

Luxury brand and country of origin effect: results of an international empirical study.

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Abstract:

The inspiration for this work arose from the current renewed interest in the theme of the Country of Origin effect (COO), taken both in the broad sense and also with specific reference to the world of luxury. This paper will outline the main theoretical-empirical contributions that have focused attention on: a) the Country of Origin effect on consumer behaviour, b) Brand effect on consumer behaviour; c) the COO and Brand interaction effect on consumer behaviour. Finally, the results of an empirical study conducted in three European countries (Italy, France and Germany) will be presented.

Keywords:

Country of origin, luxury, consumer behaviour, international, cross-cultural analysis

The authors share the final responsibility for the contents of this paper. However Gaetano Aiello wrote paragraphs 2,3; Raffaele Donvito wrote paragraphs 4,6,7; Bruno Godey and Daniele Pederzoli wrote paragraph 8; Peter Wiedmann, Nadine Hennings and Astrid Siebels wrote paragraph 9. The authors wrote together paragraphs 1, 5, 10.

1. Introduction.

The inspiration for this work arose from the current renewed interest in the theme of the Country of Origin effect (COO), taken both in the broad sense and also with specific reference to the world of luxury. The study was undertaken for the following reasons:

- I. Although the COO theme has long formed the object of continuing investigation by part of the marketing literature, the studies carried out so far have not yet reached univocal conclusions and have often been carried out with reference above all to the United States (Bertoli, Busacca, Molteni 2005);
- II. There are a number of limitations with regard to the way COO studies have been set up, as they are generally restricted within the geographic borders of a given country (even when interviewees' evaluations concern several different countries); consequently, studies with cross national validity are needed (Phau, Prendergast 2000);
- III. It is not clear whether consumers still attach importance to the country where a product is manufactured (Usunier 2006);
- IV. Relatively few COO studies referring to luxury goods are available (Usunier 2006);
- V. The influence of COO seems to be more important for luxury goods than for necessity products (Piron 2000).

This paper will outline the main theoretical-empirical contributions that have focused attention on: a) the Country of Origin effect on consumer behaviour, b) Brand effect on consumer behaviour; c) the COO and Brand interaction effect on consumer behaviour. Finally, the results of an empirical study conducted in three European countries (Italy, France and Germany) will be presented.

2. Country of Origin Effect on perception and purchasing intentions: main theoretical approaches.

Country Of Origin effect on consumer perception and purchasing intentions has long been of interest among marketing researchers. Attempts have been undertaken in various ways to verify the hypothesis that the country associated with the origin of a product is used by consumers "as a substitute for information, i.e. as a summary indicator of the product characteristics, which will then form the basis for the consumer's evaluation of the purchasing alternatives available" (Busacca *et al.* 2006; Bertoli, Busacca, Molteni 2005). Based on the survey of the literature conducted by Usunier (2006), seven critical moments in the evolution of studies on COO can be identified, as follows: 1) production of the seminal studies by Schooler (1965) and Reiersen (1966) (first articles ever published on COO, based on survey data); 2) first empirical assessment of COO by Schooler and Wildt (1968); 3) development of

the COO literature, mainly by Nagashima (1970, 1977), leading to an analysis of the COO effect on different product categories; first review of the COO literature by Bilkey and Nes (1982), suggesting a criticism of the single-cue rather than multi-cue character (in the single-cue approach, only the COO effect is analysed, instead of its impact in association with the other product attributes); 4) complexification of the COO concept, as a result of the works by Erickson et al. (1984), Johansson and Nebenzahl (1986), Johansson and Thorelli (1985), Johansson *et al.* (1985), Han and Terpstra (1988a, b), Han (1990), Martin and Eroglu (1993), which develop multicue studies in the attempt to include the brand impact as well as multinational production, country image and consumer patriotism; however, the true relevance of COO research is not discussed; 5) development of research and meta-analyses by Samiee (1994), Peterson and Jolibert (1995), Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999), which play down the weight of COO on purchasing intentions; 6) dissemination of COO literature, which still shrinks from addressing the basic question of the relevance or irrelevance of the COO effect. Moreover, Samiee *et al.* (2005) underline that many works on the COO theme were not supported by strong empirical research.

However, throughout these various different theoretical contributions, a common thread can be discerned: it is made clear that the COO impacts on consumer perception and behaviour through the image of the product's country of origin. The image is understood as the representation, the reputation or the stereotype of a specific country that consumers associate with the products (Nagashima 1970, 1977). According to Roth and Romeo (1992), the image of a country arises from a series of dimensions that positively qualify a nation in terms of its production profile. Such dimensions include the following aspects: innovative approach (superiority, cutting-edge technology), design (style, elegance, balance), prestige (exclusiveness, status of the national brands), workmanship (reliability, durability, quality of national manufactures). Usunier (1993) provides a broader and more detailed account of this concept, defining it as a multidimensional construct whose main dimensions encompass: a) factors pertaining to the image of national versus imported products; b) categories of merchandise known to derive from a specific country or provenance; c) the image evoked by the geographic origin of the brand; d) the influence of the 'made in' concept in product perception; e) the national image of the producers. In Usunier's interpretation the perception of the country's image is also influenced by cognitive components (referring to social, economic, cultural and political characteristics), affective components (feelings towards the country) and additionally by stereotypes (ingrained preconceptions) (Usunier, Lee 2005).

From a conceptual point of view it is particularly important to underline that the notion of “country of origin” is by no means plain and univocal. At first, the concept of COO was considered as the made-in country (see the review by Nebenzahl *et al.*, 1997), or the country-of-manufacture (COM) (see the review by Samiee 1994); in other words, it was the country which appeared on the ‘made-in’ label, generally the country where final assembly of the good took place. Other concepts have progressively emerged in the COO literature, such as Country-of-Design (COD) (in the review by Nebenzahl *et al.*, 1997; Jaffé, Nebenzahl 2001), referring to the country where the product was designed and developed. With multinational production, there is a growing discrepancy between COMs and CODs. Moreover, global companies tend to manipulate brand names to suggest particular origins (country-of-brand – COB - effects). Thus COO is increasingly considered as that country which consumers typically associate with a product or brand, irrespective of where it is actually manufactured. This has prompted researchers to understand the effects of interactions among the three above-mentioned “declinations” of origin (COO in the broad sense; COD and COM). Analysis has focused on the effects of the interaction between the actual country of production of the good and the country associated with the brand most renowned for that particular good.

Furthermore, considering these issues from a conceptual point of view, studies on COO can be divided into three main research lines (Bertoli, Busacca, Molteni 2005): (1) studies that make reference to the country image and consumer characteristics; (2) studies that make reference to the country image and aspects regarding the product with which the country is associated; (3) studies that make reference to the country image and the related economic setting.

The first of the above three lines of research concerns studies that analyse the impact of the image of the country of origin by considering a series of aspects characterising the *consumer*, such as socio-demographic features (age, sex, social status, educational background, degree of patriotism or ethnocentrism, etc.); in addition, attention also focuses on the extent of familiarity with the product/brand, (Shimp, Sharma 1987; Johansson *et al.*, 1985; Ettenson *et al.*, 1988; Usunier, 1994; Anderson, Cunningham 1972; Usunier, 2002). It is interesting to note that the results of these studies are not always concordant, and at times are sharply discordant. In this line of research, one also finds studies that have analysed COO in relation to the degree of involvement of the consumer in the purchasing process (Ahmed *et al.*, 1994). Such studies reveal that the importance of the country of origin is inversely proportional to the level of involvement: that is to say, the weight attributed to the country of origin decreases

with increasing involvement of the consumer in the purchasing process. At the same time, these empirical analyses show that the importance of information about the product origin tends to increase with increasing risk perceived in connection with the purchase; in such a circumstance, consumers perceive a lower risk when purchasing products from their own country or, more generally, products originating from countries with regard to which they have developed a positive image (Lumpkin *et al.*, 1985).

The second line of research is composed of studies about the impact of the country of origin image in relation to *product* specific aspects with which the country is associated. This aspects are linked to the country's traditional products, the product characteristics (including the price), and the strength of competing brands. In particular, the impact of geographic origin seems to be stronger in the case of categories of goods whose production is associated with countries that are renowned for their production tradition in the given sector, such as French perfume or Italian fashion (Baumgartner, Jolibert 1977; Roth, Romeo 1992). Furthermore, the COO impact seems to be fairly strong for luxury products. In this regard, Wall *et al.*, (1991) noted that for luxury items the COO tended to have a stronger effect than price in product quality assessment; similarly, the empirical research by Piron (2000) found that the COO has a greater influence in consumers' luxury product purchasing intention.

Finally, the third line of research concerns studies that have examined the impact of the image connoting the country of origin in relation to some aspects linked to the *economic environment* (participation in the globalisation process and degree of economic development of the country of origin). This is particularly significant in sectors characterised by global competition, as the COO effect appears destined to decrease with globalisation because a product may become associated with the image of more than one country, in accordance with the different attributes that distinguish the given products (for example, Italian design, Japanese technology, German reliability, etc.) (Bertoli G., Busacca B., Molteni L. 2005). As far as the degree of economic development of the country of origin is concerned, studies conducted in the 1980s (Johanson, Nebenzahl 1986) showed that consumers generally have greater trust in products originating from economically advanced countries. Relatively more recent studies (Manrai *et al.*, 1998) have corroborated the existence of an interaction between level of economic development of the country of origin and product typology, and have found that the interaction is greatest for luxury goods and declines for shopping and convenience goods.

3. Brand impact on perceptions and purchasing intentions.

The analysis of the brand impact on perceptions and purchasing intentions has traditionally been greater interest to marketing theory, also in the case of COO effect.

The main characters of the brand influence on customers' purchasing intentions can be analysed by investigating a) the basic components and specific functions performed by the brand, b) the concept of brand personality and the brand's relational dimension, and c) the concept of brand experience.

a) The basic components and specific functions performed by the brand.

Much of the doctrine holds that the brand represents "the memory" of a firm, which encompasses all the investments, research activities, process technologies and innovations carried out by the firm over time; it thus effectively embodies the firm's history (Deichmann 1991; Collese 2000). But, at the same time, the brand is a tool available to customers as a means of expressing their own individuality and attitudes, as well as manifesting the needs they are experiencing (Keegan, Moriarty, Duncan 1992). According to Zara (1997), the brand is structured on the basis of three fundamental components: a) the identificational component (signs of recognition); b) the perceptual component (cognitive associations and perceptions); c) the trust component (confirmation of expectations). The identificational component refers to all aspects that can be of aid to the consumer in identifying the brand and in distinguishing it from other available alternatives (name, logo). It is this component that gives rise to brand awareness, which in turn is subdivided into the dimension of recognition, i.e. the brand's capacity to be correctly identified by consumers who are exposed to it, and the dimension of evocativeness, i.e. the brand's capacity to be correctly linked to a particular product category or to specific benefits or occasions of utilisation. The perceptual component, on the other hand, refers to the network of meanings the firm builds up around the brand name and thus concerns the set of associations evoked in the brand consumers' cognitive system. Among such associations (Peter, Olson 1987) one may cite the product attributes (concrete or abstract), the benefits (functional, experiential and symbolic) offered by the product, the individual values linked to the product (relating to behaviour, social status, self-esteem, gratification). Finally, the trust component comes into play with regard to the role of the brand in the purchasing process, springing from confirmation of the expectations the consumer has developed; that is to say, in order to economise on cognitive and temporal resources, the consumer engages in an act of faith towards the brand, confident that all aspects of its performance will reveal the familiar distinctive features.

Therefore the brand, both in a general perspective and also in each of its components, has a significant impact on customers' perceptions and purchasing decisions. This analysis of brand influence can be further illuminated by examining the specific functions performed by the brand itself. In this regard, Kapferer and Thoenig (1991) and Lambin (1991) classify a series of utility functions ascribable to the brand, which work in favour both of the customer and also of the producer.

In terms of benefits offered to the customer, the brand is generally recognised as performing the following functions: a) orientation – the brand communicates the presence of a given set of attributes (tangible and intangible) and thereby provide orientation for customers on the basis of their preferences; b) guarantee – since the brand is a “signature”, it identifies a firm and requires the latter to assume an unequivocal and enduring responsibility, with a commitment to guarantee a specific and constant quality level; c) personalisation – the brand allows customers to express their originality and personality through their purchasing choices and manner of utilization; the brand thus communicates the customer's value system; d) practicality – the brand is a cognitive shortcut, enabling the customer to easily memorise the characteristics of a product associated with a specific name (the brand); and finally, e) ludic functions – once basic needs have been satisfied, the brand fulfils the need for novelty, surprise, risk, complexity.

In terms of benefits offered to the producer, the brand takes on the functions of: i) protection – the (deposited) brand name protects the firm against imitations and counterfeit products; (ii) positioning – through the brand, the firm asserts its distinctive and differentiating features; (iii) capitalisation – the brand can be compared to a reservoir containing the value of the communication investments carried out over the years and the value of the satisfaction capital and relational capital the firm has accumulated with its clients.

Therefore, by virtue of its functions the brand has in its genetic endowment a strategic force capable of awakening the purchaser's response, and since – as pointed out above – it represents a synthesis of the firm's values, it also underwrites the quality of the firm's products and processes, its competences and its role on the reference market. Furthermore, the reinforcement of the brand's strategic dimension¹ and of its impact on perceptions and

¹ Aaker (2003), proposing the concept of “brand leadership”, underlines that in addition to the aim of achieving sales volumes and specific market shares, it is also necessary to ensure that brand management is directed towards building up a brand identity. This objective, in the author's theoretical construct, is dependent on adoption of a conceptual model of “brand equity”. In Aaker (1997) it is argued that brand equity is based on a series of “assets” and “liabilities” associated with the brand and with its name or label, which add to or detract from the value of the product or service sold by a firm and purchased by consumers.

purchasing intentions additionally springs from that fact that the contemporary customer is less and less in search of primary, tangible and objective, elements in products-services: rather, customers seek emotive elements (sometimes anchored to socio-cultural trends towards which customers feel a sense of belonging) (Fabris 1999; Fornari 1995). These elements are destined to become the real basis for differentiation, and they are encapsulated in the brand. Thus firms pursue the aim of creating a “symbolic” universe around their products as a means of reinforcing the consumer’s brand loyalty (Marzili, 1979), in other words as a way of prompting consumers to purchase the firm’s products in consequence of the values and meanings summarized by the brand.

b) Brand personality and brand relational dimension.

In analysing the influence of the brand on perceptions and purchasing intentions, great attention should be paid to the links – partly fairly explicit, partly less so – that activate relations between the brand and the customer.

An in-depth exploration of the relational characters of a brand must start out from an understanding of the concept of “brand personality”. Cook’s (1992) statement that the relation between the brand and the customer has some features similar to an affective relation between individuals, suggests that a veritable personality can be ascribed to the brand. In effect, firms have increasingly sought to personify their brands, in such a manner as to enable consumers to reflect their own personality in their choice of brand: feeling that the brand expresses elements that are coherent with their own values; consumers are motivated to buy the brand products. As early as the second half of the 1980s, Grandi (1987) underlined that a consumer’s perception of a brand is that of a personified image, built up in a symbolic manner partly by virtue of the communicative effort undertaken by firms. Accordingly, it is argued that what the consumer wants and purchases is the global personality of the product, which consists not only in its chemical composition but also in the idea of the product that has taken shape in the mind of the public (Dogana, 1976).

For Blackstone (1992 and 1993), the complexity of relations between brand and customer is such that it extends over a multiplicity of dimensions that go beyond the brand image or personality. Adopting this approach, the important aspects lie not merely in gathering information on what consumers think about the brand, but also *on what consumers think the brand thinks about themselves*; consequently, this calls for analysis of the interaction between the consumer’s attitude towards the brand and the “brand’s attitudes” towards the consumer. Despite certain controversial aspects (as this represents a notable conceptual abstraction), the approach described has the merit of seeking to go beyond the customer’s perception of the

brand (and thus of the products offered by the brand) in order to gain greater insight into the relation between the two parties.

Following the Blackstone's contribution, Manaresi (1999) develops the theory of relational bases, which, although founded on the metaphor of the interpersonal relationship between consumer and brand, endeavours to integrate measurement of the rational and emotive aspects and to extend the scope of brand personalisation. According to this perspective, the foundation on which the relationship between customer and brand becomes established (in reference to the brand whose products are habitually bought) can be delineated in terms of several categories (relational bases) which involve the brand's capacity to: (a) be perceived as a brand that can supply rewards-incentives (reward base); (b) to be perceived as a brand that is rich in know-how and has an elevated content of expertise (expert base); (c) exert a form of coercion over the consumer (coercive base); (d) be perceived as legitimated through tradition and culture (legitimate base); (e) be perceived as close to the consumer's values (referent base). In relational bases theory, the concept of brand personality thus constitutes the scaffold of the relation but it takes on a biunique sense, inasmuch as the relation itself is not self-supporting and would not endure without the active and affective support both of the customer and of the brand itself. This interpretation of the importance of the concept of brand personality is supported by considerable empirical evidence (Manaresi 1999; Gurviez 1996) which indicates that the brand-customer relation is actually described by the customers themselves as if the brand were metaphorically a person. The customer shows a tendency to anthropomorphise products and brands, considering them to be endowed with a typically human personality as well as human characteristics and quality (Codeluppi, 1992). This having been said, relational bases theory also underlines that in addition to the phenomenon of brand personalisation it is necessary to take into account the specific purchasing intentions and consumption behaviour that play a role in constructing the personality itself. One essential function of such forms of behaviour is that of endowing individuals' social relations with meaning. In other words, interpersonal relations are utilized by a consumer not only as a source of promptings as to what and how to consume, but also to give a meaning to what one subjectively consumes; one consumes partly so that interactions with other individuals can become meaningful.

c) The brand experience as a relational frontier.

The extent of the relational dimension leads to a broadening of the brand symbolic implications towards the frontier of experiential branding. This is an area where experience assumes the role of a new tool for value creation (Pine, Gilmore 1999), with the brand itself

acting as the container that gathers together the multifaceted strands of experience. In branding strategies, experience deriving from product use is supplemented by overall experiential knowledge of the brand (brand experience), with the aim of reinforcing the link between the brand and the customer. Adoption of this perspective exerts a radical influence on brand identity characters, transforming brands into nothing short of suppliers of experience (experience provider) (Schmitt 1999a, 1999b) that strive to impress their transformative power on a wide range of aspects of their customers' lives. Thus experience becomes the gateway allowing the relational contents of the relationship between brand and purchaser to spread out and increase: in other words, the experience generated by the brand becomes a basis for competitive positioning and also a factor that shapes the customer's perceptions and purchasing intentions.

In short, the brand can influence perceptions and purchasing intentions regarding a given product because it allows a specific supply formula to be identified (identificational component), it generates a network of cognitive associations and perceptions in the purchaser's mind (perceptual component), and it is capable of confirming expectations (trust component). Furthermore, by performing its functions, the brand takes on a differentiation role that can affect purchasers' preferences in its own favour, thus increasing the likelihood that customers will repeat the purchasing act over time. Finally, the brand extends its capacity to influence perceptions and purchasing intentions through its capacity to activate a relational and experiential interaction.

4. COO and Brand interaction effect on consumer behaviour.

Research has also focused on the effects deriving from the brand and country of origin interaction, in relation to individuals' perceptions and purchasing intentions.

Adopting this perspective, Haubl and Helrod (1999) noted that perceptions (of the qualitative level) of a product are more favourable when coherence between brand and country of production is recognised. Research carried out by Busacca, Bertoli and Molteni (2006) likewise points out that the effect of the interaction between brand image and country of origin image varies in direction and intensity depending on the perceptual consonance of these two aspects. The above authors therefore underline that a connection between place of origin and a brand must be addressed by adopting a rationale similar to co-branding, placing emphasis on the concept of perceptual consonance, i.e. endeavouring to achieve coherence between the image of the country of production and the brand. In effect, the contents evoked by the brand are a cluster of attributes and associations that the customer correlates with the brand name, and one of these elements is the perceived place of origin of the brand (Biel

1993; Busacca 2000). Since this, perceived place of origin is little short of a demographic variable and, furthermore, since it contributes to shaping the brand personality (Thakor, Kohli 1996), it is vital for brand and country of origin to display intrinsic coherence.

Analysis of COO and brand interactions is of particular importance for global brands, which are often represented by products with different COD and COM; it thus becomes important to explore whether and to what extent customers consider the brand name as a completely autonomous factor or as a factor exerting a certain influence, or even as an estimator of the COO. According to Pecotich and Ward (2007), a brand gradually takes on the function of a summarising construct in the eyes of the customer, as the latter grows increasingly familiar with the brand in question; furthermore, the greater the familiarity, the less the customer will be inclined to consider other extrinsic information such as the price or the COO. Finally, again according to the above cited authors, a familiar brand is actually able to increase the COO of the country with which the brand is associated, and even to neutralise the negative effect often linked to developing countries.

Other empirical studies (Ahmed, Johnson, Ling Fang, Hui 2002) have shown that the COO has a more decisive effect than the brand when it is a question of perception and evaluation of product quality. This interpretation is based on two specific arguments: the “stereotype” effect associated with the various countries and perceived by individuals, and the observation that purchasers ascribe great importance to the COO if it is discoverable at the moment when the product is being evaluated. But when one moves from perceptions to purchasing intentions, the roles are inverted, with the brand exerting greater influence than the COO. It would appear that at the moment of actually performing the purchase, the customer is less affected by the country of origin stereotype, and searches instead for more reliable proxies as a means of evaluating the alternatives, such as a known brand (often consumers use the brand name as a proxy of COO itself, (Astous, Ahmed 1999). However, these theoretical positions predominantly make reference to interactions between the COO and known brand names. In cases where the brand is unknown to the customer and/or where there exists no particularly renowned brand for certain product categories, the influence of geographic provenance on the process of customer choice is found to be greater than the influence generated by the brand (Hamzaoui, Dwight 2007). Thus in such circumstances, a COD or COM that gives rise to notably adverse perceptions is hardly likely to be compensated by the positive aspects of the other attributes that characterise the product, and the adverse perceptions will play a central role in general evaluation of the good.

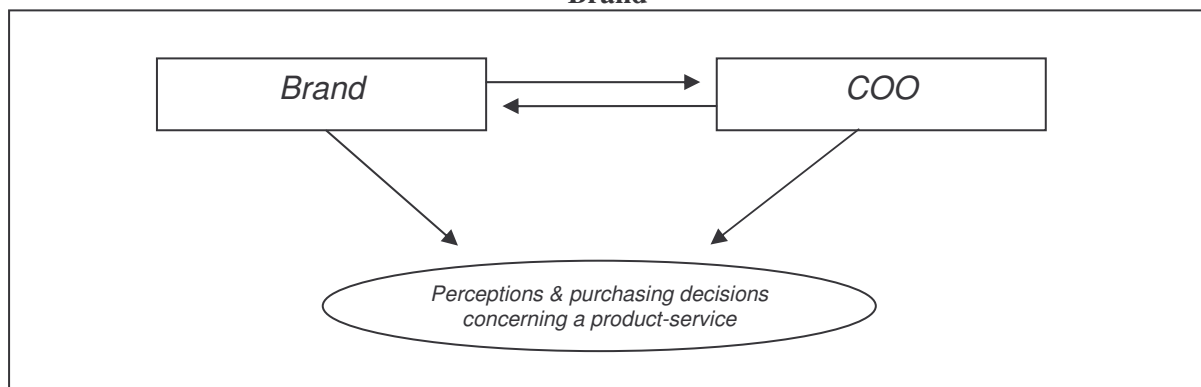
5. Research Hypothesis and Methodology.

5.1. Research Hypothesis.

The study aimed to analyse the perception on the COO and brands (taken both in the broad sense and also with specific reference to the world of luxury) and their influence on consumer behaviour of young people (Figure 1). In particular, the authors coded the following research hypothesis:

- H1 – Which is the cross-cultural perceptions on the COO concept (construct, relevance)?
- H2 – Which is the cross-cultural perceptions on the country image of a set of nations (Italy, France, Germany, China, Japan, USA)?
- H3 – Which is the cross-cultural perceptions on the brand concept (construct, relevance)?
- H4 – Are there COO and Brand influences in perceptions and purchasing intentions as regards convenience, shopping and specialty (luxury) goods?
- H5 – Is there a COO and Brand interaction effect on consumer behaviour?
 - H5a – Which brands (both general and luxury) are most representative of each country?
 - H5b – Which and how much national component is associated with the main luxury brands and how important is this for the brands themselves?

Figure 1 – The framework underlying the exploratory analysis of relations between COO and Brand



Source: authors'

A network of international scholars from Italy, France, Germany, Russia, India, China, Japan and the United States, some of whom are the authors of the present study, was set up to address these questions. This paper represents a report of work in progress, and illustrates the findings obtained so far. Thus the data given here focus on results obtained in Europe; the overall data from the entire international network will be presented in another work.

5.2. Research Methodology.

In order to test the research hypotheses, a statistically non representative sample of 48 undergraduate management students from the European universities participating in the

survey was set up (University of Florence – Italy, Groupe ESC Rouen – France, University of Hanover – Germany). The basic characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 1. Since we were more interested in basic psychological processes than generalisations, the sample size was considered appropriate (Grewal et al., 2000; O’Cass, 2000). With regard to the utilisation of students as survey units, it should be noted that this choice is widespread in social science research designed to analyse perception and levels of familiarity/renown of brands, with particular reference to the world of luxury. In particular, Peterson (2001) offers two main reasons for the validity of the analysis of samples or groups of management students in multi-country research. First, student samples are relatively homogeneous in terms of demographics, socioeconomic background, and education. Second, by involving students it is possible to limit the potential problems that would have been associated with a multi-language context, as management students generally have a good knowledge of English (which is used here as the basic language in association with the student’s native language).

Table 1 – Basic characteristics of the non statistical sample analyzed

	Young people		Male		Female		Age (average)
	%	n.	%	n.	%	n.	
Italy	33,33%	16	33,33%	8	33,33%	8	23,6
France	33,33%	16	33,33%	8	33,33%	8	22,8
Germany	33,33%	16	33,33%	8	33,33%	8	24,5
Total	100,00%	48	100,00%	24	100,00%	24	23,6

Source: authors’

With regard to the methodology adopted, the empirical survey was planned and conducted according to the following procedure:

- a) Definition of the non statistical sample characteristics (size: around 50 people; age range: 20-26; country of living: within the borders of each geographic unit; gender composition: 50% male; 50% female).
- b) Definition of a semi-structured questionnaire, based on the theoretical approaches considered in this paper and developed by the members of the global international network involved in this research.
- c) Field survey: the students were divided into three geographic units (Italy, France and Germany); in each geographic unit the local researchers interviewed the sample units using the semi-structured questionnaire (interview length range: 45 minutes – 1 hour); an overall total of 48 respondents were obtained: 16 in Italy, 16 in Germany and 16 in France.
- d) Gathering of the material by the researchers, data processing and standardisation of the output format.

As can be noted from the questionnaire format used (semi-structured), the study proposed to administer quali-quantitative questions. These aims to deeper analyze COO and Brand influence in perceptions and purchasing intentions of the young people analysed.

6. General results on the concepts of COO, brand and their influence on young people’s consumer behaviors.

In this part of our paper an aggregate analysis of young people’s perceptions of the concept of COO, brand and their influence in perceptions and purchasing intentions is performed, in order to offer a preliminary answer to the research hypotheses.

Empirical findings related to H1 – Which is the crosscultural perceptions on the COO concept (construct, relevance)?

Based on the theoretical contributions here considered (Samiee, 1994; Nebenzahl et al., 1997; Jaffé, Nebenzahl 2001) the researchers asked young people to assess the importance of COD and COM as a constituent part of a product COO. As can be noted from Table 2, according to the majority of respondents, the determination of product COO depends both by the country where it has been designed both by the one in which it was physically produced and/or assembled.

According to the opinion of subjects analyzed, thus the attribution of “made in” is accepted only if the product has the same COD and COM. However from a cross-cultural point of view this interpretation differs significantly between the three nations considered; the percentage of young Italians who consider the COO as a joint result of COD and COM even reaches 94% while the percentage of young Germans decrease to 12%; the French are instead in an intermediate position, still considering the COO as a joint result of COD and COM (60%).

Table 2 – The COO concept according to the young people surveyed

COO	Overall	Italy	France	Germany
COD + COM	56%	94%	60%	12%
COD	17%	6%	25%	17%
COM	27%	0%	15%	71%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: authors’

In other words if for the Italians and the French the COO is linked together with the design and the physical manufacturing for the German the concept of COO is explained largely (71%) only by the COM.

Empirical findings related to H2 - Which is the cross-cultural perceptions on the country image of a set of Nations (Italy, France, Germany, China, Japan, USA)?

With reference to the model proposed by Roth and Romeo (1992), the researchers asked the young people interviewed to assess the image key characteristics of a set of countries (Italy, France, Germany, China, Japan, USA) using a five point likert scale (see Table 3); such

dimensions include the innovative approach (superiority, cutting-edge technology), design (style, elegance, balance), prestige (exclusiveness, status of the national brands), workmanship (reliability, durability, quality of national manufactures).

Table 3 – Country ratings and mean value with regard to innovativeness, design, prestige, and workmanship

Country image key characteristics	Italy	France	Germany	China	Japan	USA
Innovativeness - the inclusion of new technology and engineering advances in a product	2,79	3,04	3,92	3,38	4,58	4,28
Design - the appearance, style, color(s), elegance and variety	4,45	4,19	3,17	2,33	3,43	3,51
Prestige - the exclusivity, status, and brand name reputation	4,30	4,38	3,53	2,12	3,23	3,64
Workmanship - the product's reliability, durability, craftsmanship, and manufacturing quality	3,40	3,55	4,35	2,72	4,17	3,81

Five point scale: 1=strongly not relevant; 2=not relevant; 3=neutral; 4=relevant; 5=strongly relevant

Source: authors'

The analysis of the results reveals a number of considerations that can be summarized to three main themes: I) each country is qualified by an image rooted on one or two most relevant factors; thus Italy is characterized by “Design” (4,45), France by “Prestige” (4,38), Germany by “Workmanship” (4,35), Japan (4,58), USA (4,28) and China (3,38) by “Innovativeness”. II) largely the key factor that qualifies the image of each country reaches the highest ratings in that specific country compared to others (values highlighted in bold in Table 3); III) the country images even if are rooted on a specific factor are fully determined also by other key characteristics. However the image of China is an exception; to this Country the factors Design (2,33), Prestige (2,12) and Workmanship (2,72) are not deemed important (values highlighted in grey in Table 3) and represent the lowest values in the set of countries considered; a similar consideration is also consistent to the image of Italy regarding the characteristic of “Innovativeness (2,79).

Then the researchers asked young people to freely associate the five words they think are the most consistent with the countries under analysis (this part were inspired by the contributions of Kayanak, Kucukemiroglu 1992; Usunier 1993; Usunier, Lee 2005). In this regard it is interesting to note that the terms chosen have a various nature (adjectives, product categories, food products, values, ecc.) and a closely tie to the stereotypes related to the countries under investigation (i.e. culture, design-fashion and food associate to Italy; fashion, luxury, elegance, to France; cars, beer, technology to Germany; plagiarism, communism, growth to China; innovation and precision to Japan; innovation and leadership to USA) (see Table 4).

Table 4 – Main country associations given by the young people surveyed

Country	Associations	Country	Associations
Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Art – History - Culture ▪ Design – Fashion ▪ Food and Wine (pasta, pizza, vino) ▪ Elegance - Style ▪ Quality 	China	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Plagiarism ▪ Cheap ▪ Communism ▪ Economic and population growth ▪ Food (Rice)
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fashion – Luxury ▪ Elegance ▪ Quality ▪ Culture ▪ Food and Wine (cheese, baguette, champagne) 	Japan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Innovation – New Tech ▪ Precision – Quality ▪ Food (Sushi) ▪ Population ▪ Tokyo
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cars ▪ Beer ▪ Industry – Technology – Engineering ▪ Discipline– organization ▪ Strongness - Solidity 	USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Innovation ▪ Freedom ▪ Leader-Power- Superiority – Arrogance ▪ Food (Fast food) ▪ Multiculturalism

Source: authors’

Empirical findings related to H3 - Which is the cross-cultural perceptions on the brand concept (construct, relevance)?

As regards the exploration of the concept of Brand widespread among young people, a multiple choice answer based on theoretical contribution fo Deichmann (1991), Collesei (2000), Keegan, Moriarty, Duncan (1992) and Zara (1997) was set up by the researchers. The results analysis reveals (Table 5) the Brand is unanimously considered (93,8%) as a sign of identification (eg. name, logo) and also for the wider part of the respondents (77,7%) as a set of cognitive and perceptive associations; on the contrary brand is not fully perceived as a basis of trust (52,5)%.

However a cross-cultural analysis of the composition of the aggregate figure shows a considerable fluctuation of young people opinions: the Germans consider the brand just as a sign of identification (87,5%), not very much a set of cognitive and perceptive associations (50,0%) and not at all a trust containers (25,0%); on the other side French people “read” the brand on two different dimensions (100,0% sign of identification and 95,0% set of cognitive and perceptive associations) while the Italians seem to have an even more complex brand concept based on the three roots shown in Table 5.

Table 5 – Brand concept according to the young people surveyed

Brand	Area	Yes	No	Total
A sign of identification (es. name, logo)	Overall	93,8%	6,2%	100,0%
	Italy	94,1%	5,9%	100,0%
	France	100,0%	0,0%	100,0%
	Germany	87,5%	12,5%	100,0%
A set of cognitive and perceptive associations	Overall	77,7%	22,3%	100,0%
	Italy	88,2%	11,8%	100,0%
	France	95,0%	5,0%	100,0%
	Germany	50,0%	50,0%	100,0%
A trust “container”	Overall	52,5%	47,5%	100,0%
	Italy	82,4%	17,6%	100,0%
	France	50,0%	50,0%	100,0%
	Germany	25,0%	75,0%	100,0%

Source: authors’

The questionnaire also provided an open answer asking the young people to write down their own personal definition of brand. By the way the answers given by respondents were all directly related to the three meanings proposed in the closed list by the researchers².

The research, in order to define the issue of brand influence in a general framework, has examined the specific functions performed by the brand itself (Kapferer, Thoenig 1991; Lambin 1991) according to the opinion of the interviewed. As can be noted from the Table 6, the functions of guarantee and orientation are those who qualify in general the role of Brand for buyers. Again, this data is the result of the composition of different orientations within three geographical units analyzed; referring to the next paragraphs the detailed analysis of the specific results of each Nations, it is possible to point out a first set of remarks:

- Italians consider the brand accomplishes a customization function together with the functions of guidance and guarantee;
- French focus on the brand function of guarantee;
- Germans, with the exception of the weak preference for the guarantee function, do not give to the brand a strong role for any particular function.

Table 6 – Brand functions according to the young people surveyed

Brand function	Overall	Italy	France	Germany
Orientation function	3,72	4,35	3,55	3,25
Guarantee function	4,09	4,35	4,35	3,56
Personality function	3,66	4,00	3,60	3,38
Handiness function	3,61	3,94	3,65	3,25
Recreational function	3,12	3,06	3,25	3,06

Source: authors’

Furthermore the research, within the limits of its representativeness, did not find significant evidence of relational (Blackstone 1992, 1993; Maranesi 1999) and experiential (Pine,

² The qualitative *analysis* of this open answer is not here included because the authors believe that it would not have added specific value to the paper.

Gilmore 1999; Schmitt 1999a, 1999b) brand perspective. It is believed however that the type of survey instrument used in this research was not the most appropriate for analyzing the relational and experiential perspective linked to the brand.

Empirical findings related to H4 - Are there COO and Brand influences in perceptions and purchasing intentions as regards convenience, shopping and specialty (luxury) goods?

In order to give an answer to the question contained in the research hypothesis H4, members of the international network have asked young people interviewed how much Brand, COO and other marketing items affect their own evaluations of products; to achieve most significant results products were divided into three categories: convenience goods, shopping goods, specialty-luxury goods³.

Table 7a - The items affecting the evaluations of the product

Table 7b - The items affecting the purchasing decision

Items	Product evaluation			Purchasing decision		
	Convenience goods	Shopping goods	Specialty - Luxury goods	Convenience goods	Shopping goods	Specialty Luxury goods
Brand	2,48	3,81	4,65	2,51	3,59	4,39
COO	2,63	3,06	3,77	2,43	2,67	3,31
COD	2,17	3,06	3,82	2,14	2,76	3,35
COM/A	2,56	3,06	3,48	2,37	2,78	3,06
Price	4,50	4,27	3,53	4,37	4,22	3,88
Warranty	2,76	3,73	3,98	2,62	3,44	3,92
Design	2,15	3,98	4,67	2,18	4,10	4,67
Advertising and communication	2,92	3,41	3,69	2,49	3,02	3,57

Five point scale: 1=really not much; 2=not much; 3=neither not much neither much ; 4=much; 5= very much

Source: authors'

In relation to H4, some interesting empirical evidences come out (see Tables 7a-b):

- Brand and COO respectively have a medium and medium-high impact (3,06 and 3,81) on perceptual evaluation of shopping goods and a medium high-high impact on luxury goods (3,77 and 4,65);
- Brand e COO do not affect evaluations of convenience goods;
- Brand affects the evaluations of shopping goods and luxury goods more than COO;
- The items affecting more the product evaluations are the “price” for convenience good (4,50) and shopping goods (4,27) and “design” for luxury goods (4,67); Brand is the

³ Traditionally (Copeland 1923) *Convenience goods* are those that the customer purchases frequently, immediately, and with minimum effort (es. soaps, newspapers, milk). *Shopping goods* are those which usually requires a more involved selection process than convenience goods. A consumer usually compares a variety of attributes, including suitability, quality, price, and style (furniture, electronics, not expensive clothing). *Specialty-Luxury goods* have particularly unique characteristics for which a significant group of buyers is willing to make a special purchasing effort (luxury cars, professional photographic equipment, high-fashion clothing).

second most important item affecting the evaluations of luxury goods, COO the fourth (3,31).

Considering the influence of these factors on young people purchasing decision other interesting results arise:

- i) Brand and COO reduce, in general, their influence; The COO has medium influence only in the purchasing decisions of luxury goods (3,31), while the brand maintains its influence also on shopping goods;
- ii) Brand affects the purchasing decision more than COO;
- iii) The items affecting purchasing decision are the same of those influencing the perceptive evaluations of products (price for convenience and shopping goods, design for luxury);
- iv) Brand is still the second most important items affecting the purchasing decision of luxury goods; COO is instead the last one.

Empirical findings related to H5 – Is there a COO and Brand interaction effect on consumer behaviour? H5a - Which brands (both general and luxury) are most representative of each country?

From a general point of view, the brand recognized as the most representative of the countries under investigation appear to be global brand characterized by a national leadership and a strong rooting (at least evoked) in its “historical” Country of origin⁴.

⁴ According the authors’ opinion, the “historical” Country of Origin is the country traditionally linked to a specific brand; for instance it is the country in which the business has located its headquarter, its facilities or in which still has its historical roots and it is not just the country of the majority shareholders.

Table 8 –General brands and luxury brands spontaneously associated by young people to different countries

Country	General brands	Sectors	Luxury Brands	Sectors
Italy	1. Fiat 2. Barilla 3. Ferrari 4. Gucci 5. Valentino	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cars ▪ Food ▪ Fashion 	1. Ferrari 2. Armani 3. Gucci 4. Dolce & Gabbana 5. Ferragamo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cars ▪ Fashion
France	1. Renault 2. Peugeot 3. Citroen 4. Danone 5. Carrefour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cars ▪ Food ▪ Retail 	1. Chanel 2. Dior 3. Louis Vuitton 4. Yves Saint Laurent 5. Cartier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fashion ▪ Jewellery
Germany	1. Volkswagen 2. Bosh 3. Adidas 4. Mercedes 5. Siemens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cars ▪ Electro-mechanic ▪ Sportswear 	1. Mercedes 2. BMW 3. Porsche 4. Audi 5. Escada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cars ▪ Fashion
China	1. AirChina 2. ... 3. ... 4. ... 5. ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transport 	1. ... 2. ... 3. ... 4. ... 5. ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ...
Japan	1. Sony 2. Toyota 3. Toshiba 4. Mitsubishi 5. Honda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Electronic ▪ Cars 	1. Lexus 2. Kenzo 3. Sony 4. Issey Miyake 5. Yamamoto	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cars ▪ Electronic ▪ Fashion
USA	1. McDonald's 2. Nike 3. GM 4. Coca Cola 5. Ford	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Food retailer ▪ Cars ▪ Sportswear ▪ Beverage 	1. Ralph Lauren 2. Tiffany 3. Chevrolet 4. DKNY 5. Tommy Hilfiger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fashion ▪ Jewellery ▪ Cars

Source: authors'

As can be noted in Table 8, the sectors of the brands (general and luxury) associated with the different countries are the same that qualify each specific country image. This result seems to validate the thesis on perceptual consonance and coherence between the image of the country and the brand (Haubl, Helrod 1999; Busacca, Bertoli, Molteni 2006). Therefore it seems to exist an intimate interaction between country and “representative” brands: on one hand the country qualifies the brand personality while, on the other hand, the brand plays a consistent role to determine and to consolidate the perceptive features of the country. Furthermore is also interesting to note that automotive players are mentioned by respondents for the majority of the country taking into account. The data collection shows also the very low awareness of young people on Chinese brands.

Empirical findings related to H5 – Is there a COO and Brand interaction effect on consumer behaviour? H5b - Which and how much national component is associated with the main luxury brands and how important this is for the brands themselves?

In this part of the paper we will try to summarize the empirical evidence gathered in the different countries about the relationship between COO Luxury brand, in order to answer the hypotheses H5.

Firstly, the researchers have asked young people to associate a specific Country of origin to each luxury brand included in the list contained in Table 9; these brands were selected according to the results of a previous research cross-cultural made by the authors of this paper⁵. Table 9 shows luxury brands are correctly matched by over 75% of respondents to their “historical” Country of origin (except for Burberry); for 7 brands in the list this proportion rises to more than 90%. Therefore the national component appears to be a characteristic of the luxury brand strongly recognized by the interviewed.

Table 9 - The Country of Origin associate to luxury brands

N.	Brand	Country of Origin associated	Percent of correct association
1	Cartier	France	98,1%
2	Chanel	France	98,1%
3	Dolce e Gabbana	Italy	96,2%
4	Armani	Italy	94,3%
5	Gucci	Italy	94,3%
6	Versace	Italy	94,3%
7	Yves Saint Laurent	France	90,6%
8	Dior	France	88,7%
9	Valentino	Italy	88,7%
10	Louis Vuitton	France	86,8%
11	Prada	Italy	84,9%
12	Bulgari	Italy	83,0%
13	Hermes	France	81,1%
14	Salvatore Ferragamo	Italy	75,5%
15	Burberry	UK	60,4%

Source: authors’

Secondly, researchers have asked to assess the relevance (from 0% to 100%) of Brand and COO into luxury product evaluation and purchase decision (you buy because of the “Made in” Country or because of the Brand?) with specific reference to the selected brand of luxury. Particularly the table 10a shows how the respondents emphasize the greater importance played by brand than COO in orienting their perceptions and their purchasing decisions. Then within the COO the COD seems to have a slightly higher influence than the COM (Table 10.b).

Thirdly, from the cross analysis of Table 9 and 10.a it is possible to pull out some exploratory considerations about brand and COO interaction within luxury. Although the

⁵ Aiello G., Donvito R., Pederzoli D., Godey B., Wiedmann K.P., Siebels A., Hennigs N., Tsuchiya J., Chan P., Codeluppi V., Pavone A., Rabino S. (2007), “Young people’s perception of the luxury concept”, University of Florence – Salvatore Ferragamo Parfums, Florence.

differences between the ratings assigned to the various brands are not very marked, it is possible to identify four types of cases as shown in Figure 2.

Table 10.a The relevance (from 0% to 100%) of Brand and COO into luxury product evaluation and purchase decision (you buy because of the made in “Country” or because made in “Brand”?)

Brand name	Brand	COO	Total
Louis Vuitton	72,60	27,40	100,00
Hermes	71,44	28,56	100,00
Cartier	71,35	28,65	100,00
Burberry	70,70	29,30	100,00
Chanel	70,67	29,33	100,00
Versace	70,10	29,90	100,00
Dior	69,90	30,10	100,00
Dolce e Gabbana	69,62	30,38	100,00
Valentino	69,61	30,39	100,00
Yves Saint Laurent	69,53	30,47	100,00
Prada	69,33	30,67	100,00
Gucci	69,13	30,87	100,00
Armani	68,85	31,15	100,00
Bulgari	67,62	32,38	100,00
Salvatore Ferragamo	65,70	34,30	100,00

Source: authors’

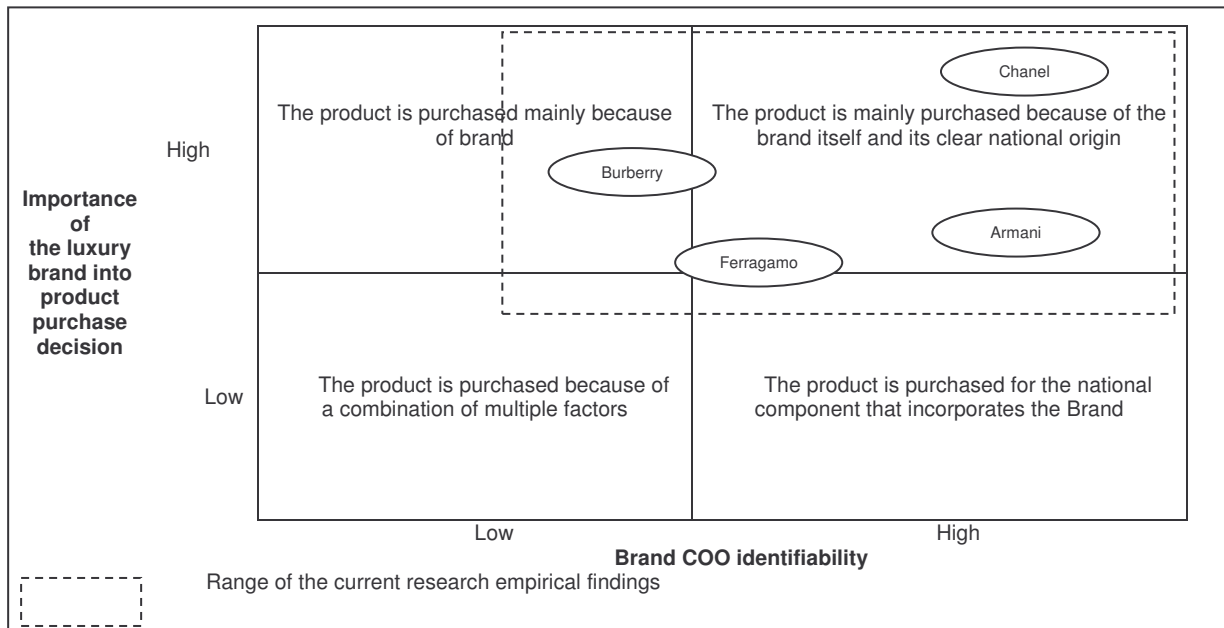
Table 10.b Within the COO (considered equivalent to 100) which kind of COO is relevant (from 0% to 100%)

COD	COM	Total
57,61	42,39	100,00
56,09	43,91	100,00
58,37	41,63	100,00
57,27	42,73	100,00
58,19	41,81	100,00
58,37	41,63	100,00
57,56	42,44	100,00
58,94	41,06	100,00
58,33	41,67	100,00
55,78	44,22	100,00
57,76	42,24	100,00
56,78	43,22	100,00
57,50	42,50	100,00
56,30	43,70	100,00
55,67	44,33	100,00

Particularly taking into account the relationship between “the importance of the luxury brand into product purchase decision” and the “brand COO identifiability” it seems that:

- 1) When both the importance of the luxury brand into product purchase decision and the brand COO identifiability are high, the product is mainly purchased because of the brand itself and its clear national origin;
- 2) When the importance of brand into luxury product purchase decision is high and the brand COO identifiability is low the product is purchased mainly because of brand;
- 3) When the importance of the luxury brand into product purchase decision is low and the brand COO identifiability is high the product is purchased for the national component that incorporates the brand;
- 4) When both the importance of the luxury brand into product purchase decision and the brand COO identifiability are low the product is purchased because of a combination of multiple factors.

Figure 2 – Interaction between COO and Brand for Luxury products



Source: authors’

7. Main empirical results on the concepts of COO, brand and their influence on young Italians’ consumer behaviors.

Table 11 provides an overview of the attributes innovativeness, design, prestige, and workmanship and the evaluation of the Italian participants in regard to the different country images.

As can be noted, assessments of young Italians not deviate very much from the general results presented in the previous paragraph; it is worth noticing that, also for Italian, Italy is distinguished by design, France for prestige, Germany for workmanship and United States, Japan and China for Innovativeness.

Table 11 - Country image key characteristics

Country image key characteristics	Italy	France	Germany	China	Japan	USA
Innovativeness	2,88	2,94	4,00	3,71	5,00	4,65
Design	4,71	4,00	3,24	2,35	3,82	3,53
Prestige	4,47	4,35	3,47	2,00	3,76	3,65
Workmanship	3,65	3,59	4,65	2,65	4,41	4,06

Source: authors’

Similarly the spontaneous terms associated by Italians to each Country reflects the same tendency mentioned in the general results; specifically Table 12 gives a summary of the most frequently Country referred terms.

Table 12 – Main country associations given by young Italian people

Country	1 st association	2 nd association	3 rd association
Italy	Art – Tradition	Fashion	Elegance - Style
France	Fashion – Luxury	Elegance	Food (cheese, baguette, Champagne)
Germany	Cars	Discipline– organization	Strength - Solidity
China	Communism	Economic growth	Plagiarism
Japan	Innovation – New Tech	Precision – Quality	Population
USA	Innovation	Leader-Power- Superiority – Arrogance	Show

Source: authors’

It is interesting underline that when the young Italian were asked to answer the question which brands come up to their mind in regard to the six countries, they did not show any problem to do so for the European countries. Many more difficulties arise for the non European countries especially for China.

Table 13 – General brands and luxury brands spontaneously associated by young Italian people to different countries

Country	General brands	Luxury Brands
Italy	Car, fashion and food brands	Car and Fashion brands
France	Mixture of car, food, and specific brands	Fashion and food brands
Germany	Cars and consumer electronic brands	Car brands
China	No brands mentioned	No brand mentioned
Japan	Car and consumer electronic brands	Fashion brands
USA	Car brands and mixture of different brands	Car, fashion and jewelery brands

Source: authors’

Considering the impact of the different product attributes (e.g., brand, country of origin, price, design) on to the overall product evaluation and purchasing decision of Italian arise some findings (for space shortages these data are not fully included in this paper): a) Brand and COO have a higher impact on product evaluation and purchasing decision of luxury goods than the one they have in the overall sample; b) brand and COO do not affect evaluations and purchasing decision of convenience goods; c) brand affects the evaluations of shopping goods and luxury goods more than COO. Table 14 shows the percentage of correct association between brands and their Country of origin; as can be noticed Italians have a high awareness about the right COO of Italian and French luxury brands.

Table 14 - The Country of Origin associate to luxury brands by young Italian people

Brand	Percent of correct association	Brand	Percent of correct association
Armani	100,0%	Salvatore Ferragamo	100,0%
Cartier	100,0%	Valentino	100,0%
Chanel	100,0%	Versace	100,0%
Dior	100,0%	Gucci	94,1%
Dolce e Gabbana	100,0%	Burberry	88,2%
Hermes	100,0%	Yves Saint Laurent	88,2%
Louis Vuitton	100,0%	Bulgari	70,6%
Prada	100,0%		

Source: authors'

The analysis also shows how the weight of COO in luxury brand is considered in Italy higher than in the full sample. Particularly it seems that the Italians put quite emphasis on the importance of luxury brands COD.

8. Main empirical results on the concepts of COO, Brand and their influence on young French's consumer behaviors.

Table 15 provides an overview of the attributes innovativeness, design, prestige, and workmanship given by the researchers and the evaluation of the French participants in regard to the different countries. The overall results indicate four distinguishing groups in the minds of the French participants. The first group is represented by Italy and France which are highly rated on design and prestige whereas Japan is more associated with innovativeness and workmanship. USA and Germany on the other hand are somewhere in between which means they have above the average scores for all the attributes, but they appear for only one attribute at the second place and for the others at the third or fourth. China is ranked at the last places for nearly every characteristic and their scores are very often under the average. The only exception is "innovativeness" where China obtains a score of 3,50. With regard to the long history of France in the field of fashion and luxury, these results don't seem to be surprising in the French participants self country evaluation. Additionally, Italy is famous for fashion and fashion brands, which also is reflected in the results of Table 17 where spontaneous country brands had to be cited by the participants.

Table 15 – Country ratings and mean value with regard to innovativeness, design, prestige, and workmanship

Attributes	1.	2.	3.
Innovativeness	Japan (4.60)	USA (4.35)	Germany (3.70)
Design	France (4.25)	Italy (4.15)	USA (3.65)
Prestige	France (4.65)	Italy (4.20)	USA (3.55)
Workmanship	Japan (4.15)	Germany (4.10)	USA (3.85)

Source: authors'

The spontaneous answers regarding the question of country association coming up the respondents' minds reflects some interesting streams. Table 16 gives a summary of the most

frequently referred collective terms. In this case, Italy is characterized with attributes such as “fashion” and “design” followed by “food”. France most important attribute is “tourism” followed by “food”, when “elegance” occupies only the third place. Germany and Japan are associated with “technology” and “engineering” but it’s interesting to underline that at the second place for Japan we can found “culture” and “tradition”. China clearly is linked with “counterfeit” and “mass production”. For the USA, the answers of the French respondents show a widespread variety of country associations compared to the six other countries but the general image for French participants is quite negative because of linkage with “junk food” on one hand and with “money” as a value on the other hand. As the participants were asked to answer the question which brands come up to their mind in regard to the seven countries, the French students did not show any problem to do so for the European countries.

Table 16 – Main country associations given by young French people

Country	1.	2.	3.
Italy	Fashion/design	Food (pasta, etc.)	Culture/religion
France	Tourism/Paris	Gastronomy/Food	Elegance
Germany	Cars	Innovation/High tech	Beer
China	Cheap/Counterfeits	Mass production	Communism
Japan	Technology	Culture/Tradition	Martial arts
USA	Fat/Obesity/Junkfood	Rich/Dollar/Money	New York

Source: authors’

Many more difficulties arise for the non European countries. For the USA some participants couldn’t mention as quickly and as many as for the European ones. Even more difficulties occurred for Japanese and Russian brands. Most striking was the fact that no brand at all were known and named for China. Concerning the sectors cited for luxury brands, respondents quoted: a) only fashion brands for France and the USA, b) mainly car brands for Germany and Japan, c) car and fashion brands for Italy, d) only caviar brands for Russia.

Table 17 – General brands and luxury brands spontaneously associated by young French people to different countries

Country	General brands	Luxury Brands
Italy	Mainly food and car brand (ie: Fiat)	Fashion brands and car brands
France	Mixture of car, food (ie: Danone), and aeronautic brands	Fashion brands only
Germany	Mainly car brands (ie: Volkswagen) and sport brands (ie: Adidas, Puma...)	Mainly car brands
China	No brand mentioned	No brand mentioned
Japan	Car and consumer electronic brands	Mainly car brands
USA	Mixture of different brands (ie: Coca-Cola, McDonalds, GM, Nike...)	Fashion brands

Source: authors’

Table 18 gives an overview of the brands accurate assignment to their country of origin. Twelve brands out of fifteen had a correct attribution at least at 85%. Not surprisingly, among the brands that obtain a 100% score, there are four from France. Many Italian brands too

appear well associated to their country of origin. Much more striking is the country attribution of two real national “icons” namely “Louis Vuitton” and “Burberry”. Should these scores be interpreted as a sign that these brands are seen as real global ones, so not strictly linked with one specific country?

Table 18 - The Country of Origin associate to luxury brands by young French people

Brand	Percent of correct association	Brand	Percent of correct association
Yves Saint Laurent	100%	Gucci	90%
Versace	100%	Armani	90%
Dior	100%	Hermès	85%
Chanel	100%	Ferragamo	85%
Cartier	100%	Louis Vuitton	75%
Dolce & Gabbana	95%	Bulgari	55%
Valentino	90%	Burberry	40%
Prada	90%		

Source: authors’

Concerning the importance of a certain number of attributes for “product evaluation” and “purchasing decision”, the French respondents show a very different evaluation among the three categories of goods proposed. “Price” is the most important attribute for “convenience” and “shopping” goods, both in the case of “product evaluation” and “purchasing decision”. For “convenience goods” the other attributes are far less important, when for “shopping goods” “brand”, “warranty” and “design” are ranked immediately after “price”.

In the case of “luxury goods”, “brand” is the first attribute for “product evaluation” but only the second after “design” for “purchasing decision”. Globally, three attributes obtain a score above 4,0 in evaluating “luxury products”, namely “brand”, “design” and “warranty”. When our respondents move to “product purchasing”, four attributes reach a score above 4.0 and they are very close (“design”, “brand”, “price” and “warranty”). “Country of origin” in its different definitions appears not relevant for French respondents in all the categories of goods analyzed.

Regarding the perceived relevance of the brand and the country of origin (COO) concerning the respondents’ luxury product evaluation and purchase decision, the results show that brands importance is about two times higher than the COO. Concerning the relative importance of the COD and COM inside COO, French respondents evaluate these two components quite at the same level, with a slight higher importance attributed to the product country of design. To sum up the answers to the last question, we can affirm that “brand” is much more important for french respondents than COO in evaluating and deciding to buy a luxury product. At the same time, we can observe that the weight of COO is not insignificant because it’s quite always around or above 30%. Inside the COO concept, French respondents

do not perceive a real difference between country of design (COD) and country of manufacturing/assembling (COM).

As we have seen previously, the main function attributed to brands by French respondents is “guarantee” and inside this concept there is also the warranty of a constant quality. This judgement of French respondents can explain why COO is so less important than brand. Another partial explanation is, in our opinion, that it’s really very difficult to know in what country a product is manufactured, assembled or designed. So, brand can be seen as a global form of communicating values and qualities, whatever the COO is.

9. Main empirical results on the concepts of COO, Brand and their influence on young Germans’ consumer behaviors.

Table 19 provides an overview of the attributes innovativeness, design, prestige, and workmanship given by the researchers and the evaluation of the German participants in regard to the different countries. The overall results indicate four distinguishing groups in the minds of the German participants. The first group is represented by Italy and France which are highly rated on design and prestige whereas Germany and Japan are more associated with innovativeness and workmanship. USA on the other hand is somewhere in between which means it has good average scores for all the attributes but no best or worth score. China has the lowest scores for all the attributes and below the mean value indicating a negative country association in the evaluation of the German respondents. With regard to the long history of German engineering these results don’t seem to be surprising in the German participants self country evaluation. Additionally, France and Italy are famous for fashion and fashion brand, which also is reflected in the results of Table 21 where spontaneous country brands have to name by the participants.

Table 19 – Country ratings and mean value with regard to innovativeness, design, prestige, and workmanship

Attributes	1.	2.	3.
Innovativeness	Germany (4.1)	Japan (4.1)	USA (3.8)
Design	Italy (4.6)	France (4.3)	Germany (3.4)
Prestige	Italy (4.3)	France (4.1)	USA (3.8)
Workmanship	Germany (4.3)	Japan (3.9)	USA (3.5)

Source: authors’

The spontaneous answers regarding the question of country association coming up the respondents’ minds reflects the same tendency just mentioned above. Table 20 gives a summary of the most frequently referred collective terms. Again Italy and France are characterized with attributes such as fashion and design and Germany and Japan with technology and engineering. China clearly is linked with plagiarism and mass production. For the USA, the answers of the German respondents showed a widespread variety of country

associations compared to the five other countries which made it not easy to find a common denominator. This leads to the conclusion that the USA has an ambiguous picture in the German participants' minds.

Table 20 – Main country associations given by young German people

Country	1.	2.	3.
Italy	Fashion/design	Food (pasta, etc.)	Culture/religion
France	Fashion	Design	café
Germany	Engineering	cars	beer
USA	Freedom	Arrogance	George Bush
Japan	Technology	sushi	culture
China	Cheap/plagiarism	Mass production	communism

Source: authors'

As the participants had to answer the question which brands come up to their mind in regard to the five countries, the participants had no problems to do so for the European countries. This was different for the non-European countries. For the USA some participants couldn't mention as quickly and as many as for the European ones. Even more difficulties occurred for Japanese brands. Most striking was the fact that no brand at all was known and named for China. The analysis in view of different branches the respondents named for luxury brands, only fashion brands have been said for Italy and France, mainly automobile brands for Germany and a mixture for the USA. In general it can be said that mostly fashion and automobile brands were mentioned above all countries.

Table 21– General brands and luxury brands spontaneously associated by young German people to different countries

Country	General brands	Luxury Brands
Italy	Mainly car and fashion brands	Fashion brands only
France	Mixture of car, food, and specific brands	Fashion brands only
Germany	Mixture of different brand in different branches	Mainly car brands
USA	Car brand and mixture of different brands	Car, fashion, and computer brands
Japan	Car and consumer electronic brands	Car brands
China	No brands mentioned	No brand mentioned

Source: authors'

Table 22 gives an overview of the percentage of correct allocations of the brands country of origin. Half of the brands had a correct allocation above 80 %. For the brands above 50 % correct classification, the answers indicate only two country classification, France or Italy. Same results could be shown for the brand Burberry where the participants only thought about Great Britain and the USA. Only the brand Ferragamo had a wide variety of country classification, the answers were mixed with Italy, France, Spain and question marks, leading to the conclusion, that Ferragamo is not very known by the German participants.

Table 22 – Country of Origin associate to luxury brands by young German people

Brand	Percent of correct classification	Brand	Percent of correct classification
Gucci	100 %	Valentino	75 %
Cartier	94 %	Prada	63 %
Chanel	94 %	Dior	63 %
Armani	94 %	Bulgari	56 %
Dolce e Gabbana	94 %	Hermes	56 %
Louis Vuitton	88 %	Burberry	44 %
Versace	81 %	Ferragamo	38 %
Yves Saint Laurent	81 %		

Source: authors' Source: authors'

Being asked if and to what extent different product attributes (e.g., brand, country of origin, price, design) do affect their overall *product evaluation* and their *purchasing decision*, the German respondents perceived in both cases the different aspects in general and the design and brand in particular to be most important relating to specialty and luxury goods. The only exception is the price that is perceived to be of high importance and most decisive in connection with convenience goods. Referring to all product categories, it has to be stated that the aspects COO, COD as well as COM show the lowest mean scores. Thus, the German respondents rated them to play a minor role in their product evaluation and purchasing decision.

In relation to the perceived relevance of the brand and the country of origin (COO) concerning the respondents' luxury product evaluation and purchase decision. Generally speaking, the results show with reference to each luxury brand that the brand's influence is about four times higher than the perceived significance of the COO. Referring to the relatively importance of the COD and COM within the luxury brand COO, the German respondents stated the relation of COD to COM to be about 60% to 40%.

10. Final remarks

The findings obtained in this study confirm that the concepts of COO and brand have a composite nature, displaying a number of possible readings. However, our analysis has provided a cross-cultural survey of the characters that describe these concepts. Although this investigation does not claim to give definitive and/or statistically representative results, a number of interesting comments can be made based on our empirical observations, starting with the hypotheses put forward at the beginning of this paper:

H1 – *Which is the cross-cultural perceptions on the COO concept (construct, relevance)?*

Our results suggest that young people's perceptions are consistent with the theoretical framework proposed by Samiee (1994), Nebenzahl et al. (1997) and Jaffé and Nebenzahl (2001).

In particular, the COO is associated by the majority of respondents to a “construct” determined jointly by the COD and the COM. On the other hand, the cross-cultural concept of COO is not unique (for Germans, unlike French and Italians, COO is mainly determined by COM).

H2 – *Which is the cross-cultural perceptions on the country image of a set of nations (Italy, France, Germany, China, Japan, USA)?*

The results shows that every nation is qualified by an image rooted on one or two factors considered most important by the respondents; particularly Italy is qualified by “Design”, France by “Prestige”, Germany by “Workmanship”, Japan, United States and China by “Innovativeness”. The analysis of the free associations also shows how images of the different Countries are closely linked to the traditional stereotypes.

H3 – *Which is the cross-cultural perceptions on the brand concept (construct, relevance)?*

Brand is unanimously considered a sign of identification (eg name, logo) and also a set of cognitive and perceptive associations; on the contrary brand is not fully perceived as a basis of trust. However there are cross-cultural different perceptions: the Germans consider the brand just as a sign of identification and not very much a set of cognitive and perceptive associations and not at all a trust containers; on the other side French people think about brand as construct of two different dimensions (sign of identification and set of cognitive and perceptive associations; finally Italians seem to have an even more complex brand concept based on three roots (identification, association and trust).

H4 – *Are there COO and Brand influences in perceptions and purchasing intentions as regards convenience, shopping and specialty (luxury) goods?*

With regards to H4 many empirical evidences come out:

- i) Brand and COO have a medium and medium high impact on perceptual evaluation of shopping goods and a medium-high and high impact on luxury goods;
- ii) Brand and COO decrease their impact on purchasing decisions; The COO has a medium influence only in the purchasing decisions of luxury goods, while the brand maintains its influence also on shopping goods;
- iii) Brand e COO do not affect evaluations and purchasing decision of convenience goods;
- iv) Brand affects evaluations and purchasing decision of shopping goods and luxury goods more than COO;

- v) The items that affect most the product evaluations and the purchasing decision are price for convenience good and shopping goods and design for luxury goods;
- vi) Brand is the second most important items affecting the evaluations and the purchasing decision of luxury goods, the COO is instead around the last one within the items considered.

H5 – *Is there a COO and Brand interaction effect on consumer behaviour?*

H5a - *Which brands (both general and luxury) are most representative of each country?*

From a general point of view, the brands recognized as the most representative of the countries under investigation appear to be global brands characterized by a national leadership and a strong rooting (at least evoked) in their “historical” country of origin. It is also can be noticed the sectors of the brands (general and luxury) associated with the different countries are the same sectors qualifying each specific country image; this result seem to validate the thesis on perceptual consonance and coherence between the image of the country of production and the brand (Haubl, Helrod 1999; Busacca, Bertoli, Molteni 2006).

H5b - *Which and how much national component is associated with the main luxury brands and how important this is for the brands themselves?*

Luxury brands are correctly matched to their “historical” country of origin. Therefore the national component appears to be a characteristic of the luxury brand strongly recognized by the interviewed. The relevance of luxury brands appears significantly higher than the COO one in determining product evaluations and purchasing decision; However, the COO is a very important component in determining the personality of luxury brands.

Finally, and more generally, the findings obtained in this survey point to two lines of investigation that should be developed in further depth. Firstly, it is of interest to explore COO and Brand perception in other Countries (such as China and India); secondly, it would be important to test other methodological tools (both qualitative and quantitative) in order to further refine the investigation of the determinants of the interaction between Brand and COO on a broader sample.

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