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**A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

LASU Journal of Management Sciences Vol. 5, No. 2, December 2019 consist of research and empirical papers that cut across several fields of knowledge in management sciences. This current edition is in line of the vision of the journal to make it a leading and credible platform for dissemination and expansion of knowledge. Starting from this edition, the editorial policy of this Journal will include the online version to enhance easy open access and facilitate the visibility of our authors. The management of the Journal is delighted that the current Editorial Board has maintained the high standard of quality, relevance and academic rigour expected of a research paper.

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## EFFECTS OF COUNTRY OF ORIGIN ON CONSUMER BRAND PREFERENCE BETWEEN ITALY AND CHINA SHOES AND CLOTHES

Kunle Patrick LADIPO<sup>1</sup>; Mufutau Akanbi AWONIYI<sup>2</sup> & Solomon A. AGADA<sup>3</sup>

### **Abstract**

*Country of origin (COO) serves as a very important determinant of consumers' preference behavior towards products and services especially in the international marketplace. Consumers therefore tend to make choices based on their preference for brands and the country of origin. The present study examined the brand preference of consumers for fashion products of Italian and Chinese country of origin (COO). A cross-sectional survey of 400 respondents selected from the population of 1,288,714 people in Alimosho Local Government Area (LGA) of Lagos State was conducted using convenience sampling technique. Hypothesis testing was done using Anova and Independent sample t-Test. The results showed that consumers perceive significant difference on preference for fashion products among the two countries. The findings of the study have salient implications for formulation and execution of strategies in international marketing and especially provided a better understanding for market segmentation in the sales of fashion products.*

**Keywords:** *Country of Origin, Branding, Brand Dimensions, Consumers, Fashion Products.*

### **Introduction**

Consumers' attitude towards products in the international markets hinges on unique factors which differ from the attitude towards the domestic products. The consumer purchase intentions therefore usually hinges on the country of origin (COO) as one of the critical factors that simplifies the preference decision. Evidence from international marketing literature also indicated that approximately one-quarter of consumers makes purchase decisions on the basis of COO information which is used to predict product quality (Melnyk, Klein & Völckner, 2012; Rana & Paul, 2017). Krupka, Ozretic-Dosen, and Previsic (2014) noted that another extrinsic attribute that influences consumers' perception of a product is the brand name. This is because brand name as a cue evokes not only beliefs about the brand itself but also triggers recall of the country associated with it. For instance, potential consumers in Nigeria would seemingly recall reputed fashionable products of countries such as the Italian and Chinese origins to actively make a preference based on alternative and competing branding elements. In effect the country of origin brand names competes in the consumer evoke sets such that the COO is often used by consumers to predict quality and performance of products (Norris & Cranfield, 2019) and to determine preference behavior. Available statistics indicate that about 43 percent of total imports in Nigeria are from Asia

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and 34 percent from Europe (NBS, 2015); the Nigerian marketplace in terms of fashion products is dominated by “Made in Italy” and “Made in China” goods. The Chinese dominance has been alleged to be based on cheap and smuggled fashion goods (AFP, 2015) and on the other hand, Italy has been reputed to be the biggest business partner of Nigeria in the area of hides and skin (Awolowo, 2014). The present study evaluates from a deep brand perspective the preference pattern of consumers in using the COO criteria as a basis for the preference of fashion products in Nigeria. This was conducted in the context of two of the popular country of origin brand names in Nigeria in terms of fashion products; the Italian and Chinese made.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The country of origin (COO) as a brand name evokes important beliefs about the brand and also triggers recall of the country in the consumer mind (Thøgersen, Pedersen & Aschemann-Witzel, 2019). The COO brand name is regarded as another extrinsic attribute that influences consumers’ perception of a product. Strategic branding provides a stimuli for consumers preference behavior and are usually communicated through branding elements such as the name, term, logo, packaging, design, symbols and or a combination of these elements to create an identity and to differentiate the maker or manufacturer of a product or service (Barbarossa, De Pelsmacker & Moons, 2018). From the international multi-national marketing perspective, Banovic, Reinders, Claret, Guerrero and Krystallis (2019) suggests that as international markets evolve and become more closely interlinked, firms need to pay closer attention to the coherence of branding decisions across national markets. They also need to build an effective international brand strategy that transcends national boundaries as well as decide on how to manage brands across different geographic markets and product lines (Tjandra, Omar & Ensor, 2015). Gao, Yu, Li and McFadden (2019) found that brand affiliation, name recognition, and reputation for high quality service together can contribute as much as between 20 and 25 percent to the going concern value of a successfully operating business.

Branding also serves as a critical factor in a firm's overall marketing and corporate strategy mainly for the sake of corporate identity and to establish a solid customer franchise as well as the basis for brand and line extensions, which further strengthen the firm's position and enhance its value (Schätzle & Jacob, 2019). Rana and Paul (2017) found that the critical issues faced by firms in developing an international branding strategy are how its expansion level can attain international height and how its international operations are organized. In effect, they suggest that as firms seek to expand further, they must consider whether to develop brands geared to specific regional or national preferences and how to integrate these into their overall branding strategy. An effective branding strategy therefore is crucial for effective business performance in the marketplace especially in international markets (Sevanandee & Damar-Ladkoo, 2018). The battle for the consumers mind in the international marketplace will significantly revolve around the competition between developed/developing/emerging economies. This classification has put Italy and China at opposite ends with Italy superiorly rated as an advanced/developed economy by IMF (2010).

The international marketplace is in effect cast in this form of competitive image which invariable informs a significant brand perception issue for the consumer with anticipated salient marketing implications (Kim & Chao, 2018). Previous studies with respect to this phenomenon in Nigeria examined issues on foreign products

generally without any specific focus on fashion products. Secondly, branding perspectives have been viewed generally with a critical determination of brand preference from the deep brand concept. Specific comparison of branding along specific countries such as Italy and China in terms of consumer preference is also scanty. This study therefore attempts to examine these issues within the overarching dimensions of the deep brand strategy.

## **1. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The specific objectives therefore are as follows:

- i. To determine the extent to which products attributes affect consumers' preference of 'Made in Italy and 'Made in China fashion products in Nigeria.
- ii. To examine how consumers perceive Italian culture and Chinese culture in the preference of fashion products in Nigeria.
- iii. To determine the effect of personality attributes on consumer preference of 'Made in Italy' and 'Made in China' fashion products in Nigeria.
- iv. To examine the difference in the values consumers' consider in the preference of Made in Italy' and 'Made in China' fashion products in Nigeria.
- v. To determine the benefit level consumer derive from the preference of 'Made in Italy' and 'Made in China' fashion products in Nigeria.
- vi. To determine the brand preference of male and female consumers for "Made in Italy" and "Made in China" fashion products in Nigeria.
- vii. To ascertain if there is any significant difference in brand preference among the age categories for "Made in Italy" and "Made in China" fashion products in Nigeria.

## **2. STUDY HYPOTHESES**

- H<sub>01</sub>: Consumers do not perceive any significant difference of product attributes in the preference of 'Made in Italy and 'Made in China fashion products in Nigeria.
- H<sub>02</sub>: The perception of Italian and Chinese cultures does not differ among consumers in the preference of fashion products in Nigeria.
- H<sub>03</sub>: Consumers preference do not significantly differ in the brand personality attributes of 'Made in Italy' and 'Made in China fashion products in Nigeria.
- H<sub>04</sub>: There is no significant difference in the values consumers consider in the preference of Made in Italy' and 'Made in China' fashion products in Nigeria.
- H<sub>05</sub>: The brand benefit level do not significantly differ in consumer preference for "Made in Italy" and 'Made in China' fashion products in Nigeria.
- H<sub>06</sub>: There is no significant difference between male and female consumers' preference for "Made in Italy" and "Made in China" fashion products in Nigeria.
- H<sub>07</sub>: There is no significant difference in age categories in the preference of "Made in Italy" and "Made in China" fashion products in Nigeria.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

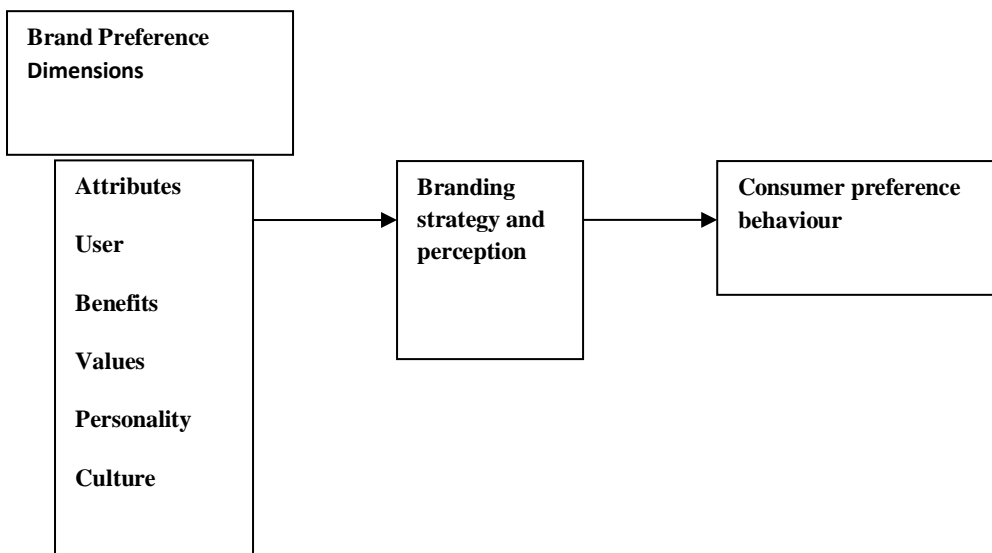
**Theoretical Framework**

The structure-conduct-performance (SCP) framework explains how market characteristics comprising of buyers, sellers and distribution determine a firm’s strategy in the marketplace (Dobrucali, 2019). The firm’s strategy may be informed by characteristics such as a heterogeneous market which may determine the choice to adapt or standardize its strategies which include the brand name, packaging and ingredient (Wegapitiya & Dissanayake, 2018). Andéhn and Decosta (2018) suggests that international marketing strategies are usually determined by factor conditions. The dimension of country of origin (COO) is one critical factor which serves as an effective comparison and assessment of the consumer perceived value of a product in multinational marketing. Therefore, the Country of Origin (COO) theory and Expectancy-value model underscore consumer perception of branding elements in relation to their satisfaction of a product or service (Hornikx, van Meurs, van den Heuvel & Janssen, 2019). The Expectancy-value model for instance underlies how the total evaluation or attitude of the consumer is related to the beliefs about the alternative product or services and perhaps how they are differentiated through branding and COO. It was emphasized that the country-of-origin of a product can have an effect on a consumer’s opinion of the product (Hornikx *et al*, 2019).

**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The structure-conduct-performance (SCP) framework, the Country of Origin (COO) theory and the Expectancy-value model have together help to explain the performance of a product or service and consumer characteristics in the international marketplace. Consumer preference theories indicate that products are identified according to identifiable attributes of quality or performance. Van Esch, Northey, Duffy, Heller and Striluk (2018) classified brands as either a deep or shallow brand. A deep brand possesses six levels of meaning. These include attributes, benefits, values, culture, personality and user which can be visually perceived by the customer whereas a shallow brand has just some of these qualities. It was further suggested that where quality is more difficult to assess by the customer, then the marketer needs to deepen the brand with well-developed personalities.

**Figure 1: Consumer Evaluation of Brand Characteristics.**



*Source: Adapted from: Kotler, P. (1994). Marketing Management. Analysis, Planning, Implementation and Control. Prentice hall: Englewood Cliffs.*

Adenan, Ali and Rahman (2018) x-rayed the concept of fashion from differing perspective such as: clothing styles (style in clothing, hair, and personal appearance generally); business styles (creativity and promotion of the latest products); currency (style of dress, behavior, lifestyle, and way of speaking or expression that is popular at present). The more commonly used slangs by Nigerians for attributes of fashion as enumerated above are “What is in Vogue Now”, “What is Reigning Now” “ and “The Latest in Town”.

### **EMPIRICAL REVIEW**

Norris and Cranfield (2019) examined the attitudes of the Nigerian consumer in respect of cars and television sets and found that the Nigerian consumer is obsessed with foreign-made goods and have a negative image of the “Made in Nigeria” label, rating it lower than labels from more economically developed countries. A comparative study by Thøgersen *et al* (2019) examined the relationship between consumer ethnocentrism and the evaluations of foreign sourced products and found that highly ethnocentric consumers have more favourable attitudes toward products from culturally similar countries than countries that have dissimilar cultures. Consequently, by extensive review of literature on the concept of COO, Banovic *et al* (2019) argued that in spite of all the studies on COO, yet, most, if not all, of the research is only applicable to decision situations in which a domestic alternative is available.

According to Tjandra *et al* (2015), France and Italy are the sources of the most important luxury fashion brands in the world. Those two countries command more than one-half of the global consumer luxury brands - Italy with 30 percent and France with 25 percent of the market. Available statistics accordingly point to the fact that Italy and China seem to compete on the contemporary international markets in similar sectors such as low-tech (textile, clothing, furniture) even when Italy seems to differ in industrial specialization to peers in European countries but paradoxically pairing up with an emerging economy like China (Gao *et al*, 2019).

### **COUNTRY OF ORIGIN BRAND CONSIDERATION IN CONSUMER PREFERENCE**

An internationally agreed legal definition for brands states that a brand is ‘a sign or set of signs certifying the origin of a product or service and differentiating it from competition’ (Schätzle & Jacob, 2019). In other words, country of origin relating to products is imperative in a firm’s multinational marketing and branding strategy. Distinctive attributes or features situates the products within perceived geographical indications (GIs) and forms the basis of preference evaluation (Barbarossa *et al*, 2018). This equally ingrains the threads of culture emblazoned in the quality of products especially in the manufacturing and sales of fabrics/textile and fashion products. The success around the world in terms of items “Made in Italy” is mostly due to the Italian brand’s ability to transfer a certain sense of product quality in concert with values and experiences of beauty, elegance, tradition, luxury, and life quality (Kim & Chao, 2018). The distinctive power of a brand is in its name. Sevanandee and Damar-Ladkoo (2018) indicated that since a brand is a name with the power to influence the market, its power increases as more people know it, are convinced by it, and trust it. Brand management is about gaining power, by making the brand concept more known, bought, and shared. Furthermore, a brand is a shared desirable and exclusive idea embodied in products, services, places and/or experiences.

## **LEVEL OF BRAND AND BRAND CHARACTERISTICS**

The argument for the quality of a deep brand in the marketplace is common in marketing. Kotler (1994) in Dobrucali (2019) suggests that a deep brand possesses six levels which include attributes, benefits, values, culture, personality and the user characteristic which can be visually perceived by the customer whereas a shallow brand has just some of these qualities. As a corollary, Hornikx *et al* (2019) also suggested that where consumers find it more difficult to assess the distinctive quality of product then the marketer needs to deepen the brand with well developed personalities. In effect the characteristics of a deep brand are typical of branding strategies and thus the different levels suggest the levels of customer expectation and perception. The attribute level will include design and durability of the product, benefit will include functional and emotional benefits, the values and culture benefit is subsumed under culture in the present study. Personality level will project a certain class of persons or title, and finally the user level depicts the type of user and the related activity (Kotler, 1994; Dobrucali, 2019). The deep brand is a concept shared by a larger number of people and countries, and shows the more power the brand has. Example include popular brands of multinational marketing outreach in terms of what values they project and sustain such as BMW (Van Esch *et al*, 2018) and others like Coca-Cola, Honda and Toyota. A brand is significantly a name that influences buyers originating from a set of mental associations and relationships built up over time among customers or distributors. The brand evokes benefits such as saliency, differentiability, intensity and trust attached to the mental associations (Van Esch *et al*, 2018). The pattern of mental association of consumers' preference decision process with brand names as well as COO factors and GIs indicate that most consumers from developed countries follow a pattern whereby they tend to prefer products from their own countries first and foremost, then products from other developed countries and, lastly, products from less developed countries (Adenan *et al*, 2018). However, the converse is the case for consumers in developing countries such as Mexico, Jordan, and Nigeria as literature suggests that consumers in developing economies view products from developed countries more favorably than products from their own country (Adenan *et al*, 2018).

Related literature on the COO concept by Andéhn and Decosta (2018), suggested that when consumers are aware of certain country characteristics, they become more inclined to use country-of-origin as an external cue in evaluating product quality and in ordering their purchasing decision process. Accordingly, consumers conferred a higher evaluation of product quality on products produced in developed countries, owing to the technological advances and competitive nature of the markets in these countries (Wegapitiya & Dissanayake, 2018). However, in some cases, consumers prefer products manufactured locally, owing to ethnocentrism and patriotism. He moreover suggested that with increasing globalization and the narrowing of markets, it is possible to neutralize or lessen the effect of country-of-origin effects by emphasizing and accentuating other branding elements apart from the COO through promotional activities.

Consumers' preference decision is based on both intrinsic and extrinsic product or service cues or values depicted by the physical composition of a product and product related features respectively. According to Rana and Paul (2017) extrinsic product attributes such as brand name and manufacturers reputation may indicate the country where a product was made, assembled, or both. Consequently, the brand name, retailer reputation, and products' country of origin constitute the extrinsic cues and can be manipulated without physically changing actual products (Gao *et al*, 2019).

### **BRAND OF FASHION PRODUCTS AND MARKET CHARACTERISTICS**

Fashion products by extension are defined as consumer goods where style holds the primary importance, and the price is secondary. Such goods include clothing, jewelry, handbags, sun shades, and shoes (Keiser, Garner & Vandermar, 2017). De Angelis, Adıgüzel and Amatulli (2017) argued that the ability of a brand to exert power which can significantly influence the market seeks to determine the brand existence. This equally shows the distinctive competence of the brand and its manufacturer in view of rivals and the ability to harness enormous power takes time. The time span tends to be short in the case of online brands, fashion brands and brands for teenagers, but longer for, for example, car brands and corporate brands. However, the power can be lost, if competition strategy is mismanaged (Ladhari, Gonthier & Lajante, 2019). Park-Poaps and Kang (2018) identified luxury fashion brands to possess qualities such as symbolic values arising from exclusivity, premium prices, image, and status. As a corollary, Coelho, Rita and Santos (2018) argued that a product's country of origin has a stronger effect when considering luxury products than the consideration to purchase necessities. This reinforces the notion that for luxury fashion brands, COO is a strong component of the brand perception by consumers and can constitute a “make-or-break of brand’s market success” (Krupka, Ozretic-Dosen & Previsic, 2014).

### **EFFECTS OF CONSUMER DEMOGRAPHICS ON PREFERENCE OF FASHION PRODUCTS**

Demographic characteristics including age and sex usually have significant effect on consumer preference especially of fashion products and are expressed in a range of personality characteristics such as self-assertiveness, competitiveness, venturesome, attention seeking, and self-confident and appearance conscious (Yang & Mattila, 2017). The consumption of fashion items like clothes and adornments makes the consumer feel attractive and experience a higher level of self-esteem, positive mood and satisfaction (Keiser, Garner & Vandermar, 2017). Specifically, gender has been found to affect preference of fashion products with women being more passionate about clothing than men (Lee & Nguyen, 2017). Women also were found to exhibit fashionable attributes such as perfectionist tendencies and more attention to external appearance than men (Yu, Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018) even though some men try to exhibit fashionable tendencies such as being innovative and fashion opinion leaders like women. The effects of age on preference of fashion products indicate varying preference behavior for different categories. Su and Chang (2018) indicate that older and younger shoppers have different expectations towards shopping with younger consumers are more influenced by fashion. The younger ages have preference for new products trial, preference for famous brands and less price-sensitive (Coelho *et al*, 2018).

On the other hand, older consumers prefer to plan and economize their purchases (Park-Poaps & Kang, 2018) stated that older and retired consumers are “least novelty-conscious, exhibit more routine behaviour, prefer long-established brands, and are less willing to explore new products. Extant literature has indicated the implications of gender effect in retail shopping behavior (Davis, Lang, & Diego, 2014). Some studies have underpinned fashion products buying behavior around the theory of planned behavior (TPB). Results of such studies show the variables of TPB such as attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control have

significant effects on the intention of consumers to purchase luxury fashion goods (Ladhari *et al*, 2019). Female fashion product buyers considered such factors as appearance, past purchase behavior, value consciousness, and normative susceptibility as significant predictors of their attitude toward buying fashion goods (Keiser *et al*, 2017).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

The study adopts descriptive design through a cross-sectional survey research. Two fashion products categories were selected (clothes and shoes). The selected fashion products categories represent the usual fashion products imported from these two countries (clothes and shoes).

### **SAMPLING AND DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE**

Data collection which was facilitated through a cross-sectional survey made use of a structured questionnaire administered to 400 respondents selected from a population of 1,288,714 people (2006 Census) in Alimosho Local Government Area (LGA) of Lagos State. This sample size corresponds with Yamane (1967) formula for determination of sample size. The formula is stated as follows:  $n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$ . Where  $n$  = sample size =400,  $N$ =1,288,714,  $e$ = margin of error (0.05). The respondents were selected through convenience sampling technique by administering the questionnaire to easily accessible respondents in shopping malls. This including the consumer demographic categories such as male and female by gender, young and adults by age, single, married or even divorced by marital status and so also considered across other demographic factors without any biasedness. Alimosho LGA is the largest LGA in Lagos State and comprise of six local community development areas (LCDAs). Alimosho LGA is reputed for its rich blend of Nigeria cultural heritage and inhabited by a reasonable proportion of all the major tribes in Nigeria. The study which took place in Lagos is also justified as Lagos provides an enormous accommodation for Nigerians and other nationals as residents to transact business and other social activities in Nigerian hobnobbing around the commercial nerve centre of West Africa. The population categories comprise of adults from 18 and above and include both male and female categories.

### **STUDY INSTRUMENT**

The study made use of a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into three major parts. The first section captures data on the criteria of deep brands category (Kotler, 1994) with respect to clothes and shoes made in China and Italy. The users' criterion or buyers' information is represented by the demographic characteristics of the respondents in the second part of the instrument. The last part elicited responses in terms of the preference rating by COO qualities. It was a self-administered instrument which was subjected to mini pilot survey to ascertain its accuracy and consistency otherwise known as validity and reliability respectively. Reliability test yielded Cronbach Alpha overall coefficient of  $\alpha$  of 0.84 considered a sufficient proof of the instrument's reliability (Nunnally, 1978). While the validity of the instrument on the other hand was carried out using face and content validity. It was confirmed by senior marketing and academic researchers' of the university faculty, specifically, the faculty of business administration.

The pattern of questions is designed to indicate comparison in the consumers' preference between "Made in Italy" and "Made in China". Responses rating were delineated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from highly

preferred (5) and not preferred (1). The brand preference evaluation criteria were delineated between two to three levels for each of the brand characteristics. The breakdown of the levels enabled the respondents to easily identify the specific product feature that they rate according to their respective preference levels.

**PROCEDURE FOR DATA ANALYSIS**

Independent sample T-test and Anova were used to determine the differences in consumer preference in respect of fashion products between “Made in Italy” and “Made in China. The dependent variable commonly investigated in country-of-origin studies is mostly in respect of consumer's perception or evaluation of product/brand quality and consumer's likelihood of purchase or willingness to buy while the independent variable is country-of-origin. Consequently, the data collected were linked to each country-of-origin brand characteristics to determine consumer preference.

**3. RESULTS**

**Table 1: User Characteristics in the Preference of ‘Made in Italy’ and ‘Made in China’ Fashion Products.**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
18-27	181	81.16
28-37	18	8.07
38-47	21	9.42
48 and above	3	1.35
<b>Total</b>	<b>223</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>Sex</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Male	142	63.7
Female	81	36.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>223</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Trader	32	14.3
Student	97	43.5
Administrator	15	6.7
Entrepreneur	27	12.1
Teacher	52	23.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>223</b>	<b>100.00</b>

*Source: Authors Field Survey, 2018.*

Table 1 shows the pattern of user characteristics in terms of the sampled population. The result indicates that most of the respondents are between the ages of 18-27 with students comprising the largest population.

**Table 2: Result of Independent Sample T-test on the Dimensions of Brand Preference of “Made in Italy” and “Made in China” Fashion Products in Nigeria**

Measures	Country	Attributes	Brand Personality	Culture	Values	Product Benefits
<b>Mean</b>	Italy	4.7	4.50	4.33	4.73	4.49
	China	3.60	3.71	4.20	3.49	3.56
<b>Standard deviation</b>	Italy	0.47	0.61	0.78	0.52	0.97
	China	1.02	1.17	1.10	1.15	1.29
<b>t-value</b>		2.64	2.019	1.71	1.54	1.64
<b>Sig. level</b>		0.000	.99	.315	0.000	0.002

*Source: Authors’ Field Survey, 2018.*

Table 2 shows the difference in the level of perceived value of the brand characteristics in relation to each country. Italy has a higher perceived value on all characteristics but very close to China in terms of culture. In addition, there was no significant difference in terms of attributes, values, and product benefits characteristics.

**Table 3: Anova Result on the Effects of the Age Categories of Consumers on the Preference of “Made in Italy” and “Made in China” Fashion Products.**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b>Between Groups</b>	26.646	6	4.441	5.570	.000
<b>Within Groups</b>	172.224	216	.797		
<b>Total</b>	198.870	222			

*Source: Authors’ Field Study, 2018.*

The Anova result in Table 3 test for any significant difference among the age categories involved in the study on the preference of “Made in Italy” and “Made in China” fashion products. The result shows that the age categories significantly affect the preference of fashion products among the two countries  $F=5.570, p<0.01$ .

**Table 4: Group Statistics of Male and Female Consumers on the Preference of “Made in Italy” and “Made in China” Fashion Products**

Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
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Male	142	1.6901	.93158	.07818
Female	75	1.6933	.97223	.11226

*Source: Authors' Field Study, 2018.*

Tables 4 and 5 show the group statistics and independent sample t-test result of the effects of sex on the consumer preference of fashion products in Nigeria. The result shows that there is no significant difference in the preference of “Made in Italy” and “Made in China” Fashion products between male and female consumers in Nigeria  $t=-.024$ ,

**Table 5: Independent Samples t-Test of the Preference of Male and Female Consumers on the Preference of “Made in Italy” and “Made in China” Fashion Products.**

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.148	.701	-.024	215	.981	-.00319	.13500	-.26929	.26290
Equal variances not assumed			-.023	145.246	.981	-.00319	.13680	-.27357	.26719

*Source: Authors Field Survey, 2018.*

**DISCUSSION**

The study examined the buyers’ socio-demographic data and tested hypotheses in terms of consumers’ attitude towards “Made in Italy” And “Made in China” Fashion Products brand categories. The study is part of the research interest in evaluating the effects of country of origin on consumers’ preference behavior. The result of the descriptive statistics showed that buyers between the ages of 18 to 27 constitute the major type of consumers in the study and are students which depict the type of user and the related activity (Kotler, 1994). The hypotheses tested in terms of the brand dimensions showed that consumers perceive a significant difference in terms of attributes ( $t=2.64, p<.05$ ), values ( $t=1.54, p<.05$ ) and benefits ( $t=1.64, p<.05$ ) brand dimensions in the preference of “Made in Italy” and “Made in China” fashion products in Nigeria. The significance placed on the benefit level indicate a situation whereby consumers and distributors may have tied the benefits more to price and not because they are conscious of any exclusive benefit from the brand (Schätzle & Jacob, 2019). Consumers rated “Made in Italy” fashion products high on all dimensions of the deep branding perhaps in line with the global perception of the exclusive quality of Italian fashion brand’s ability to transfer a certain sense of product quality in concert with values and experiences of beauty, elegance, tradition, luxury, and life quality

(Banovic *et al*, 2019). However, a cursory concern should be made about the close marking by China ( $M = 4.33:4.2$ ,  $p > .005$ ) in terms of competition in the area of culture (based on business tradition and craftsmanship) especially in textile and clothing in the international marketplace (Adenan, Ali & Rahman, 2018).

Anova and t-test were further conducted on the demographic data with respect to the age categories and sex respectively. The Anova result which significantly showed difference in the preference behavior of “Made in Italy” and “Made in China” fashion products among the age categories is in line with the suggestions that younger ages have preference for new products trial, preference for famous brands and less price-sensitive and that older and younger shoppers have different expectations towards shopping with younger consumers are more influenced by fashion (Yang & Mattila, 2017). The males and the females do not differ in their shopping behavior of fashion products as shown in Tables 4 and 5. Norris and Cranfield (2019) indicated that gender plays a significant role in the preference of fashion products with some men trying to exhibit fashionable tendencies such as being innovative and fashion opinion leaders like women. Generally, men have become more fashion conscious in the society today in a bid to feel attractive and experience a higher level of self-esteem, positive mood and satisfaction (Andéhn & Decosta, 2018).

## **CONCLUSION**

The study evaluated consumers brand preference in relation to two categories of country of origin products; “Made in Italy” and “Made in China” fashion products. Findings from the study show the effects of brand dimensions in relation to the country of origin as well as the significance of the consumer demographic characteristics such as age and sex. The brand dimensions such as the attributes, values, and benefits show a significant difference between the two countries among the consumers. This therefore means that perceive these dimensions as the bases of discriminating between “Made in Italy” and “Made in China” fashion products in the marketplace. These dimensions may serve as very effective competitive strategies by countries competing in the international market. The preference for “Made in Italy” and “Made in China” fashion products also differ in terms of age but not in terms of sex among the consumers. Younger consumers differ in their preference of fashion products to older people while the fashion preference behavior of men and women do not significantly differ. In other words men are almost as fashion conscious as women. This result suggests a better way for market segmentation in terms of demographic factors for the fashion products market.

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**APPENDIX**

**QUESTIONNAIRE ON CONSUMERS’ BRAND PERCEPTION IN THE PREFERENCE OF “MADE IN ITALY” AND “MADE IN CHINA” FASHION PRODUCTS IN NIGERIA**

**Dear Respondent,**

The attached questionnaire is intended to gather responses from Nigeria consumers about their perception in the preference of “Made in Italy” and “Made in China” fashion products in Nigeria. Kindly follow the instructions carefully and indicate your responses accordingly. Please be assured that data provided for this research will be used mainly for the purpose of the present study and would be treated with confidentiality.

Thanks

Yours faithfully

**Researcher**

**Instruction: For each question choose one country only and the corresponding preference level.**

**Level Of Perceived Preference Measurement:** Highly preferred (HP) = 5, Preferred (P) = 4, Moderately preferred (MP) = 3, Lowly preferred (LP) =2, and Not preferred (NP) =1.

**Perceived Brand Preference of Fashion Products between “Made in Italy” and ‘Made in China”**

No	Dimension	Levels	HP	P	MP	LP	NP
	<i>Attributes levels</i>						
		<b>Country</b>					
1	I like the quality of design of clothes and shoes.	Italy					
		China					
2	The quality of texture of leather and fabrics makes me buy any cloth or shoe.	Italy					
		China					
3	Fitness is necessary when I buy any cloth or shoe.	Italy					
		China					
	<i>Benefits levels</i>						
4	I like to buy shoes and clothes that can last	Italy					
		China					
5	I like to buy clothes and shoes that are affordable	Italy					

		China					
	<i>Values levels</i>						
6	I buy shoes and clothes that meet my taste of quality	Italy					
		China					
		<b>Levels</b>	<b>HP</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>MP</b>	<b>LP</b>	<b>NP</b>
7	I buy shoes and clothes that boost my status	Italy					
		China					
8	I buy shoes and clothes that have stylish features	Italy					
		China					
	<i>Culture levels</i>						
9	I buy clothes and shoes produced with quality technology	Italy					
		China					
10	I buy from manufacturers who are consistent in making good quality shoes and clothes.	Italy					
	<i>Personality levels</i>						
11	I buy shoes and clothes that make me look gorgeous	Italy					
		China					
12	I buy shoes and clothes that make me feel smart whenever I wear them	Italy					

**Users/Consumers of “Made in Italy” and “Made in China” fashion products**

13. Age: 18-22 [ ] 23-27 [ ] 28-32 [ ] 33-37 [ ] 38-42 [ ] 43-47 [ ] 48-52 [ ] 53-57 [ ] 57 and above [ ]

14. Sex: Male [ ] Female [ ]

15. Occupation: Trader [ ] Student [ ] Administrator [ ] Entrepreneur [ ] Teacher [ ]

**Country of Origin Factors**

16. I select the clothes and shoes I buy base on the name of the country where the product is produced. Strongly Agree [ ] Agree [ ] No idea [ ] Disagree [ ] Strongly Disagree [ ]

17. The name of the country where the product is produced is a signal of quality

Strongly Agree [ ] Agree [ ] No idea [ ] Disagree [ ] Strongly Disagree [ ]

18. I would be reluctant to buy any clothes or shoes if the country of manufacture is not indicated Strongly Agree [ ] Agree [ ] No idea [ ] Disagree [ ] Strongly Disagree [ ]