes Nepal a logical and relatively easy market to enter. In the two-wheeler (i.e., motorcycle) category, the market-leader from India, Baja, goes head-to-head with the well-known Japanese brands, Suzuki and HeroHonda. In the bottled water category, Bisleri, a well-known Indian brand, competes vigorously with Coca Cola's brand, Kinley. Yet the bottled water category also illustrates that in some categories, local brands also compete. Two leading Nepali brands, Himalaya and Everest, are also gaining market share. Many Japanese brands also compete vigorously for market share. In the TV category, Sony competes against two of Korea's well-known brands, Samsung and LG. In the two-wheeler (i.e., motorcycle) category, well-known Japanese brands, Suzuki and HeroHonda, go head-to-head with Bajaj, the market-leader from India. This discussion of global versus

local brands leads logically to the topic of globalization. Common marketing textbook assertions about globalization are that (1) it supports consumer awareness of and desire for non-domestic products and brands, thereby creating new market opportunity for the globally-aware firm; (2) it enables firms to leverage more efficiently than ever before widely dispersed markets, through their use of technology and the Internet; and (3) it homogenizes consumer preferences: consumers now want the same brands everywhere (Cateora & Graham, 2007; Johansson, 2009; Kotler et al., 2007). de Mooji (2004a) has tackled directly what she terms “the myth of the global village”:

In a sense, new communication technology has made the world a global city or village in which we, in theory, can hear and see everything at any time in any place. The question is whether in practice we *do* hear and see at any time and place. And, then, even if we do, the core question is whether that makes us similar to each other (p. 2)

de Mooji’s response to her own rhetorical question is that it does not. She asserts that “no empirical evidence has yet been presented to support the argument that homogenization of tastes, needs and motives of consumers across the world has occurred. On the contrary, there is recent evidence of increased heterogenization of consumer behaviour with increased wealth” (de Mooji, 2004b, p. 179). Whatever perspective

on globalization is ultimately correct, Pecotich and Wards’ (2007) observation that “ ‘globalization’ of world markets implies a research focus on global and international brands spanning countries and cultures” (p. 272) is correct. Sharma (2006) summarizes what he considers to be the unique characteristics of the Nepalese market. It is seller dominated, price conscious, and short run in orientation. Most firms “maximize profits with high price in the short period; they do not have a marketing vision for tomorrow or against global competition” (p. 82). Additionally, the Nepalese market, he notes, has weak intellectual property (IP) protection. Weak government enforcement of IP law further enables grey and black markets to flourish across the country. Finally, Sharma (2006) notes the strong dominance market dominance of foreign firms. This, then, leads logically to the question at the heart of this research: If foreign firms dominate in Nepal, will there be strong preferences for products with foreign country of origins? The paper turns next to a succinct literature review on country of origin and global brands

I. Literature Review

1.1 Country of origin

Generally, COO “definitions can be classified into three groups: overall country image, aggregate

product-country image, and specific product - country image” (Hsieh, 2004, p. 269). “Overall country image” relates to the stereotypes and generalized attitudes individuals have about a specific country. Myanmar’s overall country image, for example, might be thought of as a highly repressive, militaristic, poor, backward country. In contrast, “aggregate product-country image” and “specific product-country image” refer to the COO attitudes individuals hold at the level of product category and individual brand level, respectively. Aggregate product-country image is tapped when individuals evaluate “the made in” label, such as computers made in Malaysia. Specific product-country image is evoked when consumers evaluate a brand, such as an Apple iPhone made in China versus an Apple iPhone made in Vietnam. More recently, Pappu, Quester and Cooksey (2006) simplified Hsieh’s framework into just macro and micro country image.

Since COO research is, by its very definition, a comparison of one country against another, COO studies have been conducted in a wide variety of locations around the world. As note

above, most researchers have studied COO effects in developed, Western countries, although there is a growing body of literature of COO effects in developing countries (Bilkey & Nes, 1982; Lee, Yun & Lee, 2005; Speece & Nguyen, 2005). Table 1 provides a selection of COO research focused specifically on Asian consumer COO perceptions.

Over the years, COO research has moved from conceptualizing country of origin as a single cue presented to consumers for evaluation to being a complex, multidimensional cue in which consumers use varying strategies for its evaluation (Pecotich & Ward, 2007). COO is now a nuanced concept that includes Hofstede’s work on culture, brand image, brand name, consumer levels of involvement, country stereotypes, quality/price relationships, and differentiation (if possible) between country-of-assembly, country-of-parts and country-of design (Pharr, 2005). Additionally, scholars have variously tried to understand how COO effects perceived product value (Cervino, Sanchez & Cubillo, 2005; Hui & Zhou, 2002); brand image and brand equity

<Table 1> Selected Country-of-Origin Research Conducted in Asian Countries

Country of Origin Location	Researchers
Bangladesh	Kaynak, Kucukemiroglu & Hyder (2000)
China	Au & Sha (2003), Hu et al. (2008), Wang & Yang (2008), Xuehua & Yang (2008), Wong, Polonsky and Garma (2008), Zhuang et al (2008)
India	Bandyopadhyay & Banerjee (2003), Bawa (2004), Kinra (2006)
Taiwan	Lin & Chen (2006), Lee & Chen (2008)
Vietnam	Speece & Nguyen (2005)

(Lin & Kao, 2004; Pappu, Quester & Cooksey, 2007).

Consumer ethnocentrism can act as a mediating variable in any COO evaluation. Following the definition first used by Shimp and Sharma (1987), consumer ethnocentrism is the belief held by consumers about “the appropriateness, indeed morality, of purchasing foreign products” (p. 280). Consumer ethnocentrism is a systematic preference favoring purchase of domestic over foreign products. Consumer ethnocentrism is more contemporaneously termed “domestic country bias” (Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2004, p. 80). Empirical research has identified differences in domestic country bias between consumers living in developed versus developing countries (Batra et al., 2000; Upadhyay & Singh, 2006). The former clearly favored domestic over foreign products, while the latter favored the opposite. Research by Bawa (2004) indicated that contrary to earlier findings that consumers from developing countries were biased toward imported over domestic products, “the label ‘made in India’ is not a liability. The Indian consumers will not lap up foreign goods merely because of their ‘made in’ tags” (p.43). Whatever the research focus, though, COO is inevitably linked with trying to understand how COO mediates product evaluation and consumer purchase intention (Pharr, 2005; Usunier & Cestre, 2007).

When the extant literature on COO is placed within the context of Nepal, the following hypotheses emerge:

H1: Nepali consumers will have strong COO preferences. This follows not only from the research of Balabanis & Diamantopoulos (2004), Batra et al. (2000) and Upadhyay & Singh (2006) but also from Sharma (2006) and Shrestha (2005)’s statements that foreign brands dominate the Nepalese market.

H2a: High involvement products will have strong COO preferences. This follows from Ahmed & d’Astous’s (2007) research which suggests that COO functions as a quality cue.

H2b: Low involvement products will generate strong domestic preferences given the price sensitive, price-quality nature of the Nepali market (Sharma, 2006; Shrestha, 2005).

1.2 Brand Trust

As with many concepts in marketing, there are multiple definitions of trust. Rotter (1971) defined trust as “a generalized expectancy held by an individual or group that a word, promise, verbal or written statement of another individual or group can be relied on” (p.1). Barney and Hansen (1994) add the idea of hurt and harm when they defined trust as “The mutual confidence that no party to an exchange will exploit another’s vulnerabilities” (p. 176). As the previous definitions suggest, trust is an elusive concept (Elliot & Percy, 2007), which

can be thought of as an individual characteristic, as a characteristic of interpersonal relations and/or as an institutional attribute (Lewicki & Bunker, 1995). Trust is also a nuanced concept that has familiarity as its precondition (Luhmann, 1979). Battacharrya, Devinney & Pilluta (1998) highlight the protective nature of trust when they defined trust as “an expectancy of positive (or nonnegative) outcomes that one can receive based on the expected action of another party in an interaction characterized by uncertainty” (p. 462). Trust thus involves commitment, risk and mutuality. Trust is also a dynamic concept that is always contingent. “The amount of knowledge necessary for trust is somewhere between total knowledge and total ignorance. Given total knowledge there is no need for trust and given total ignorance there is no basis upon which to rationally trust” (McAllister, 1995, p.26).

Relationship marketing has encouraged the transfer and application of trust to brands (Romaniuk & Bogomolova, 2005; Fournier, 1988). This led Delgado-Ballester, Munera-Aleman and Yague-Gullien (2003) to define brand trust as “The confident expectations of the brand’s reliability and intentions in situations entailing risk to the consumer” (p. 37). Brand trust has also been defined as “the confidence a consumer develops in the brand’s reliability and integrity” (Chatterjee & Chaudhuri, 2005, p.2). Brand trust has been linked with brand loyalty (Lau & Lee, 1999) as well as

increased market share and advertising efficiency (Chatterjee & Chaudhuri, 2005). Brand trust has also been hypothesized to be leading indicator of brand equity (Ambler, 1997).

Of recent interest has been the question of whether brands vary in terms of trust. Romaniuk and Bogomolova (2005) studied this question by controlling for brand size effects when they assessed trust scores of 110 local brands in 13 markets in subjects living in the United Kingdom and Australia. They found little variation in brand trust scores when controlling for market share. They concluded that “trust is more like a ‘hygiene’ factor in that all brands have to have a certain level of trust to be competitive in the market” (Romaniuk & Bogomolova, 2005, p. 371).

1.3 Global brands

In a recent article, Johansson and Ronkanin (2005) raise an important definitional issue around global brands: “The stickiest problem... seems to be the difficulty of defining what is ‘global’ [about a global brand] and what is not” (p. 340). Two definitional perspectives are found in the literature. One set of definitions takes a producer perspective, while the other takes a consumer perspective. Cateora and Graham’s (2007) definition clearly embodies the producer perspective. A global brand is “the worldwide use of name, term, sign, symbol (visual and/or auditory), design or combination

therefore intended to identify goods or services of one seller and to differentiate them from those of competitors” (p. 360). For Cateora and Graham, a global brand is a product or service with uniform characteristics (name, sign, and symbol) sold in multiple countries.

Barron and Hollingshead’s (2004) definition likewise takes the producer’s perspective, since its focus is on the tasks that sellers must do to communicate a global brand position. For them, a global brand is one that “expresses the same values in all of its markets and owns a similar position vis-à-vis its competitors around the world” (Barron & Hollingshead, 2004, p. 9). By defining a global brand in terms of values and positioning, Barron and Hollingshead extend the global brand definition into elements of a consistent marketplace position, wherever in the world the product is sold. This universal platform gives the global brand several advantages including increased leverage with channel partners, economies of scale and increased revenue.

Steenkamp, Batra and Alden (2003), in contrast, take a decidedly consumer-focused perspective when defining a global brand. A global brand for them is any brand that consumers perceive to be global. “A brand benefits from consumer perceptions that it is ‘global’...only if consumers believe the brand is marketed in multiple countries and is generally recognized as global in these countries” (p. 54). They term this perspective “perceived brand globalness.” Johansson and Ronkainen (2005) integrate both producer

and consumer perspectives into their definition. A global brand is defined as “the multi-market reach of products that are perceived as the same by both consumers and internal constituents” (p. 340). The approach used in the Nepali consumer survey described below follows Steenkamp, Batra and Alden’s (2003) perceived brand globalness. If a survey respondent thought a brand was global, then it was.

Finally, Samiee (1994) found that the demographic characteristics of consumers created statistically significant differences in the relative importance consumers gave to the country of origin information. Consumers with more income and education accepted foreign products more readily (Niss, 1996). Both Ahmed and d’Astous (2002) and Han & Terpstra (1988) found that younger, wealthier and more educated consumers evaluate foreign products more favorably. Since country of origin must always be researched in terms of product category or brand, an inference from this research is that gender, education and age differences are discernable for brand trust. This leads to the following hypothesis:

- H3: Age, education and gender will differentiate Nepali consumers in terms of their brand trust preferences.
- H4: Nepalis will value global brands given both the country’s current market structure and current stage of economic development.
- H5a: Nepalis will have higher global brand trust scores in product categories perceived

as high risk. As perceived risk increases, there is a greater need to buy global brands because the global brand becomes a quality surrogate for performance and reliability guarantees.

H5b: Nepalis will have lower global brand trust scores in product categories perceived as low risk. As perceived risk decreases, there is less need to buy global brands because there is less need for the performance and reliability guarantees that a global brand stands for.

A discussion of the study's methodology comes next.

II. Methodology

The challenge of designing and conducting research in the poorest country in South Asia must be acknowledged at the onset. The Asian Development Bank (2003) indicates that Nepal is the second most underdeveloped country in Asia after North Korea. Many Nepalis live in isolated communities. Isolation is reinforced by geography (the Himalayan Mountain range runs across Nepal's northern border) and by an inefficient, crumbling infrastructure. Nepal has frequent nationwide power blackouts and has continual water shortages, even in its major cities. A Maoist insurgency has created substantial

political instability and there are frequent, violent national strikes often targeted at businesses.

The study was designed to be a small scale, first effort at measuring country of origin and brand trust perceptions in a segment of Nepali consumers. The study was conducted within Kathmandu, where access to English-speaking individuals was greatest. English-speaking respondents were essential, since the survey was written in English. Furthermore, data collection was electronic. This also suggested using respondents who lived within Kathmandu, since computer access and consistent electricity was most likely here.

Stock and Tupot (2006) provided evidence for a "global youth" segment. This global youth segment is defined by not only by a convergence of brand preferences but also by a homogeneity of life style. Global youth are media savvy, are tuned-in, are plugged-in, are knowledgeable with current trends/fads and can converse literally with one another through social networking websites such as myspace and facebook. A working assumption for this research was that exposure to global brands would be highest among young, media savvy Nepali consumers. Thus, survey participants were recruited from three educational institutions in Kathmandu. One institution was a well-known secretarial school; one institution was a large private university with a business school; and one institution was newly formed private school of management. English was the language of

instruction in all three schools. Students had access to computers in all three schools as well. Students attending these three schools were asked by their teachers to participate in the research.

This survey had three parts. Part one asked respondents to evaluate the importance of buying a global brand in each of 23 different consumer categories. This approach mirrored that of Steenkamp, Batra and Alden (2003) in the use of perceived brand globalness. As noted above, there is no agreed upon, unitary meaning for what constitutes a global brand, other than the fact that the brand must be sold outside its domestic market. To avoid the artificiality of encumbering the survey with an academic definition of global brands, the survey stated simply that “a global brand is one that you think is found or sold in several countries around the world.” A seven-point Likert scale (anchored with “very unimportant” and “very important”) was used to capture level of importance.

Product categories tested in the survey spanned a range of dimensions: (1) high and low involvement product categories (computers versus candy bars); (2) durable versus nondurable products (washing machines and coffee); and (3) categories not often reported in the marketing literature (e.g., rice cookers, disposable batteries, motorcycles and clothes dryers). <Table 2> lists all 23 product categories.

Part two of the survey asked respondents to evaluate country of origin and brand trust. This was a forced choice question. For each of the 23 product categories listed in <Table 2>, respondents were asked to choose the one country that their most trusted brand(s) came from. Country choice was limited to China, France, Germany, Great Britain, India, Japan, South Korea and the United States because at least one global brand from each category in <Table 2> came from at least one of the listed countries. Respondents could note if the brand(s) they trusted most came from a country not listed. If a consumer most trusted

<Table 2> Product Categories Explored

A bank checking account	VHS player	Clothes dryer
Shampoo	Refrigerator	Personal credit card
Disposable batteries	Soft drink	Mobile phone
Hamburger - Fast Food	Rice cooker	Coffee
Home computer	Toothpaste	Bottled drinking water
DVD player	Washing machine	Jeans
Running shoes	TV	Motorcycle
Chocolate candy bar	Yogurt	

a domestic, Nepali brand, they would code it as "other country." Part three of the survey collected basic demographic information: age, gender, employment status and highest education level.

Academic colleagues reviewed and critique the initial survey draft. Based on their feedback, the survey was revised by deleting some of the original product categories and adding others. Additionally, colleagues confirmed that all product categories had a single meaning. The survey was posted on SurveyMonkey.com, an online survey website, for ease of data collection. Online data collection did not present any problems to these Internet-savvy young adults. The survey's first page assured all respondents that their answers would be kept confidential and that the identity of every respondent would remain anonymous. Data were collected from 2006-2007.

III. Results

A total of 102 Nepalis took the survey. Fifty-two percent of the respondents were male; 48% were female. Survey respondents ranged in age from 19 through 47 and had a mean age of 30. The older, more mature composition of survey respondents is reflected further in the sample's educational profile. Thirty percent of survey respondents had

completed college, while 50% had completed a Masters degree. Seventeen percent of the sample reported having some college, while 2% held a doctoral degree.

3.1 Global Brand Importance

〈Table 3〉 presents an aggregate summary of how important it is to buy a global brand for the entire sample. As this table indicates, aggregate responses are highly concentrated in the "very important" category. Both the total number of responses as well as the percentage of cases indicate a very, very strong desire to buy global brands. H4: That Nepalis will value global brands given both the country's current market structure and current stage of economic development seems to be confirmed.

〈Table 3〉 Aggregate Importance of Purchasing a Global Brand

	Responses	
	N	Percent
1-Very unimportant	166	9.0%
2	106	5.8%
3	116	6.3%
4	223	12.1%
5	226	12.3%
6	272	14.8%
7- Very important	734	39.8%
Total	1843	100.0%

〈Table 4〉 makes more explicit the overall finding of 〈Table 3〉. 〈Table 4〉 is a rank

<Table 4> Importance of Buying a Global Brand:
Ranked Order of Importance

Product	Mean	n
Mobile Phone	6.48	87
Refrigerator	6.05	87
TV	5.95	92
Credit Card	5.88	75
Home Computer	5.82	87
Shampoo	5.74	87
Motorcycle	5.67	83
Checking Account	5.41	74
Rice Cooker	5.41	87
DVD	5.31	81
Washing Machine	5.31	81
Toothpaste	5.26	90
Soft Drinks	5.24	89
Bottled Water	5.08	85
Running Shoes	4.96	85
Coffee	4.82	84
Jeans	4.78	83
Clothes Dryer	4.43	51
VHS	4.35	52
Hamburger-Fast Food	4.21	74
Chocolate	4.13	76
Disposal Batteries	3.86	77
Yogurt	3.54	83

Note. Rated on a seven point scale with 1=very unimportant and 7=very important

ordering of mean scores on the importance of buying a global brand in all 23 product categories tested. Buying a global brand seems very strong in these Nepali consumers. The top five product categories for which a global brand is

most important are: mobile phone, refrigerator, TV, credit card and home computer. The most salient, common characteristic in these products is that they are all high involvement products. In all five product categories, these Nepali consumers probably engage in lengthy decision making, likely evaluate various product features and benefits and probably make price/performance as well as price/quality tradeoffs. Like every consumer, their implicit purchase goal is to get the greatest value for their Rupees spent. When taken as a group, these top five, high involvement products (mobile phone, refrigerator, TV, credit card, home computer) seem to confirm H2a, that knowing COO is very important in high involvement product purchases.

Given the value perspective just described and the overall economic level of Nepal as a county, it is also reasonable to look at the first five products through the purchase attitudes triggered by different products. Batra and Ahtola (1990) state that "consumers purchase goods and services and perform consumption behaviors for two basic reasons: (1) consummatory affective (hedonic) gratification (from sensory attributes), and (2) instrumental, utilitarian reasons concerned with 'expectations of consequences'" (p. 159). It seems reasonable, then, to conclude that in Nepal, what unites the first five products is their function/utilitarian features. Consumers want the utilitarian benefits of mobile phones, refrigerators, TVs, credit cards and home computers to work right. While one may

purchase a refrigerator based on hedonic motivations (i.e., having this globally branded refrigerator will increase one's self-esteem), if the refrigerator doesn't function correctly (i.e., keep some food cool and other food frozen), then whatever hedonic motivations have been applied to the refrigerator are worthless. Purchasing a global brand in these five product categories stresses the functionality of the product.

Lastly, these same "top five" products are technological. A credit card is here considered technological in the sense that it embodies the technology part of banking and purchasing. In essence, each of these five product categories embodies a high risk purchase situation. It seems reasonable, then, to hypothesize that purchasing a global brand in these five categories greatly reduces risk - functional risk, monetary risk and physical risk. Nepali consumers want neither their cell phone, nor their refrigerator nor their credit card to fail. The global brand becomes a surrogate for increased product reliability and performance, thereby increasing its purchase for these Nepali consumers. H5a, that Nepalis will have higher global brand trust scores in product categories perceived as high risk, seems to be confirmed.

〈Table 4〉 also suggests that purchase of a global brand is not very important for low involvement products, such as fast food hamburgers, chocolate candy bars, disposable batteries and yogurt. Thus, H2b seems to be confirmed: That COO is much less important in products

typically classified as low involvement. Further understanding of why this is the case can be gained from the following: Global fast food companies, such as McDonalds, KFC and Burger King, have no presence in Nepal to date. This fact, when combined with the Nepali dislike of beef and processed food, helps explain the lack of importance of purchasing a global brand in this category. When the top five most important and the bottom five least important product categories are compared, there seems to be a relationship between risk and the importance of buying a global brand. The greater the perceived risk, the more important it is to buy a global brand - and vice versa. Therefore, both H5a (that Nepalis will have higher global brand trust scores in product categories perceived as high risk) and H5b (that Nepalis will have lower global brand trust scores in product categories perceived as low risk) seem to be confirmed by the ranked order of products in 〈Table 4〉.

To gain further insight into significant differences in this group of Nepali consumers vis-à-vis global brand purchases, a one way ANOVA test was conducted comparing mean scores across three demographic variables: age, gender and education. Quite surprisingly, the one-way ANOVAs did not reach a statistical level of significance for age and education. For H3, that age and education will differentiate Nepali consumers in terms of their brand preferences preferences, is not confirmed. 〈Table 5〉 presents

11 product categories in which gender differences were statistically significant. It is very clear from <Table 5> that in all 11 product categories listed, women consistently rated the importance of buying a global brand higher than men.

Most interestingly, this preference for global brands cuts across broad product category types. Some product categories in which women more than men valued a global brand were technological: computer, cell phone and DVD player. Some categories were low involvement food products (coffee, yogurt, chocolate), while some were durable products (washing machine, TV). Two contrasting hypotheses can be offered. One: For technology products, the global brand functions to reassure women more than men about consistent, product performance. Global brands communicate reliability and value, increasing,

for these Nepali women, the desire to purchase. The risk reduction function of global brands noted above might be operating here. Two: Brands have symbolic as well as function characteristics. Brands, in the context of every consumer culture, convey meaning. This is no less true in Nepal than elsewhere. One can hypothesize that the ego expressive, symbolic quality of a global brand may be very important to these women. Thus, choosing a global brand for a rice cooker may communicate important characteristics about the buyer: product knowledge, status, self-concept and so on. These findings suggest that for H3, that gender is the only demographic variable that differentiates Nepali consumers in terms of their global brand preferences at a statistically significant level.

Finally, <Table 5> clearly suggests a differentiated

<Table 5> Importance of Buying a Global Brand By Gender*

Product	Means
Cell phone	Male -- 6.19 Female -- 6.77
Computer	Male -- 4.86 Female -- 6.71
TV	Male -- 5.28 Female -- 6.61
Rice Cooker	Male -- 4.60 Female -- 6.20
Shampoo	Male -- 5.34 Female -- 6.14
Motorcycle	Male -- 5.27 Female -- 6.13
DVD Player	Male -- 4.55 Female -- 6.13
Washing Machine	Male -- 4.67 Female -- 6.00
Coffee	Male -- 4.31 Female -- 5.33
Chocolate	Male -- 3.63 Female -- 4.63
Yogurt	Male -- 2.86 Female -- 4.24

* Note. All reported mean differences are significant at the .05 level or less

marketing strategy for Nepali women versus Nepali men in these 11 product categories. Products in these 11 categories should be positioned and an integrated marketing communications strategy should be developed that highlights the value and benefits of purchasing a global brand.

The paper turns next to a discussion of which countries these Nepali young adults trusted most. Table 6 presents a cumulative summary of respondent judgments as to which countries' brands, overall, they trust most. In other words, <Table 6> is a summary of country-of-origin perceptions relative to most trusted brands. Table 6 indicates that within the 23 product categories evaluated, Japanese brands are most trusted. Brands from the United States and India are the second and third most trusted countries, respectively. HI, that Nepali consumers will have strong COO preferences, seems to be confirmed.

<Table 6> Cumulative Summary of Most Trusted Brand by Country-of- Origin

	Responses	
	N	Percent
Japan	482	31.1%
United States	332	21.4%
India	257	16.6%
Other Country	235	15.1%
China	75	4.8%
Korea	58	3.7%
Great Britain	58	3.7%
Germany	30	1.9%
France	25	1.6%
TOTAL	1552	100.0%

<Table 7> refines <Table 6> through its presentation of the top three most trusted countries across all 23 product categories. Nepali young adults clearly trusted Japanese-branded computers, DVD players, washing machines, TVs, motorcycles, VHS players, clothes dryers, refrigerators, batteries, cell phones and rice cookers the most. For product categories jeans, running shoes, checking accounts, credit cards, soft drinks and hamburgers, these Nepali consumers trusted most brands from the United States. One might hypothesize that respondents are expressing in these categorizes the halo effect of such well-known US brands as McDonalds, Coke/Pepsi, Levi's, Visa/MasterCard.

<Table 7> also suggests a very strong predisposition by these Nepali consumers to trust brands from Asian countries. Except for the occasional mention of the United States, "another country" not listed, and the twice mentioned Great Britain (shampoo and chocolate bar), Japan, Korea, China and India all dominate the most trusted country of origin. These preferences might simply reflect the marketplace reality in Nepal: That brands from Asia, such as Sony, Panasonic, Samsung, HeroHonda, Yamaha, have had a long marketplace presence in Nepal. Alternatively, it might suggest something deeper: That these Nepali consumers have very strong trust preferences for regional brands, in this case Asia, rather than for the stereotyped "global brands" most closely associated with the United States. <Table 7> seems to confirm

H4: That Nepalis will value global brands.

Finally, the paper discusses <Table 8>, which is a listing of the top three brands in each product category as reported by these Nepali consumers. Specific brand names give additional insight into these consumers, since judgments about country-of-origin operate at the aggregate level. Consumers do not buy “country-of-origin.” They do, however, buy brands. <Table 8> must be dealt with carefully. Some categories, such as yogurt, clothes dryers, checking accounts and hamburger, have very few responses. As in <Table 7>, overall, these Nepali consumers seem to trust regional (i.e., Asian) brands. There is a mix of East Asian brands (Sony, Samsung, LG, Sanyo, Toshiba, Honda) and South Asian brands (Bisleri, Ganga, Amul, National). Additionally, there are now more American brands (Dell, IBM, Nike, Reebok, Yoplait, Visa, Coke, Pepsi, Duracell, Eveready, Whirlpool, Starbucks, Calvin Klein). As noted earlier, it would be unwise to interpret some brand preferences too strongly due to small numbers. Table 8 tantalizes, though, and suggests further research is needed to validate this finding of regional brand preferences.

IV. Discussion and Conclusion

This research yielded three main findings about young adult Nepali consumers living in

Kathmandu. First, the research found that the sample, as a whole, thought that purchasing a global brand was exceptionally important (Table 3). This sample of Nepali consumers was well educated and mature. On the one hand, one could have predicted their interest and desire to purchase global brands due to their education levels, their exposure to global media, their use of the Internet and participation in social networking websites and their ability to travel. Quite unexpectedly, as Table 3 indicated, was the strength of the importance of global brand purchases. Marketers would do well to highlight the “globalness” of their brand when positioning it to these Nepali consumers.

The second finding, which strengthens the discussion above, is the much stronger desire of women to purchase global brands than men (Table 5). In 11 product categories, women gave statistically significantly more importance to purchasing a global brand than men. A possible explanation for this difference in gender evaluation was that a global brand reduced the risks associated with technology products more for women than it did for men. Global brands communicate reliability, consistency and quality. Further, the global brand communicates things about the buyer who purchases it. Perhaps such values as, “I am a wise shopper,” “I know quality when I see it,” “I have status because I can afford a global brand,” are behind these women’s motivation to purchase a global

brand. This finding suggests that firms would do well to develop positioning strategies and integrated marketing communications initiatives targeted toward women as distinct from men.

The third, and perhaps most interesting finding, concerns the regional, Asian relationship between country-of-origin and brand trust.

〈Table 7〉 suggests that brands from Asian countries are, by-and-large, the most trusted. However, when 〈Table 7〉 is compared to Table 8, that is, when a generalized statement about country-of-origin (Table 7) is compared to the specific brands these Nepali consumers trust most (Table 8), there is conflict. To take

〈Table 7〉 Brands from this Country-of-Origin Most Trusted

Product	Most Trusted	2 nd Most Trusted	3 rd Most Trusted
Computer (n = 76)	Japan (50%)	US (28.9%)	Other Country (10.5%)
Toothpaste (n = 74)	India (66.2%)	US (16.2%)	Other Country (8.1%)
Bottled Water (n = 61)	Other country (55.7%)	India (19.7%)	US (19.7%)
DVD Player (n = 80)	Japan (80%)	Korea (6.3%)	China (5.0%)
Washing Machine (n = 79)	Japan (74.7%)	Korea (10.1%)	India 6.3%
Jeans (n = 73)	US (61.6%)	India (8.2%)	China (6.8%)
Running Shoes (n = 76)	US (34.2%)	Korea (13.2%)	China (11/8%)
TV (n = 81)	Japan (72.8%)	Korea (7.4%)	China (6.2%)
Motorcycle (n = 71)	Japan (47.9%)	India (42.3%)	China (2.8%)
Chocolate Bar (n = 67)	India (22.4%)	US (22.4%)	Britain (16.4%)
Yogurt (n = 56)	Other country (55.4%)	India (25%)	US (5.4%)
Checking Account (n = 57)	US (49.1%)	Other Country (36.8%)	India (7%)
VHS Player (n = 55)	Japan (67.3%)	China (10.9%)	Korea (5.5%)
Clothes Dryer (n = 49)	Japan (46.9%)	China (12.2%)	US (12.2%)
Shampoo (n = 73)	India (49.3%)	US (17.8%)	Britain (9.6%)
Refrigerator (n = 76)	Japan (60.5%)	India (15.8%)	Korea (10.5%)
Credit Card (n = 56)	US (58.9%)	Other Country (32.1%)	India (3.6%)
Batteries (n = 58)	Japan (43.1%)	India (13.8%)	US (12.1%)
Soft Drinks (n = 65)	US (47.7%)	India (26.2%)	Other Country (21.5%)
Cell Phone (n = 77)	Japan (46.8%)	Other Country (20.8%)	US (10.4%)
Hamburger (n = 53)	US (52.8%)	Other Country (22.6%)	India (11.3%)
Rice Cooker (n = 76)	Japan (55.3%)	China (18.4%)	India (7.9%)
Coffee (n = 63)	Other Country (28.6%)	US (25.4%)	India (23.8%)

but two examples: computers and toothpaste. This sample of Nepali consumers said they most trust Japanese branded computers (Table 7). Yet, <Table 8> suggests that the specific brands they trust most were American (Dell,

Intel, IBM). Similarly, for toothpaste: <Table 7> indicates that Nepali's trust Indian toothpaste most, but the specific brands they report as being "most trusted" are all American: Colgate, Pepsodent and Close-Up.

<Table 8> Top Three Most Trusted Brands

Product	Most Trusted Brand	2 nd Most Trusted Brand	3 rd Most Trusted Brand
Computer (n = 59)	Dell (25.4%)	Intel (13.6%)	IBM (11.9%)
Toothpaste (n = 67)	Colgate (61.2%)	Pepsodent (19.4%)	Close-up (11.9%)
Bottled Water (n = 38)	Aqua (47.4%)	Bisleri (38.8%)	Ganga (5.3%)
DVD Player (n = 59)	Sony (57.6%)	Samsung (16.9%)	Philips (11.9%)
Washing Machine (n = 59)	LG (26.0%)	Samsung (20.0%)	Whirlpool (8.0%)
Jeans (n = 56)	Levi (71.4%)	Pepe (10.7%)	Calvin Klein (5.4%)
Running Shoes (n = 54)	Nike (42.6%)	Adidas (35.2%)	Reebok (11.1%)
TV (n = 67)	Sony (73.1%)	LG (10.4%)	Philips (9.0%)
Motorcycle (n = 56)	Honda (30.4%)	HeroHonda (28.6%)	Yamaha (19.6%)
Chocolate Bar (n = 43)	Cadbury (25.6%)	Toblerone (18.6%)	Nestle (11.6%)
Yogurt (n = 18)	Juju Dhau (22.2%)	Amul (16.7%)	Yoplait (11.1%)
Checking Account (n = 29)	Standard Chartered (27.6%)	Nabil (10.3%)	Bank of America (10.3%)
VHS Player (n = 34)	Sony (61.8%)	Panasonic (11.8%)	Toshiba (5.9%)
Clothes Dryer (n = 17)	National (23.5%)	LG (11.8%)	Philips (11.8%)
Shampoo (n = 51)	Pantene (23.5%)	Sunsilk (15.7%)	Garnier (15.7%)
Refrigerator (n = 46)	Samsung (30.4%)	LG (23.9%)	National (6.5%)
Credit Card (n = 38)	Visa (38.6%)	MasterCard (21.1%)	Standard Chartered (15.8%)
Batteries (n = 24)	Duracell (20.8%)	Energizer (12.5%)	Eveready (12.5%)
Soft Drinks (n = 50)	Coke (92.0%)	Pepsi (4.0%)	Fanta (4.0%)
Cell Phone (n = 607)	Nokia (70.0%)	SonyEricsson (11.7%)	Motorola (8.3%)
Hamburger (n = 24)	McDonalds (70.8%)	Burger King (8.3%)	KFC (8.3%)
Rice Cooker (n = 34)	Sanyo (17.6%)	Philips (17.6%)	National (14.7%)
Coffee (n = 42)	Nescafe (85.7%)	Starbucks (4.8%)	Grand (2.4%)

One explanation for this incongruence can be found in the research done by Samiee et al. (2005). Their findings suggest that (a) consumers varied in their accurate recognition of a brand's true country of origin, and (b) respondents inferred country of origin by associating the brand name with a language thought to be representative of a specific country. They postulated a new construct called "brand origin recognition accuracy." The difference between Nepali statements found in <Table 7> and those in <Table 8> might simply be due to the inaccurate recognition of the true country-of-origin for the product. Another (and perhaps more intriguing) explanation might concern the "demise of global brands." Globalization -- and the desire of many fast moving consumer good (FMCG) companies to penetrate emerging markets -- has resulted in a global market presence for many FMCGs. Colgate, Pepsodent and Close-Up are all available in Nepal. Their manufacture, however, is in India. In marketing, perception is reality. As is often discussed, if a product is marketed here, sold here, and positioned here, it must *be* from here. If Colgate, Pepsodent and Close-Up are made in India and sold in the Indian subcontinent, then they must be Indian not American. Perhaps, in this era of global saturation for many brands, country-of-origin is becoming much less important to consumers. This raises intriguing questions about whether globalization blurs consumer understandings of what it means to be a "global brand." Perhaps

country of origin is becoming less meaningful and relevant to consumers, since "everything is everywhere" and "it is essentially the same." The perceptions of *how* these Nepali consumers arrived at their judgments clearly needs further investigation.

Conducting research in countries with low literacy levels and whose national citizens live in rural, dispersed and remote areas and whose national citizens speak an ethnic/tribal as well as a national language is challenging. The educated, more mature Nepalis who comprised this sample and who lived in Kathmandu are only one segment of Nepali consumers. This research was a small scale, initial effort to explore country-of-origin and global brand trust perception in this one segment. Not only is further research needed to confirm these findings in Kathmandu, but also further research should include measures of consumer ethnocentrism. Understanding consumer attitudes towards local versus foreign products and brands is an important next step in developing a multi-cue approach to COO. Also research is needed to see if these findings can be generalized to other segments of Nepali consumers. As noted earlier, Nepal is the poorest country in South Asia. Extending these findings to low income Nepali consumers, who constitute the largest number of individuals in Nepal, would extend knowledge about another underrepresented consumer segment and their COO/global brand trust perceptions (Pralhad, 2005).

Overall, this research had two goals: (1) to obtain a better understanding of the attitudes and preferences of Nepali consumers with regard to global versus local brand trust and (2) to evaluate the salience of country of origin cues within these same Nepali consumers. As noted in this paper's opening section, "small states" have some inherent economic disadvantages, and as this research has suggested, one of the marketing implications of being a small state is the marketplace dominance of foreign brands. This research, then, has been a first, tentative step toward exploring how Nepal (one of the smaller states in South Asia) and its citizens interpret COO information and value global brands. More work needs to be done on all fronts.

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