Luxury brand and Country of Origin effect: results of an international empirical study

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) 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. We have drawn up a sample of 48 respondents from the 3 countries. The findings obtained in this study confirm that the concepts of COO and brand have a composite nature, displaying a number of possible readings.

Keywords: Country of Origin, luxury, consumer behaviour, international, cross-cultural analysis

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Introduction

The inspiration for this work arose from the 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 *et al*. 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 1999);

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) 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.

Due to the exploratory nature of this study we chose to work in this phase of our research, mainly on qualitative data.

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 questions 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 *et al.* 2005). 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). 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.

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 *et al.*, (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.

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.

Other empirical studies (Ahmed *et al.*, 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.

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, Merunka 2006, 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.

Research questions and Methodology

Within this research, we chose to work as a first step in deploying a qualitative methodology using semi-structure interviews around five key issues.

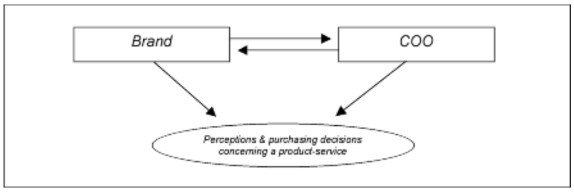
Research questions

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, we defined the following research questions:

- Q1 – Which is the cross-cultural perceptions on the COO concept (construct, relevance)?
- Q2 – Which is the cross-cultural perceptions on the country image of a set of nations (Italy, France, Germany, China, Japan, USA)?
- Q3 – Which is the cross-cultural perceptions on the brand concept (construct, relevance)?
- Q4 – Are there COO and Brand influences in perceptions and purchasing intentions as regards convenience, shopping and specialty (luxury) goods?
- Q5 – Is there a COO and Brand interaction effect on consumer behaviour?
- Q5a – Which brands (both general and luxury) are most representative of each country?
- Q5b – 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 *(Sources: 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.

Research Methodology

In order to test the research questions, 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: student samples are relatively homogeneous in terms of demographics, socioeconomic background, and education and they have a good knowledge of English.

Table 1. Basic characteristics of the non statistical sample analyzed (Sources: authors')

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

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

a) Definition of the non representative 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.
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 qualitative questions. These aims to deeper analyze COO and Brand influence in perceptions and purchasing intentions of the young people analysed.

General results on the concepts of COO, brand and their influence on young people's consumer behaviours

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 questions.

Empirical findings related to Q1 – Which is the cross-cultural perceptions on the COO concept (construct, relevance)?

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 and 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.

Table 2. The COO concept according to the young people surveyed (Sources: authors')

COO	Overall	Italy	France	Germany
COD + COM	**27**	**15**	**10**	2
COD	7	1	4	2
COM	14	0	2	**12**
Total	48	16	16	16

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 only by the COM.

Empirical findings related to Q2 - Which is the cross-cultural perceptions on the country image of a set of Nations (Italy, France, Germany, China, Japan, USA)?

The researchers asked the respondents 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 innovativeness, design, prestige, workmanship.

Table 3. Country ratings and mean value with regard to country perception (Sources: authors')

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

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 rooted on a specific factor, are fully determined also by other key characteristics, with the exception of China.

Empirical findings related to Q3 - Which is the cross-cultural perceptions on the brand concept (construct, relevance)?

A multiple choice answer was set up by the researchers. The results analysis reveals (Table 4) the Brand is nearly unanimously considered as a sign of identification (eg. name, logo) and also for the wider part of the respondents as a set of cognitive and perceptive associations; on the contrary, brand is not fully perceived as a basis of trust.

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, not very much a set of cognitive and perceptive associations and not at all a trust container; on the other side French people "read" the brand on two different dimensions (sign of identification and 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 4.

Table 4. Brand concept according to the young people surveyed *(Sources: authors')*

Brand	Area	Yes	No	Total
A sign of identification (es. name, logo)	Overall	**45**	**3**	**48**
	Italy	15	1	16
	France	16	0	16
	Germany	14	2	16
A set of cognitive and perceptive associations	Overall	**37**	**11**	**48**
	Italy	14	2	16
	France	15	1	16
	Germany	8	8	16
A trust "container"	Overall	**25**	**23**	**48**
	Italy	13	3	16
	France	8	8	16
	Germany	4	12	16

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 according to the opinion of the interviewed. As can be noted from the Table 5, 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 5. Brand functions according to the young people surveyed *(Sources: authors')*

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

Furthermore the research, within the limits of its representativeness, did not find significant evidence of relational (Blackstone 1992, 1993; Maranesi 1999) and experiential (Pine, Gilmore 1999; Schmitt, 1999) 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 Q4 - 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 question Q4, 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 goods[1].

Table 6a. The items affecting the evaluations of the product *Table 6b. The items affecting the purchasing decision*

Items	Product evaluation: Convenience goods	Product evaluation: Shopping goods	Product evaluation: Specialty - Luxury goods	Purchasing decision: Convenience goods	Purchasing decision: Shopping goods	Purchasing decision: 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

In relation to Q4, some interesting empirical evidences come out (see Tables 6a-b):

a) 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);
b) Brand e COO do not affect evaluations of convenience goods;
c) Brand affects the evaluations of shopping goods and luxury goods more than COO;
d) 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 second most important item affecting the evaluations of luxury goods, COO the fourth (3,31).

[1] 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).

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 Q5 – Is there a COO and Brand interaction effect on consumer behaviour? Q5a - 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 Origin[2].

Table 7. General brands and luxury brands spontaneously associated by young people to different countries
(Sources: authors')

Country	General brands	Sectors	Luxury Brands	Sectors
Italy	1. Fiat 2. Barilla 3. Ferrari 4. Gucci 5. Valentino	• Cars • Food • Fashion	1. Ferrari 2. Armani 3. Gucci 4. Dolce & Gabbana 5. Ferragamo	• Cars • Fashion
France	1. Renault 2. Peugeot 3. Citroen 4. Danone 5. Carrefour	• Cars • Food • Retail	1. Chanel 2. Dior 3. Louis Vuitton 4. Yves Saint Laurent 5. Cartier	• Fashion • Jewellery
Germany	1. Volkswagen 2. Bosh 3. Adidas 4. Mercedes 5. Siemens	• Cars • Electro-mechanic • Sportswear	1. Mercedes 2. BMW 3. Porsche 4. Audi 5. Escada	• Cars • Fashion
China	1. AirChina	• Transport		
Japan	1. Sony 2. Toyota 3. Toshiba 4. Mitsubishi 5. Honda	• Electronic • Cars	1. Lexus 2. Kenzo 3. Sony 4. Issey Miyake 5. Yamamoto	• Cars • Electronic • Fashion
USA	1. McDonald's 2. Nike 3. GM 4. Coca Cola 5. Ford	• Food retailer • Cars • Sportswear • Beverage	1. Ralph Lauren 2. Tiffany 3. Chevrolet 4. DKNY 5. Tommy Hilfiger	• Fashion • Jewellery • Cars

As can be noted in Table 7, 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 et al., 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 Q5 – Is there a COO and Brand interaction effect on consumer behaviour? Q5b - Which and how much national component is associated with the main luxury brands and how important this is for the brands themselves?

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 8; these brands were selected according to the results of a previous research cross-cultural made by the authors of this paper[3]. Table 8 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 8. The Country of Origin associated with luxury brands
(Sources: authors')

N.	Brand	Country of Origin associated	Correct association on overall respondents (n=48)
1	Cartier	France	47
2	Chanel	France	47
3	Dolce e Gabbana	Italy	46
4	Armani	Italy	45
5	Gucci	Italy	45
6	Versace	Italy	45
7	Yves Saint Laurent	France	44
8	Dior	France	43
9	Valentino	Italy	43
10	Louis Vuitton	France	41
11	Prada	Italy	40
12	Bulgari	Italy	39
13	Hermes	France	38
14	Salvatore Ferragamo	Italy	36
15	Burberry	UK	29

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 9.a 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 9.b).

Thirdly, from the cross analysis of Table 8 and 9.a it is possible to pull out some exploratory considerations about brand and COO interaction within luxury. Although the 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.

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:

[2] 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.

[3] Aiello G. et al, (2007),"Young people's perception of the luxury concept", University of Florence – Salvatore Ferragamo Parfums, Florence.

Table 9a. 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"?)

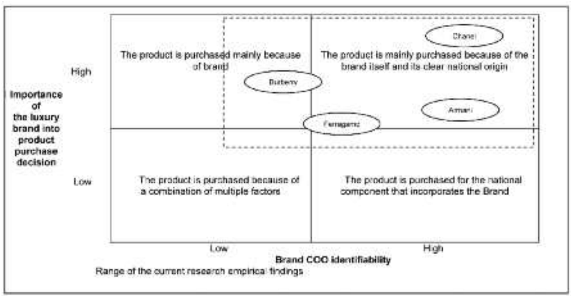
Brand name	Brand	COO	Total
Louis Vuitton	72,60	27,40	100,00
Hermes	71,44	28,56	100,00
Cartier	71,35	28,65	100,00
Burberry	70,70	29,30	100,00
Chanel	70,67	29,33	100,00
Versace	70,10	29,90	100,00
Dior	69,90	30,10	100,00
Dolce e Gabbana	69,62	30,38	100,00
Valentino	69,61	30,39	100,00
Yves Saint Laurent	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

Table 9b. 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

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 (Sources: authors')



Conclusion

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 :

- Concerning the perceptions of the COO concept, 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.
- The results on the perceptions of different nations suggest that every nation is qualified by an image rooted on one or two factors considered most important by the respondents. The analysis of the free associations also shows how images of the different Countries are closely linked to the traditional stereotypes.
- Brand is unanimously considered a sign of identification 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.
- As far as brand influences in perception and purchasing intentions are concerned:

  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.
- 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.

• 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 in determining product evaluations and purchasing decision.

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, both developed and developing; 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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