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Samiee, S., Leonidou, L., Katsikeas, K. orcid.org/0000-0002-8748-6829 et al. (1 more author) (2024) *Research on Country-of-Origin Perceptions: Review, Critical Assessment, and the Path Forward*. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 55. pp. 285-302. ISSN 0047-2506

<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-023-00678-z>

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**Research on Country-of-Origin Perceptions:
Review, Critical Assessment, and the Path Forward**

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Abstract

Despite the volume of research and significant advancements in the country-of-origin (CO) area, the topic remains contentious in two key areas. One area is the presence of tensions and contradictions associated with origin-related research. The second relates to an overreliance on relatively narrow theories that can neither address disparities nor capture a range of CO ecosystem considerations critical to the effective use of results in addressing firm-level planning and outcomes. Our examination of the business-to-consumer CO literature details the characteristics of published work and highlights the substantive contributions of the 50 most influential publications, with the overarching goal of accommodating meaningful future research. We examine 417 journal articles (551 studies) published from 1962 to 2022 to extract important granular characteristics of the literature and to summarize the findings of the most influential CO contributions. We also report the results of two surveys of academic researchers and U.S. exporters and importers examining CO's role in research and practice. Finally, we propose a theoretical lens, paradox theory, as a basis for considering and framing competing aspects of the CO ecosystem and recommend the use of multilevel modeling to link future studies to marketing strategy and performance outcomes, thus advancing CO research.

Keywords: Country-of-origin; CO ecosystem; literature review; paradox theory; multilevel modeling; international marketing.

An issue of particular interest to international business (IB) researchers is whether foreignness (vs. localness) influences the perceptions and subsequent behaviors of businesses and consumers. In international marketing (IM) research, much attention and intellectual capital are devoted to the study of consumers' perceptions of the origin of products and brands and how these perceptions affect buyers' evaluations and choice behaviors (Kotabe & Jiang, 2009; Leonidou, Katsikeas, Samiee, & Aykol, 2018). Consumers hold varying perceptions of products and brands from different countries, which in turn might influence their buying decisions. Broadly referred to as country-of-origin (CO), this topic has received focused research attention since the early 1960s. Dichter (1962) is credited as being the first to highlight consumer attitudes toward other countries' products, consumption preferences violating those views, and the "made-in" label. Since then, a rich body of knowledge has evolved, placing CO as one of the most widely studied and diverse research areas in IM.

Early research focused on the influence of product-level CO on customers' evaluations and purchase intentions. Over time, research foci gradually broadened to include more specialized areas such as country image (CI) (e.g., Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009), brand origin (BO) (e.g., Samiee, Shimp, & Sharma, 2005), consumer ethnocentrism (e.g., Shimp & Sharma, 1987), and consumer animosity (e.g., Klein, Ettenson, & Morris, 1998). Despite its maturity and the accumulated wealth of CO knowledge, multiple aspects of this research domain continue to be the subject of scientific scrutiny. For example, researchers have questioned published CO work based on weak or nonexistent theoretical and conceptual framing, opaque or undefined scholarly motivations, definitional or conceptual inaccuracies, conflicting findings, and impractical, exaggerated, and/or limited managerial relevance (e.g., Leonidou & Samiee, 2011).

Accordingly, our investigation is motivated by the numerous and ongoing questions and concerns arising from published CO works (e.g., Josiassen & Harzing, 2008; Usunier, 2011). The primary purpose of this study is to conduct a comprehensive review to critically appraise published research on CO effects on consumer behavior. Our holistic examination of the CO literature is complemented with two surveys through which we sought the views of both CO scholars and practitioners (exporters and importers). Most

prior CO review studies, including meta-analyses, investigate specific areas of the CO literature or provide broad-based literature overviews capturing specific time periods (e.g., Bhaskaran & Sukumaran 2007; Samiee 1994). In contrast, our review extracts fine-grained details from the most pertinent literature and provides a chronological evaluation of published business-to-consumer CO works. In addition, we capture the views of CO scholars and export and import managers, as well as their recommendations for future research. The intended outcome of this work is to offer fruitful directions for scholars, managers, and policymakers.

We address four primary objectives in our review: First, we evaluate the theoretical underpinnings of the CO literature. Second, we systematically examine key methodological features of CO research, identify researchers' areas of concern, and offer a multilevel modeling solution that addresses firm-level strategic actions and performance outcomes. Third, we synthesize major empirical findings on the subject and offer a repository of key findings and established thematic trends. Fourth, we provide recommendations for further research that incorporate input from IB/IM scholars and practicing export and import managers, complemented by CO-related concerns articulated in the literature.

We make three important contributions to the CO literature. First, we provide an inventory of accumulated knowledge and related trends, with a sharp focus on the most highly cited CO contributions. We supplement and extend this repository with a survey of scholars to reveal promising avenues for future investigations. Identifying neglected, problematic, and/or controversial theoretical, methodological, and thematic issues in the CO literature will prove particularly helpful in the design of future studies. To this end, we propose a broad-based theoretical lens that accommodates competing aspects of the CO ecosystem, inclusive of firm-relevant outcome measures, to better align the results of future CO studies with firm-related marketing strategies and performance. This will help alleviate inconsistencies in future research, lead to more robust research designs that accommodate firm-level outcomes, and facilitate the development of a more coherent and relevant body of cumulative CO knowledge over time.

Second, given the proliferating views among academics regarding the scholarly relevance and rigor of CO research, we offer insights from prominent CO researchers. An overarching question we seek

to answer is whether CO as a field of inquiry has reached maturity with newer studies adding little consequential knowledge. We identify critical areas of concern among CO researchers and identify ways to overcome real and perceived obstacles that may inhibit the advancement of knowledge in the field.

Third, while academia has placed a significant emphasis on studying CO and related issues, questions have arisen regarding the extent to which CO as a phenomenon is relevant for IB/IM practitioners and, if so, whether it is on their list of priorities. The question is whether the origin of exported or imported products is of strategic importance to firms. To address this question, we summarize insights gleaned from a survey of U.S.-based export and import managers regarding the relevance of the CO phenomenon in marketing and purchasing decisions. This represents an initial effort to align firm-based views and academic beliefs and to bridge theory and practice in this important area of research.

Our review begins by providing a backdrop for the CO phenomenon and considers the general criticisms in the literature. We then explain our methodology, followed by an evaluation of the theoretical underpinnings of CO studies. Next, we consider methodologies used in this literature, focusing on design, scope, product emphasis, method, construct operationalization, and analyses. We then examine the various themes identified in CO research, and identify the top 50 most-cited CO articles and consider the top three contributions published during each decade. Following this, we present scholars' and managers' views of the CO phenomenon. We ultimately recommend ways to theoretically and methodologically advance the CO domain and offer implications and directions for scholars, managers, and policymakers.

The CO Phenomenon

Definition

Early CO studies focused on buyers' attitudes toward non-domestically manufactured products. However, as Kock et al. (2019, p. 45) note, "A plethora of definitions have been suggested for the CO concept, with little agreement on its scope and scale." To some extent, such variations are expected outcomes of greater research intensity in a field. For example, Diamantopoulos and Zeugner-Roth (2011) used widely known constructs in conjunction with CO, namely, consumers' cognitive, affective, and normative concepts for a specific country on buyers' product evaluations and purchase intentions.

In CO research, a product's or brand's origin is frequently used as a key measure for predicting intended choice behavior. CO gains in importance when consumers face greater product information asymmetry (Nes, 2019). The CO of foreign-sourced products is generally accessible to buyers on manufacturer labels, but it may also be a perceived phenomenon. CO perceptions may, in turn, be reinforced through voluntary actions (e.g., communications to create a favorable association with any intended origin; [in]accurate Internet postings) or regulatory compliance and involuntary measures (e.g., protection afforded to local producers).¹

CO research generally holds that images of countries are formed through education, websites, social media, news, family and personal sources, and international travel which are either explicitly or implicitly used as cues that influence consumers' purchase intentions for products. As such, CO research is based on the assumption that purchase behavior is a rational response to individual beliefs about and perceptions of countries. Although various outcome measures have been used in CO studies, consumer responses, e.g., attitudes and purchase intentions toward a country's product/brand, are the most common.

The literature offers strong indications that favorable (or unfavorable) CO perceptions may facilitate (or impede) effective introduction, recognition, and acceptance of products in foreign markets. Specifically, consumers' evaluations of foreign products based on CO (demand-side) have major implications for firms' international and marketing strategies (supply-side), including country selection for establishing manufacturing operations; market segmentation, targeting, and positioning decisions; standardization-adaptation decisions across and within various countries; and company performance outcomes (Samiee, 1994). Further, CO effects have important policymaking implications, as some governments adopt special programs aiming to improve their country's image to attract foreign direct investment and/or promote national exports (Balabanis, Mueller, & Melewar, 2002). Collectively, these aspects—consumer (demand), firm (supply), and public policy and other external influences (context)—constitute the CO ecosystem.

Common criticisms

As scholarly interest in CO phenomena flourished, some researchers began to raise concerns and criticisms (e.g., Johansson, Douglas, & Nonaka, 1985; Peterson & Jolibert, 1995). Overarching issues of

concern center on (1) ecological validity—whether and to what extent consumers use CO information during normal marketplace search and shopping behavior (e.g., Usunier, 2011); (2) the practical use of CO findings—the extent to which findings can and should serve as the basis for the firm’s marketing strategy to achieve desired performance results (e.g., Samiee, 1994); and (3) the designs of CO publications—their appropriateness for providing reliable, valid results (e.g., Samiee, 2011).

More specific concerns about CO studies are rooted in four distinct areas. First, researchers have relied on a range of theories to frame their investigations of the CO phenomenon, and some earlier studies lacked theoretical grounding altogether (e.g., Samiee & Leonidou, 2011; Albaum & Peterson, 1984). Second, researchers have used widely varying methodologies to adhere to study context, subject type, sampling procedures, data collection, and analytical methods. Third, empirical results reported are fragmented and occasionally contradictory due to the diversity of theoretical bases, drivers, mediators, moderators, or outcomes of CO effects (e.g., Samiee, 1994). The final concern relates to contextual influences of various spatial (e.g., geographic foci), temporal (e.g., time periods), or conjuncture-related (e.g., assumed conditions) factors in assessing CO perceptions (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999) (see Web Appendix A).

Other criticisms of the literature include authors’ use of imprecise definitional scope (e.g., lacking specific definitions and corresponding research designs), inaccurate consumer assessments (e.g., scales, measures), and inflated CO effects based on unrealistic research designs and a lack of attention to the marketing strategy development process (e.g., Johansson et al., 1985; Peterson & Jolibert, 1995). For example, most CO publications implicitly generalize CO-related results to all consumers, whereas some consumers may be impervious to CO (i.e., CO-sensitive consumer segments) (e.g., Bhaskaran & Sukumaran, 2007; Samiee, 1994). Although a range of concerns may be raised, we use published overviews and assessments of the CO body of knowledge to highlight five key criticisms of this literature.

First, early CO publications focused on assessing consumer beliefs regarding imported products. However, as businesses have globalized, a given brand may be produced and sourced from multiple locations. In addition, virtually all products have some foreign aspect, such as BO, components, country

of assembly, and other pertinent elements. Further, a combination of regulatory regimes and ease of information access and transmission offers the potential to more accurately pinpoint production location information than “country.” For example, the geographic origin of certain products/brands can nowadays be defined at a broader level (e.g., an EU designation, which is now allowed within the block) or a narrower level (e.g., a city) (Diamantopoulos et al., 2017). Although distribution channels do not change products’ CO, they add another layer of consideration when the retail channels are non-domestic (e.g., Alibaba, eBay) and subject to potential CO bias (Hu & Wang, 2010).

Second, consumers’ knowledge about the true product or brand origins is often circumscribed (Samiee, Shimp, & Sharma, 2005). Accurate origin knowledge is low even in situations in which people actually own the product and would be expected to have higher levels of familiarity (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2008). Thus, at least some responses to CO cues in surveys could be based on biased perceptions due to limited knowledge about true BO, with response accuracy dependent on specific product characteristics (e.g., Abdellah-Kilani & Zorai, 2019). Low knowledge of product or BO does not impact experimental studies in which CO is introduced as an experimental artifact, but it raises questions as to whether consumers consider CO during purchase and, when such knowledge may be diagnostic for consumers, whether accurate (vs. perceived) knowledge matters. Research shows that when inaccurate origin knowledge is modified to its correct designation, there is a shift in consumers’ cognitive, attitudinal, and emotional responses (Magnusson, Westjohn, & Zdravkovic, 2011; Mandler et al., 2017). A parallel consideration is the extent to which incorrect origin designations are salient and influence purchasing decisions. Few studies have considered this possibility; however, Magnusson et al. (2011) reveal that, right or wrong, consumers are influenced by their perceived origin of a product or brand.

Third, CO’s importance as a key purchase determinant for foreign products should not overshadow other information cues, some of which are more readily available or can be easily accessed (e.g., differentiators such as design and price) and/or likely to also be judged as influential (e.g., safety) in consumers’ buying decisions (Usunier, 2011). Moreover, the salience of CO as an information cue will depend on various factors, such as product category familiarity, technological complexity of the product,

and the type of decision-making situation (Jo, Nakamoto, & Nelson, 2003; Semaan et al., 2019).

Fourth, the extent to which consumers use CO in their decision-making process to reject or buy foreign products has been rightfully questioned, with the belief that CO can influence consumers' decisions in spontaneous, subconscious, and uncontrollable ways (Herz & Diamantopoulos, 2013; Insch & Jackson, 2014). Paradoxically, some consumers forget to declare the role CO played in their purchasing decisions, despite using it as an information cue, which hints that consumer self-reports regarding the salience of CO may or may not reflect reality (Herz & Diamantopoulos, 2017). The reliability of self-reported data as to whether CO was viewed or considered during purchase is also open to question. In short, we cannot be certain of the extent to which CO cues are diagnostic in purchase situations.

Finally, evidence indicates that consumers are widely aware that their purchases are likely sourced from multiple countries (Shimp, Samiee, & Madden, 1993). It is a marketplace reality that multinational firms manufacture the same product in multiple locations, which can be a source of CO bias even though products are essentially identical (Funk et al., 2010; Cakici & Shukla, 2017). In a sense, consumers appear to be well-informed about the fact that labeling requirements vary cross-nationally, which may in turn reduce CO's impact for some groups. Indeed, this was said to be the case with consumers in India who preferred products manufactured in and sourced from a developed market over identical versions assembled locally (Khanna, 1986). A variety of general and specific labeling options and rules (e.g., Made in the EU, designed in the US) also serve to dilute or confuse the impact of origin during purchase (Gineikiene, Schlegelmilch, & Ruzeviciute, 2016). These serve as serious limitations for cross-national generalizations of CO findings.

In summary, despite the many advances in CO knowledge over the last six decades, more work is needed to address supply-side concerns, among other issues. These issues make a detailed systematic examination of current knowledge even more important. Although an implicit goal of all CO research is its impact on product and brand sales, firm-related performance considerations and metrics are nonexistent in the literature. Firms are essentially financial entities that seek to meet designated performance objectives, and outcomes of CO research should contribute to the realization of firms'

performance goals.

Review Method

This review covers published CO works from its inception in 1962 through 2022. This holistic approach affords us the possibility of identifying transitions and trends in the field. To be eligible for inclusion, studies had to fulfill four criteria. First, we only considered work published in academic journals, because peer-reviewed journals serve as screening mechanisms for stronger contributions. This consideration is bolstered by the general transitory route of projects that often begin as conference papers but are eventually channeled to refereed journals for publication. Second, we focus on publications dealing with consumers. Third, our search focused on CO research appearing in marketing, management, IB, and other business journals included in the Web of Science (WOS) database and ranked as tier 3 or higher in the Academic Journal Guide.² We identified CO studies by conducting an electronic search using ABI Global, EBSCO, JSTOR, and the WOS, as well as academic journal publishers' own databases.

We developed a comprehensive list of keywords to identify published CO works.³ We also manually examined reference sections of all published CO articles to identify additional articles. These efforts resulted in the identification of 551 individual studies in 417 articles published in 31 academic journals. Our initial content classification indicated that 90.8% of eligible published CO studies are empirical, 5.6% are methodological, and 3.6% are conceptual. (The distribution of CO publication outlets over time appears in Web Appendix Table A1.)

Next, we coded the contents of each article. We prepared a coding protocol and a manual which provided explicit definitions and explanations of important dimensions of articles as the basis for coding. We grouped these into seven major categories: theory, design, scope, product focus, constructs, analytical methods, and thematic areas. The coding task was undertaken by two experienced coders with extensive knowledge of the subject matter. Both coders underwent rigorous training for our established coding protocol. Each coder initially worked on a sample of articles under close supervision to ensure accuracy. Ambiguities and problems were clarified and resolved before proceeding with full-scale coding. Each coder independently worked on the full set of articles and recorded pertinent information using the coding

scheme. Intercoder reliability scores across the two coders ranged from .83 to 1.00. Inconsistencies were resolved by the coders and authors.

Theoretical underpinnings of CO research

The marketing discipline has often been reliant on testing or extending theories borrowed from other fields (Zeithaml et al., 2020). Early marketing contributions often lacked a theory, a tradition that likely has influenced CO research as the area initially evolved. Few would disagree that atheoretic CO studies represent a critical shortfall; we find that many observers are in full agreement regarding the need for strengthening conceptual and theoretical foundations of CO research (e.g., Obermiller & Spangeberg, 1989; Samiee, 2011; Usunier & Cestre, 2008). However, there is no consensus as to what constitutes a relevant theory.

We examined the contents of each article to identify its foundational theory(ies). A chronological examination of the resultant list (Table 1) indicates a sharp decrease in the proportion of CO atheoretic studies, from 69.2% in the 1980s to 23.0% in the 2010s. As the CO literature has matured, scholars have placed greater emphasis on theory-driven contributions. More than 40% of CO studies used adapted theories, whereas less than 10% drew on an existing theory(ies).

Insert Table 1

More than 100 different theories have been used in the CO publications examined. The large variety of theories deployed signals the literature's fragmented nature and the absence of central conceptualizations guiding CO investigations. These theories are derived mainly from psychology, sociology, and other social science disciplines. Social identity theory is the most common theoretical basis (5.1% of all CO studies), followed by cue utilization theory (3.8%), schema congruity theory (3.6%), categorization theory (3.4%), theory of reasoned action (2.5%), signaling theory (2.5%), information integration theory (2.4%), and stereotype content model (2.4%). During the last decade, researchers began using a wide range of theories, such as signaling theory, associative network theory, and system justification theory, indicating further foundational fragmentation and divergence rather than gradual convergence toward a more cohesive set or central CO theory(ies).

Despite the volume of contributions and CO's relative maturity, none of the studies use a theory that concurrently addresses both the demand level (i.e., consumers) and the supply level (i.e., the firm). Although incorporating consumer-related considerations into business plans is necessary, even more critical is meeting firms' financial and other objectives. This apparent divide creates tensions that managers need to resolve. In a consumer behavior tradition, a growing number of CO publications have called for developing theories that incorporates key measures, antecedents, mediators, moderators, and outcomes of consumer CO-related perceptions (e.g., Bloemer, Brijs, & Kasper, 2009; Kock, Josiassen, & Assaf, 2019). To this end, Bloemer et al. (2009) propose semiotic theory as an eclectic means of accounting for a variety of stimuli (e.g., information cues, evaluation, purchase), as well as the interpretation consumers might associate with each stimulus (e.g., beliefs, imagery). Overall, we conclude that theoretical foundations of CO studies frame the phenomenon using perceptions along with purchase intention as a typical behavioral outcome, all of which sidestep firms' objectives.

Consequently, CO studies have become insulated and disassociated from the critical aspects of corporate decision making, marketing strategy, and brand/firm performance outcomes. This pattern has been persistent, even as results-driven managerial recommendations emerging from the literature call for strategic actions to incorporate the CO effects uncovered in each study, but the recommendations fail to consider firm performance. Some investigations have noted the void in unifying theory-based accounts of consumer perspectives in CO research (e.g., CI, country emotions); however, this integration goal has not been extended to firm-level marketing strategy outcomes (e.g., Kock et al., 2019). A broad-based central conceptual framing will accommodate progress toward a holistic ecosystem view. To this end, two studies provide literature-based conceptualizations that can serve as bases for developing more integrative theories (Samiee, 1994; Samiee & Chabowski, 2021). These literature-backed conceptual frameworks incorporate key consumer and marketing strategy measures, including product- or brand-level performance. Samiee (1994) specifically proposes the inclusion of relevant CO-related measures, as well as firm-level IB (i.e., global production rationalization, foreign direct investment decisions), IM strategy decisions (e.g., international strategy standardization versus adaptation), and brand-level performance

outcomes. Samiee and Chabowski's (2021) bibliometrics-based CO conceptual framework includes customer- and product-level considerations as well as firm-level performance outcomes.

CO research methods

To identify and classify methods-related aspects, we extracted a comprehensive list from previous reviews of IB/IM research. Our results indicate that the majority of CO studies have been empirical (92.2%) (Table 2). The most common approach is the empirical testing of specific models, with data collected about products and brands sourced from other countries, mainly using experiments, consumer panels, surveys, or student samples. Incidents of qualitative research approaches are rare (2.9% of the studies) and take various forms, such as inductive inquiries to explain foreign product purchase behavior (Halimi, D'Souza, & Sullivan-Mort, 2017), content counts of consumer panels' views on countries and products used as inputs for analytical mapping (Shimp et al., 1993), and personal interviews about country-specific associations of brands (Herz & Diamantopoulos, 2013). Few studies (.5%) combine quantitative and qualitative methods.

Insert Table 2

As the CO literature has matured, there has been a shift from exploratory studies to conclusive research projects, with over 80% of studies in the latter group. Not surprisingly, the majority of studies (85.5%) are causal; only 12.0% are descriptive. Moreover, we note a greater emphasis on descriptive research before the 1990s (46.2%) and a subsequent decline in this type of investigation (3.7%) during the most recent decade. The scarcity of longitudinal studies (4%) serves as a common criticism of CO research, because both typical and less frequent shifts in external forces (e.g., economic, political) alter countries' profiles and consumers' CO perceptions.

Surveys (51%) and experiments (44.1%) constitute the main forms of data collection across CO studies. Laboratory experiments have long been criticized because respondents are likely to pay close attention to CO stimuli, whereas field surveys leverage somewhat more realistic settings and are thus comparatively less susceptible to this effect (e.g., Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). Nevertheless, studies using CO cues in some form (e.g., a visible CO label on a product, CO spoken or in survey questions)

bias respondents (Samiee, 1994; Samiee et al., 2005). In marketplace settings, research has demonstrated that explicit consideration of CO during the purchase process is rare (e.g., Liefeld, 2004). (Methods-related details are available in Web Appendix A, Tables A2-A5.)

Thematic areas

We extracted CO studies' themes by reviewing all articles, resulting in 76 topics which we classified into ten thematic categories: environmental influences, product/brand influences, consumer demographics, consumer psychographics, consumer familiarity, consumer decision-making, country image, consumer responses, strategic marketing implications, and miscellaneous. Given the goal and thrust of the CO literature, consumer response has been hypothesized to be associated with numerous variables. The most frequently used measure in CO studies is purchase intentions (used in about 35% of studies). This is followed closely by product evaluation (34.1%). Consumer attitudes are used in about 19.1% of CO studies. Notably, only a small proportion of studies examine the "actual purchase" as an outcome or a familiarity measure (4.7%). (Details are shown in Web Appendix A, Table A6.)

Highly influential CO contributions

The 417 CO articles included in this review have significantly advanced the field, providing both broad-based and fine-grained knowledge using a wide range of measures and contexts. Over time some works become more influential in shaping a field and its knowledge base. The evolution of knowledge in disciplines is largely governed by published works that precede newer studies, with some studies being more influential in guiding and shaping the field (Kuhn, 1962). Consistent with bibliometric protocols, the articles most highly cited in a discipline are considered the most influential and are understood to have a disproportionate impact on the field's advancement (MacRoberts & MacRoberts, 1989). Accordingly, we used citation data as the determinant of the relative influence of the CO articles reviewed. We extracted WOS citation frequencies for all CO publications and calculated average annual citation counts (AACC) based on each article's age to rank-order the 417 articles and selected the 50 most-cited ones. We divided this subset of articles by decade, starting in the 1980s. For this review, we highlight the top three most influential articles from each decade. Reliance on the main CO contributions is intellectually

appealing and fair in that, while every study makes a contribution in some way, a given study's impact is constrained in propelling the field forward if it is rarely used to guide subsequent research. (Web Appendix A, Table A7, includes AACCs, findings, and managerial recommendations for the top 50 publications.)

Despite the limited number of contributions during the 1980s, three of the 50 most influential CO articles were published during this decade. Indeed, the first and second most influential CO contributions among all 417 articles (using AACC) are from the 1980s. Furthermore, all three articles from this era were published in leading journals (i.e., *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Journal of International Business Studies*). Han and Terpstra (1988), who introduced the concept of uni- versus bi-national products, is by far the most-cited CO article overall. This is followed by Shimp and Sharma's (1987) highly influential work that introduced the concept of ethnocentrism to the CO literature. The third contribution by Han (1989) distinguishes between halo and summary CO cues and has been particularly influential in shaping conceptualizations in subsequent studies.

Four of the top 50 most influential CO contributions were published during the 1990s. These also appeared in the leading journals. Klein et al. (1998) introduces animosity as a distinctly different construct from ethnocentrism, developed a corresponding scale, and demonstrated its negative impact on consumers' willingness to buy products from countries viewed as unfriendly. In the second most influential article, Roth and Romeo (1992) highlight the role of product category in consumers' purchase intentions for products from certain origins and assert product-country fit strategies. Next, Maheswaran (1994), examines the moderating role of consumer expertise and attribute information on the effect of CO on product evaluations and distinguishes between information processing of experts and novices and how they are influenced by and recall CO.

Fifteen CO articles published during the 2000–2009 period are among the top 50 most influential works. The growing number of highly cited articles demonstrates the heightened scholarly attention to the topic. Batra et al. (2000), the most influential work during this decade, examine how a brand's local or nonlocal origin impacts brand attitude in developing countries. The authors found that consumer attitudes

in developing nations become more favorable with increased perceived foreignness of brands. In the second most influential CO publication of the decade, Balabanis and Diamantopoulos (2004) investigate the links among consumer ethnocentrism, domestic country bias, and CO for different product categories. They show that ethnocentrism positively affects preference for domestic products, and vice versa. The decade's third most influential work is by Laroche et al. (2005). They explore the cognitive processing and structure of CI and consider its impact on product evaluations. The authors treat CI as a higher-order construct comprising country beliefs, people affect, and desired interaction.

More than one-half of the top 50 most influential CO works (28) were published since 2010. Compared with the number of highly cited CO publications before the 1990s, nearly five times as many highly cited studies are among the top 50 works for this period. It is evident that IB/IM researchers' interest in origin-related topics has accelerated, and while there is a general tendency for researchers to cite more recent work, the growing number of highly cited articles during this decade speaks to the quality of scholarly efforts in the area. Zeugner-Roth et al. (2015) lead the list of the most influential articles of this decade. They examine the relative impact of consumer ethnocentrism, national identity, and cosmopolitanism on consumers' product judgments and intentions to purchase domestic and foreign products. They show that national identity has a stronger effect than ethnocentrism on domestic product judgments and intention to buy domestic products, while cosmopolitanism has the weakest effect. Sharma (2011), the second most influential study of 2010s, reveals variations in CO effects on consumer responses in developed and emerging countries through the moderating effects of ethnocentrism, materialism, and value consciousness. As compared with developed markets, consumers in emerging markets exhibit more favorable evaluations of and purchase intentions toward products originating in advanced economies. This period's third most impactful contribution is Ma, Yang, and Yoo (2020), who use a cross-national design and show that personal cultural values (i.e., self-direction, stimulation, achievement, power, and hedonism) condition the effect of emerging-market consumer ethnocentrism on the evaluation of and intention to buy products originating from developed nations. This study provides an alternative explanation to the ethnocentrism–consumer responses link through personal cultural values.

The top 50 most influential CO articles represent 12% of the articles covered in this review. As the field has evolved, it has become not only more fine-grained but also more insular, as demonstrated by the heightened attention to psychological aspects of origin-related phenomena. For the sake of brevity, from among the most-cited works, we focused on the top three from each decade.

Academic and Managerial Perspectives

Academics' views

To further explore the contrasting and, at times, contentious views regarding CO research (e.g., Bhaskaran & Sukumaran, 2007; Samiee, 2011), we sought input from academics. We surveyed the top 100 IB/IM contributors with CO publications based on their WOS citation scores. We obtained 40 responses from our sample of leading IB/IM scholars. The survey focused on the role of CO research in IB/IM, their positions on issues and criticisms related to the topic, and their recommendations for future research topics in the field. Not surprisingly, the results show that the vast majority of participating academics considered CO an important area within IB/IM due to its contribution to understanding origin-based consumer perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors. This belief is bolstered by their responses to our nine objective questions regarding various aspects expressed in the CO literature. Based on our seven-point Likert scales, respondents tended to disagree that consumers do not retain and consider CO information during purchase ($\bar{x} = 2.7$), that consumers do not consider CO as important as other product attributes ($\bar{x} = 3.1$), or that CO matters more to consumers in developed than developing nations ($\bar{x} = 2.5$). They also generally believe consumers render inaccurate evaluations of CO for foreign products with English brand names ($\bar{x} = 5.4$). Overall, academics neither agreed nor disagreed with the remaining statements (Table 3).

Concurrently, the CO scholars' comments echo five shortcomings noted in the literature. First, the overall intellectual capital and volume of studies devoted to origin-related phenomena have been disproportionately higher than the knowledge and clarity gained. Second, the relevance of CO research within the firm's overall IM strategy development and implementation, as well as public policy is generally overemphasized. Third, identifying meaningful new origin-related research topics has become increasingly more difficult. This is idiosyncratic of mature fields and highlights the need to consider

innovative directions for advancing CO knowledge. Fourth, shifts in global external forces (e.g., social media, sustainability mandates) present significant potential to revitalize research on origin-related topics. Finally, the multidimensional, complex, and dynamic nature of the CO phenomenon is blurred by multilocation and hybrid production and sourcing in firms. This reflects the increasing complexity of CO as a domain and corresponding opportunities to untangle it with novel and diverse approaches that address competing aspects and tensions within the CO ecosystem.

Academics also stressed the significance of consumer-level CO effects on various decisions pertaining to IB strategy in general and IM strategy in particular. Two IB strategy concerns commonly cited were: (a) value chain deployment, which could help identify sourcing, design, and/or production locations to leverage positive (and avoid negative) CO effects, and (b) foreign market entry-mode decisions (e.g., acquisitions, alliances, franchising). A targeted manufacturing site, foreign firm, and/or international partner invariably affects consumers' perceptions of origin associated with products/brands sourced from there (e.g., perceptions of Škoda and Volvo following their acquisition by VW and Geely, respectively). In the IM strategy sphere, academics highlighted CO effects on two primary issues: segmentation and marketing strategy elements. First, the main segmentation issues are: (a) using CO to segment markets at both macro-levels (country-level segmentation based on, for instance, the nature of political and historical relations, or export and import trade) and micro-levels (e.g., CI, consumer ethnicity); (2) within-country segmentation and targeting (i.e., identification and selection of promising segments using CO-related measures); and (3) positioning (i.e., using positive country equity and CO effects to establish a brand's competitive advantage). Second, in terms of marketing-mix issues, academics view CO as being applicable to: (a) branding aspects (mainly brand image and equity) and adapting brands for a more favorable effect to targeted countries; (b) marketing communications, including effective communication modes, channels, and messages to leverage positive/deflect negative CO images; and (c) capitalizing on a country's positive production reputation to promote product features.

IB/IM academic informants recommended a series of CO research ideas which we classified into

three groups: supply-related, demand-related, and region-related topics. Supply-related CO topics encompass the influences of CO-based decisions on various components of IM strategy. They noted the importance of addressing the impact of globalization and the increasingly global structure of firms, such as outsourcing and mergers and acquisitions, on product CO. Another supply-side topic centers on the influence of CO on firm performance, which has been voiced in the literature. Respondents also recommended examining the impact of BO on firms' pricing and distribution decisions. A final supply-side topic involves exploring firms' host market strategy shifts in accordance with local CO perceptions.

The largest number of topics recommended extend the dominant lines of published CO research on demand-related aspects of CO. Two such topics involve service aspects: (1) assessing the confounding effects of major retailers selling imported products and (2) the comparison of traditional and digital services. Given the dominance of digital services (e.g., Spotify: Swedish, Next Games: Finnish), this void is surprising. A third recommended topic is the CO effect and brand globalness interaction. Other topics concern the role of corporate social responsibility and sustainability in CO perceptions. Collectively, these topics could expand and update CO knowledge in areas that will remain important going forward.

A noteworthy region-based topic is assessing consumer perceptions of hybrid products on the basis of their value chain (i.e., countries of design, engineering, and manufacture). Many examples of such products in the marketplace, confounded by the firm's brand image, make this a timely topic. Other recommendations involve assessing origin on the basis of layers of locality in various ways (e.g., Bavaria vs. Germany vs. Europe). (Academics' research recommendations appear in Web Appendix B, Table B1.)

Export–import managers' views

Research relevance refers to the extent to which a study's findings provide strategic guidelines that can help firms gain a competitive edge in the market. Given the criticisms of the managerial relevance of CO research, we conducted an online survey of managers using a sample of U.S. exporting and importing firms to solicit corporate views regarding 12 CO-related items. Specifically, we used the services of a research supplier (Qualtrics), which contacted an equal number of relevant U.S.-based firms and secured responses from 83 consumer goods firms (44 exporters and 39 importers).⁴ The survey focused on the

role of CO in their business decisions and marketing strategy and sought to identify CO research areas that would benefit firms' marketing plan and strategy. (Web Appendix B, Table B2, compares exporters' and importers' responses.)

Overall, the exporters' and importers' views on various CO-related issues did not differ much.⁵ Both groups tended to agree that consumers care about product CO when making purchases. Export managers also agreed that consumers in developed markets tend to pay more attention to CO than those in developing markets. This stands in contrast to some research reporting that consumers in developed nations tend to be less concerned about CO than those in lower-income developing countries (e.g., Gong, 2003) and that emerging-market consumers exhibit more favorable reactions to products sourced from developed countries (Sharma, 2011). Such contradictions reinforce the need for additional work that considers most or all entities within the domain's ecosystem. U.S. Importers generally agree that domestic consumers prefer products from developed markets over those from developing ones. We expect their responses are influenced by their knowledge of the U.S. market. In contrast, exporters may be selling to a range of distant countries and thus less familiar with each.

In response to our inquiry as to whether managers believe a CO effect on consumers' buying decisions will diminish as a result of growing globalization, regionalization, and digitalization, managers' views are generally neutral and appear to reflect their uncertainty about CO's impact in the future. However, managers agree that consumer sensitivity to CO should be considered in segmenting markets. They also agree that foreign consumer CO perceptions are incorporated in their positioning strategies. Taken together, managers' responses appear mixed and do not convey discerning CO-related sentiments.

Regarding research ideas, managers proposed both supply-side (e.g., firm-centric) and demand-side (e.g., consumer-centric) topics. Exporters' supply-related topics deal with mitigating negative CO bias through "made-in" label placement, adjusting exporting websites to correspond with CO biases, and the influence of CO on export pricing. Our importer respondents recommended two topics that overlapped with exporters' suggestions: (a) the differing impact of CO effects on pricing and margins and (b) sales effect of optimizing the "made-in" label design to convey more information to end-users.

Importers also recommended exploring whether consumer goods sourcing decisions might be impacted by product CI. Finally, a CO-based classification (segmentation) of consumers was recommended by importers. Nearly all research ideas have been the subject of investigation in the CO literature in one form or another. (Web Appendix B, Table B3, details managers' CO-related research recommendations.)

Discussion

This comprehensive review of the CO literature demonstrates that in many respects the topic has matured. The field has advanced considerably in terms of transitioning to theory-based investigations, the use of a broad range of themes, and well-crafted and implemented methods. *Theoretically*, this line of inquiry has significantly improved over time, with more recent CO studies leveraging an impressive array of theories from cognitive psychology, social psychology, and behavioral economics. This is the result of a tendency among CO researchers to adopt a narrow focus on the subject as opposed to a more holistic theory-based perspective. Theoretical fragmentation is creating more confusion than clarity in the field. The area lacks a holistic theoretical framing that incorporates competing aspects within the CO ecosystem, and in this sense, the area remains largely atheoretic. To address this void, we propose paradox theory, within which other conceptualizations might be nested to (more) holistically address the frictions in origin-related research.

Methodologically, the field has advanced significantly, with more recent studies using carefully crafted designs that closely follow marketing and other social science research method protocols. The progression, however, has been slow. As a result, much of the published CO research has been criticized on different methodological grounds and its relative absence of external validity. Future studies should be designed to address such criticisms.

Contextually CO has been shown to impact consumer attitudes in a variety of settings, and its relevance to marketing strategy has been found to be stronger in developing countries. It is thus surprising that most CO research has used advanced economies as the empirical context, even though research has revealed that developing-country consumers exhibit stronger reactions to origin-related information in their choice behavior (e.g., Batra et al., 2000; Kaynak, Kucukemiroglu, & Hyder, 2000; Khanna 1986).

Compared with advanced economies, developing-country consumers face higher purchase risks due to their lower average incomes and fewer consumer protection laws or retail return policies. At least two-thirds of the countries in the world are developing or emerging nations and international firms selling consumer products in these regions need more fine-grained consequential information related to marketing strategy to mitigate origin-related consumer concerns in these nations.

Thematically, Schooler's (1965) study established CO as a stimulus that can impact consumers' attitudes. This stimulus–response link has become a key basis of CO research, which has gained in breadth and depth over time by using wide-ranging conceptualizations, along with a diversity of antecedents and moderators that influence CO-related behaviors. These developments have contributed to the accumulation of detailed but relatively narrow knowledge on the subject, which we classified into ten areas. Some areas (e.g., responses, psychographics, CI) have attracted more attention, while others (e.g., environmental effects, marketing strategy implications) remain under-researched. Our chronological analysis of CO constructs demonstrates that the field has gradually placed an increasing emphasis on specific topics, such as consumer psychographics (notably, animosity) and CI (notably, macro-CI).

Advancing the CO Domain

To advance research on origin-related topics, we must consider the shortcomings of the body of research. This approach will help researchers envision designs that not only build on prior CO work but also sidesteps the weaknesses and responds to issues not previously addressed, while offering greater practical utility. New CO studies that merely extend or replicate what is already known about the demand side by using conventional methods of surveys or experiments (regardless of technology platform or context used) and/or by drawing on theories centered on consumer attitudes and behavior alone will not overcome these concerns or rejuvenate the area. Furthermore, our review leads to the conclusion that future research should include both consumer sentiments and their connections to marketing strategy and performance outcomes, and thus the relevance of multilevel conceptualizations and modeling. Several CO studies have advocated for and stressed the importance of linking origin-related choices to performance outcomes (e.g., Samiee, 1994; Samiee and Chabowski 2021), and numerous studies have leveraged their results to

propose changes to marketing strategy (notably product/brand communications), with the implicit goal of improving product/brand performance. Accordingly, we propose a theoretical lens to help frame future CO investigations and assert the need to elevate CO research from single-level (i.e., demand-side) projects to multilevel studies that incorporate firms' marketing strategies and performance concerns.

Toward an overarching theory

The CO literature has been criticized as theoretically underdeveloped (e.g., Albaum & Peterson, 1984). Although the proportion of theory-based CO works has increased over time, CO studies lack an overarching theoretical lens that links and relates key dimensions of interests within the CO ecosystem under the umbrella of a smooth theory-based conceptual story. Such a theoretical framing is essential for incorporating the broader issues of concern at different levels of the CO ecosystem in future studies. This conceptual void is exacerbated by contradictory findings that constrain their generalizability and practical use by firms (Bhaskaran & Sukumaran, 2007).

Two tacit assumptions drive CO investigations: (1) consumers use CO during buying situations, and (2) by understanding consumers' reactions to CO cues, firms can develop appropriate marketing strategies that will enhance product/brand sales and related performance outcomes (e.g., brand share, profitability). To this end, firms potentially impacted by origin-related phenomena have a vested interest in removing obstacles to both customer adoption and repeat purchases of the foreign-linked products they offer.⁶ CO studies assert that consumers demonstrate a preference for and express significant behavioral intentions (positive or negative) toward products from origins for which they hold a view. Research also reveals tensions and contradictions at the consumer level and demonstrates that most consumers do not find CO or BO information sufficiently diagnostic to commit it to memory or consciously use it as the basis for purchase decisions (e.g., Balabanis & Diamantopoulos 2008; Liefeld, 2004; Samiee et al., 2005).

The trichotomy of consumers' general sensitivity to CO information, their corresponding behavioral intentions, and their relatively low familiarity with, recall of, and use of origin-related information (as reported in the literature) represent further tensions and contradictions that have not been addressed. This reality entails "competing demands on organizations" that increase, strengthen, and

become commonplace as they grow more global and competitive (Smith and Lewis, 2011). As firms enter more markets, their CO-related exposure introduces additional frictions and tensions with respect to addressing local preferences and developing cohesive IM strategies.

To frame CO-related research questions, authors have typically borrowed theory from other disciplines, particularly psychology. These theories are internally consistent and useful at the consumer level, but they are unable to mitigate the serious concerns of marketing managers seeking to address the latent tensions and contradictions they must balance to arrive at optimum or at least satisficing solutions (Poole & Van De Ven, 1989). We reason that *paradox theory* is a suitable overarching framework within which competing but interrelated elements within the CO ecosystem, inclusive of CO's firm-based consequences, can be framed and resolved. Paradox is *not* a CO theory but provides the conceptual foundation for addressing tensions and contradictions among interrelated elements within the CO ecosystem, with the goal of reducing or eliminating systemwide tensions to arrive at satisficing solutions. Researchers can nest pertinent perspectives and theories dealing with various aspects to resolve the tensions and contradictions within the CO ecosystem.

To our knowledge, paradox theory has not been applied as a means of covering the full spectrum of competing circumstances that impact the use of CO in firms' marketing strategies. In fact, its use as a foundation for marketing studies is relatively recent (e.g., Ozanne et al., 2016; Vafeas 2021). The theory can accommodate CO research by virtue of the presence of contradictory forces pertaining to the consumer, enterprise, and country levels that firms need to balance. The general direction of the results emerging from CO research demonstrates a contradiction between consumers' cognitive complexities and their marketplace behavior (Bhaskaran, & Sukumaran, 2007; Denison, Hooijberg, & Quinn, 1995). Whereas local subsidiaries of multinational corporations or importing firms' marketing managers strive to be more sensitive to local market nuances such as CO effects, they also remain cognizant that CO, if impactful, is but one of many possible elements that affect purchase decisions. This decision process introduces additional tensions that managers need to resolve.

In contrast to addressing consumers' CO preferences, marketing managers face realities regarding

the relatively fixed locations of MNCs' production (or sourcing) facilities as well as the need to meet certain performance metrics as marketing objectives. These concerns also introduce tensions within the marketing strategy planning systems that can be framed and resolved using the paradox theory lens. A simultaneous resolution of tensions due to contradictions accommodates the practical challenges of managerial decision making and is a step forward for firms in developing a deeper understanding of the impact of these contradictions on firm-related outcomes (Graetz & Smith, 2009), especially given the pivotal role of these decisions in influencing firm-level performance (cf. Håkansson & Ford, 2002). Taken a step further, in line with organizing paradox (Smith & Lewis, 2011), as firms expand internationally, a tendency to leverage economies of scale and scope through higher degrees of formalization permeates the firm, which in turn is often accompanied with more standardized IM strategies. However, adherence to origin-related phenomena speaks to the need for greater strategic flexibility (Smith & Lewis, 2011) and, accordingly, more local adaptation. Adherence to these contradictory realities presents a strategic challenge for firms.

The extent to which IM managers envision existing competing forces around them and seek to holistically manage them is not known. However, given the complexity involved, it is fair to assume that many managers either ignore or live with CO-related tensions and contradictions or perhaps simplify the world around them by choosing among competing scenarios and contradictions to maximize fit between organizational imperatives and external forces (i.e., partial response). An alternative for managers is to concurrently consider two or more competing demands "to create a dynamic equilibrium," as Smith and Lewis (2011) note. As two or more focused theories will be nested with the paradox paradigm to address competing concerns, specific research questions are generated based on researchers' goals and shaped by the specific theories selected for the project. (see Web Appendix A.)

Multilevel designs

As competing forces in origin-related work are present across different entities (e.g., consumers, managers, firms, countries), future CO research designs will need to incorporate data from various domains. Multilevel models accommodate the examination of, for example, individual-level data (e.g.,

product CI, brand knowledge), firm-level data (e.g., consumer responses resulting in strategy measures and performance outcomes), and pertinent country-level aspects that impact a firm's actions and outcomes based on consumer responses. The goal is to simultaneously consider various levels of the CO ecosystem—the consumer (micro), firm (meso), and even country context (macro)—to help determine how consumer-level attitudes and behavior impact firm-level marketing strategy and firm- and brand-level performance, while accounting for country-level influences (see, e.g., Molina-Azorín et al., 2010; Misangyi et al., 2006). Such designs accommodate multilevel theoretical framing, for example, by using two or more complementary conceptualizations or perspectives nested in an overarching theoretical foundation such as paradox theory.

Figure 1 represents a hypothetical multilevel CO model comprising three interrelated levels of analyses: host-market consumers, country attributes, and firm-level marketing strategy and outcomes—each of which is shown with exemplars. Given that the ultimate goal of CO investigations is to account for consumer responses, in order to develop more effective marketing strategies that also include pertinent contextual factors, multilevel conceptual models and empirical analyses are required. In Figure 1, consumers (Level 1) are nested within firms (Level 2), which are nested within countries (Level 3), representing three different levels of analyses. Given this view, multilevel CO studies need to be designed such that the resultant data sets are interrelated (vs. independent levels); observations in multilevel studies are not independent, as outcomes from one level are used as inputs in the next (cf. Hofmann 1997).

Insert Figure 1

The conceptualization in Figure 1 hosts complementary but competing CO aspects within a hypothetical multilevel model that accommodates the use of specific theories of a researcher's choosing at each level. Consumers' CO perceptions and corresponding attitudes, BO knowledge, and choice behavior constitute Level 1 of analysis. In this example, Level 1 leverages, for example, the theory of planned behavior (TPB) (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) as its foundation that accommodates the design of a suitable IM strategy (in Level 2). Firm-level segment-based IM strategies and their performance outcomes define Level 2, which in our example uses strategic action theory (Barney, 1996). Finally, country-related

influences impact the consumer and the firm (which may follow a pertinent theory) in Level 3, which, in our hypothetical example, leverages overlapping demand theory (Linder, 1961).⁷ Thus, consumers are nested within firms, which in turn are nested within countries. For example, a consumer's reaction and subsequent behavioral response to an advertisement intended to leverage or mitigate CO bias (a CO-based component of the firm's IM strategy) conforms with the TPB (Level 1), which in turn leads to the consumer's purchase of the advertised product (with the advertisement constituting a strategic action). Firms are nested within countries (Level 3) that may impose, for instance, cultural distance between the supplier and the consumer as a result of such country-level differences. This may impact a market's reception of imports from the focal supplier nation (in line with overlapping demand theory) and the firm's performance. The number of levels, types of measures, and corresponding theories may vary by project, with some studies using only two competing levels, while others may use more complex designs involving more levels, corresponding theories, and operationalizations. In this light, paradox theory and multilevel analysis offer a general guideline for envisioning richer and more fruitful CO research.

Multilevel designs within a paradox paradigm are clearly more complex and demanding. The implementation of multilevel models for CO research will require the collection of data for each level of analysis, which naturally demands more resources. Depending on the design, a project will need consumer data, corporate survey data, and additional data if more levels are used (e.g., archival trade data, firms' performance), in addition to product/brand performance data gathered directly from targeted firms.

Location and consumers' place-based perceptions of products have played a pivotal, if not the only, role in CO research. However, multilevel designs acknowledge that CO researchers' implicit goal is always a higher-level objective, for example, improving brand and organizational outcomes, enhancing foreign investment returns, or increasing the inbound flow of tourists (e.g., Molina-Azorín et al., 2010). This type of hierarchical structure is essential for resolving the reality researchers face in assessing origin-related issues because of the intuitive link between CO effects and actual product- and brand-level sales, which themselves are nested within the firm and/or industry levels.⁸

Analytically, hierarchical linear modeling is an appropriate approach and can be applied to any

number of multilevel conceptualizations, including, for example, more specific versions of the general conceptualizations in the literature (e.g., Samiee, 1994; Samiee & Chabowski, 2021). These and other similar multilevel frameworks can be nested within an overarching theoretically anchored conceptualization, such as our proposed paradox theory, and holistically respond to the CO literature's shortcomings and criticisms we have highlighted.

Conclusions and Implications

Despite much attention to origin-related research, the area is not holistically understood in terms of its relevance to marketing and firms' strategies. Criticisms regarding external validity issues, narrowly focused managerial relevance, and inadequate links with public policymaking have also diminished the value of this line of inquiry. In response to concerns about the marketing strategy and performance relevance of CO research, we propose using multilevel modeling that concurrently involves consumers, suppliers, and consuming-nation context, inclusive of marketing strategy elements and outcomes. The adoption of an overarching framework, appropriate theories for each level of analysis, and suitable choice of research design, in conjunction with multilevel modeling will constitute a major leap forward in an area that has become increasingly insular and self-sustaining. In this review, we propose a holistic view of the CO phenomenon by using an overarching theoretical framework (paradox theory), within which appropriate conceptualizations can be nested.

To date, no effort has been expended to build a theoretically anchored conceptualization with a comprehensive view of the CO ecosystem. CO research will benefit from the conceptual guardrails that a generally accepted comprehensive theory or conceptual framework provides. To this end, we argue that using an overarching conceptualization that captures the CO ecosystem's various facets is a good starting point. We further recommend using multilevel analysis and hierarchical linear modeling as a means of employing data from and testing models nested at different levels, considering a broader set of influential factors ranging from consumers and marketplace forces to marketing strategy and performance outcomes.

The use of uniform definitions of central CO concepts and constructs, while not essential for

advancing CO research, will facilitate comparisons of results across studies and, thus, orderly progress in future research. This has been partially accomplished within the CO body of knowledge. However, it is natural for researchers to explore and use variants of concepts and measurements (e.g., Hofstede's cultural dimensions). Scale modifications invariably involve fewer items than initially validated, without paying sufficient attention to assessing their appropriateness for reliable and valid measures that tap the conceptual domains of corresponding constructs (Katsikeas et al., 2023). More uniform sets of definitions and measures will accommodate the cross comparison of CO studies.

Our examination of the CO literature and the research recommendations from academics and managers reveal two critical areas that are virtually void of any contribution. The heightened economic importance of these domains makes these voids all the more surprising. First, the influence of ecommerce on consumers' attitudes toward and acceptance of products from international digital retail platforms remains unexplored. For example, Amazon represents a foreign retail brand, and global consumers' willingness to buy from (or avoid) Amazon is a reflection of their positive attitudes (or bias) toward a U.S. retail brand. Concurrently, Amazon and its local platforms (e.g., China, France) serve an array of merchants based in multiple markets. Given the pace of technological changes, research that reveals consumers' views toward a range of CO issues related to international ecommerce is necessary to fill this gap. A second neglected area is that of consumers' views toward an array of foreign-origin service brands (e.g., restaurants, entertainment). Internet retail brands (e.g., Alibaba, MercadoLibre, Zalando) constitute multinational ecommerce properties and service brands with the capacity and the goal of reaching consumers abroad. Given the importance of ecommerce and services in general in the economies of nations, multilevel CO modelling involving both deserves more scholarly attention.

Our surveys of export and import managers demonstrate that firms consider CO in decision-making, even if only tacitly. However, the managers offered no indication as to whether any of their CO considerations are based on their own research efforts, published academic research, or their experience. Managers' awareness and consideration of CO in IM decisions highlights the need for academics to develop studies in which CO and consumer behavior serve as inputs to IM strategy and firm-level

outcomes. Although CO literature offers an array of IM strategy recommendations, such recommendations are based only on consumers' input (demand-side), without any consideration of market-based strategy and organizational performance (supply-side). For the firm, consumers' CO views matter only if the impact on firm-level performance outcomes is significant.

Finally, for policy purposes, branches of government interacting with political bodies of other countries or with international organizations should be mindful of image-building and its long-term commercial (and social) impact. National image-building campaigns aimed at strengthening a country's overall stature can benefit from the findings reported in the CO literature. A country's image is shaped over time, and thus it is impacted to varying degrees by multiple influences, including the arts, culture, the government's global leadership, and technological achievements, in addition to the country's products and brands. A country's brand can be internationally ruined overnight, as currently is the case with Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Therefore, public policy can benefit from a sharper focus on CO research findings. For example, relevant government entities (e.g., commerce, tourism) and industry representatives may embark on joint image-enhancing campaigns. Over time, such measures should positively impact consumer views and brand- and firm-level outcomes.

Table 1
Theoretical aspects of country-of-origin studies

Theoretical aspects	Total (n=551) %	Time Period			
		<1990 (n ₁ =39) %	1990s (n ₂ =90) %	2000s (n ₃ =122) %	≥2010 (n ₄ =300) %
Number of theories used					
One	44.6	30.8	15.6	32.0	60.3
Two	10.9	-	4.4	11.5	14.0
Three	1.8	-	1.1	1.6	2.3
Four or more	.2	-	-	-	.3
No theory	42.5	69.2	78.9	54.9	23.0
Status of theories employed					
Existing theory	8.2	10.3	3.3	9.0	9.0
Theory extension	47.9	20.5	16.7	36.1	65.7
New theory development	1.5	-	1.1	-	2.3
No theory	42.5	69.2	78.9	54.9	23.0
Theoretical perspective used*					
Social identity theory	5.1	-	-	4.1	7.7
Cue utilization theory	3.8	7.7	-	.8	5.7
Schema congruity theory	3.6	-	4.4	-	5.3
Categorization theory	3.4	-	6.7	3.3	3.0
Theory of reasoned action	2.5	2.6	2.2	4.1	2.0
Signaling theory	2.5	-	-	-	4.7
Information integration theory	2.4	-	1.1	4.1	2.3
Stereotype content model	2.4	-	-	.8	4.0
Cognitive dissonance theory	2.2	-	1.1	3.3	2.3
Associative network theory	2.0	-	-	-	3.7
Dual process theory	1.6	-	-	-	2.3
Attribution theory	1.5	-	-	4.1	1.0
Congruence / congruity theory	1.5	-	2.2	1.6	1.3
Schema theory	1.5	-	3.3	-	1.7
Equity theory	1.3	-	-	-	2.3
Fishbein model	1.3	15.4	-	-	.4
System justification theory	1.3	-	-	-	2.3
Accessibility diagnosticity theory	1.3	-	-	3.3	1.0
Institutionalization theory	1.3	-	-	-	2.3
Self-categorization theory	1.1	-	-	-	2.0
Attachment theory	1.1	-	-	-	2.0
KEM animosity model	1.1	-	-	2.5	1.0
Other/New	25.6	5.1	8.9	22.1	34.7
No theory	42.5	69.2	78.9	54.9	23.0

*Multiple applications possible

Table 2
Research methods of country-of-origin studies

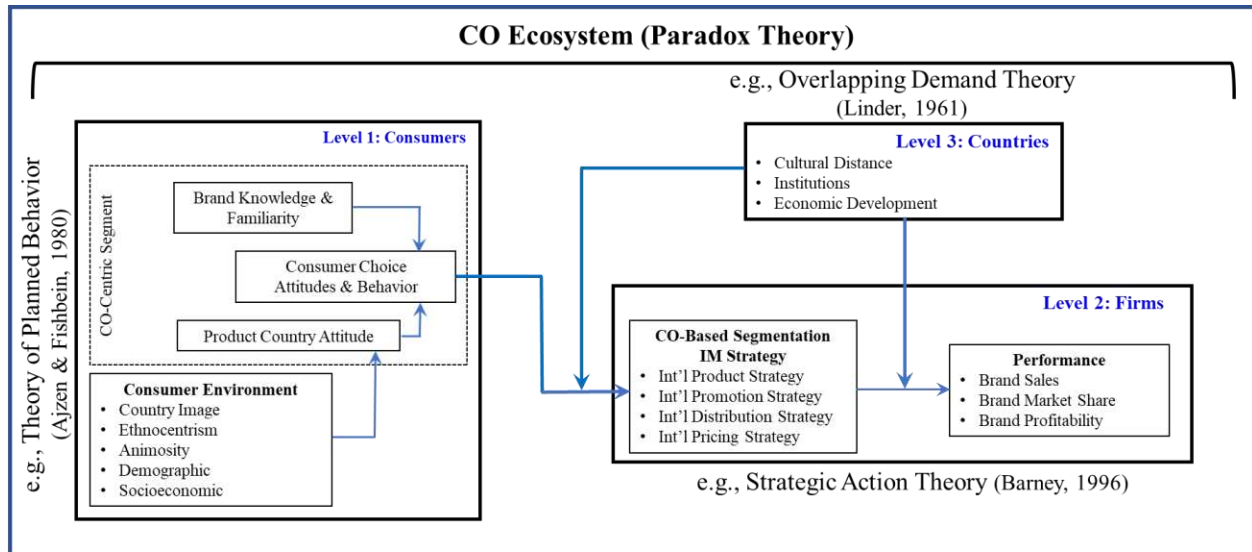
Research method characteristics	Total (n=551) %	Time Period			
		<1990 (n ₁ =39) %	1990s (n ₂ =90) %	2000s (n ₃ =122) %	≥2010 (n ₄ =300) %
<i>Research Design</i>					
Quantitative	94.1	94.9	92.2	91.0	95.7
Qualitative	2.9	-	3.3	3.3	3.0
Mixed methods	.5	-	-	1.6	.3
Non-empirical	2.5	5.1	4.4	4.1	1.0
<i>Problem crystallization</i>					
Exploratory	16.2	48.7	43.3	10.7	6.0
Formalized	81.3	46.2	52.2	85.2	93.0
Non-empirical	2.5	5.1	4.4	4.1	1.0
<i>Variable association</i>					
Descriptive	12.0	46.2	28.9	9.0	3.7
Causal	85.5	48.7	66.7	86.9	95.3
Non-empirical	2.5	5.1	4.4	4.1	1.0
<i>Temporal emphasis</i>					
Cross-sectional	93.5	89.7	90.0	90.2	96.3
Longitudinal	4.0	5.1	5.6	5.7	2.7
Non-empirical	2.5	5.1	4.4	4.1	1.0
<i>Research setting</i>					
Survey (field)	51.0	56.4	48.9	56.6	48.7
Experiment (laboratory)	44.1	38.5	42.2	37.7	48.0
Other	2.4	-	4.4	1.6	2.3
Non-empirical	2.5	5.1	4.4	4.1	1.0

Table 3
Academics' position regarding various criticisms of country-of-origin research*

Consumers do not really retain in their memory issues relating to the CO, which they consider when purchasing foreign products.	2.7
As opposed to other factors (e.g., price, quality, service, etc.), consumers do not perceive CO as an important factor influencing their purchasing decisions of foreign products.	3.1
The role of CO in consumer decisions to buy foreign products is both spontaneous and unconscious .	4.4
The fact that many products nowadays are hybrid (with the design, parts, and assembly made in different countries) questions the accuracy of consumers' perceptions of a product's CO.	4.7
The fact that the same brand can nowadays be produced simultaneously in different country locations (which consumers may not be aware of) can mislead consumers' perceptions of CO.	5.2
CO-related issues seem to matter more for consumers living in developed than developing countries.	2.5
Consumers may provide inaccurate evaluations of CO for foreign products (e.g., Chinese) that have changed their brand names to English .	5.4
CO studies conducted among students (rather than real consumers) may produce misleading results, because student samples are not representative .	4.1
The use of fictitious rather than real products in CO research can create inaccuracies in consumers' perceptions about the product's country of origin.	4.1

*Based on seven-point scales, ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree

Figure 1
A hypothetical multilevel model of country of origin



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¹The EU, for example, grants three geographic indications (GI) if a product has unique characteristics linked to a region: (1) protected designation of origin (PDO: food and wine), (2) protected geographical indication (PGI: food and wine), and (3) geographical indication (GI: spirit drinks). PDO has the strongest link to origin (e.g., Kalamata olive oil). PGI is associative based on the connection between a region and product (e.g., Bordeaux and Champagne) (European Commission, 2023).

²The Academic Journal Guide (Chartered Association of Business Schools) classifies most business publications, including about 70 marketing journals.

³Search terms are available from the authors upon request.

⁴Although we commissioned 35 responses each from importers and exporters, Qualtrics delivered 13 additional responses (9 exporters and 4 importers).

⁵Group means for exporters and importers are not significantly different and are only slightly above the midpoint of our 7-point scale. However, importers' means are invariably lower across all items (exporters = 4.70-5.34; importers = 4.05-5.15, where 1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree).

⁶We use “foreign-linked” to convey *all* origin-related associations with a product, brand, or service, inclusive of foreign ownership of locally produced products or brands, and service/tourism brands.

⁷The “overlapping demand theory” (Linder 1961) asserts that greater similarity of end-user preferences across countries leads to greater similarity across products and services demanded and, hence, the greater the trade potential between nations.

⁸Some CO studies use “multilevel” to refer to consumer responses to, e.g., product and brand (e.g., Leonidou et al., 2007; Zhou et al., 2010), but do not use multilevel designs.