

Country of Origin Perceptions: An Ethnocentric study of Chinese Products and Life Cycle Assessment in the Malaysian market

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of country of origin perceptions on Chinese products in the Malaysian market. Specifically, the study focuses on how Malaysian consumers perceive Chinese products and how their perceptions are influenced by ethnocentrism, a tendency to favor products from their own country. The study utilizes a mixed-method approach, including a survey and interviews with Malaysian consumers. The findings of the study suggest that Malaysian consumers have mixed perceptions of Chinese products, influenced by various factors such as product quality, price, and branding. However, the study also finds that ethnocentrism plays a significant role in shaping consumers' perceptions of Chinese products. Malaysian consumers tend to favor products made in Malaysia or from other countries that are perceived as more similar to Malaysia in terms of culture and values. The study also identifies several implications for marketers of Chinese products in the Malaysian market. Marketers need to be aware of the importance of country of origin perceptions and the role of ethnocentrism in shaping these perceptions. They need to develop strategies to overcome negative perceptions and build a positive image for Chinese products. Marketers should also consider adapting their marketing strategies to the local culture and values to increase acceptance of their products. Furthermore, the study contributes to the understanding of country-of-origin perceptions and the role of ethnocentrism in shaping consumer behavior in the Malaysian market. The findings have practical implications for marketers of Chinese products in Malaysia and provide insights for future research in this area.

Keywords: *Country-of-Origin, Malaysia, Customers, Purchase, Chinese, Behaviour.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Country of Origin (COO) is a term used to describe a country that controls the production and manufacturing processes of a given product (Adejorooluwa and Liu, 2018). For instance, marketing decisions, as well as other decisions concerning the product, are made based on the country of origin of the product. The country of origin primarily influences the perception of a product in the market, such as its quality, reliability, performance, and prestige. The study has shown that consumers tend to develop positive or negative attitudes on products based on the information they have on the country of origin of the product. The biases associated with the country of origin have negatively impacted the developing countries as compared to developed ones. Consumers tend to perceive products from developing countries to be of a low quality than those from developed

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nations such as America and the United Kingdom (Wang and Chen, 2004). In understanding the relations that exist between the country of origin and product perception, the paper evaluates Malaysian customers and how they perceive Chinese electronic products (Shwedeh, F., Hami, N., & Baker, S. Z. A., 2020). Malaysia imports more of its electronic products from the Chinese market. Research indicating that 22 percent of the country's imports are from China, followed by 13 percent of imports from Singapore. Over the years, Malaysian customers have preferred Chinese products such as Huawei and Oppo (Yusof, 2003). Research indicates that Chinese products constitute 44 percent of the electronic market in Malaysia. Despite the upper hand in the market, China faces competition from South Korean products and America, such as Samsung and Apple. According to Salwani et al. (2009).

Nurhayati and Hendar (2019) claim that consumer's behavior is affected by product knowledge. Product knowledge refers to the knowledge customers have on a particular product. The country of origin is also discussed while putting into consideration the product knowledge in the market. Product knowledge is usually established based on many aspects; customer experience on the product, competition, specifications as well as the market trends (Grunert, 2005). Customers who had a better experience of a product are likely to buy the same product and inform others about the product. The market trends as well increase the product knowledge to customers. For instance, firms compete based on the technological advancements they use in their production. In electronic devices, more user-friendly skills have been used in manufacturing gadgets, which then increases their purchasing power. According to Knight et al. (2007), the country of origin is associated with the production of highly competitive goods, which then increases the product knowledge of such commodities (Shwedeh, F., Hami, N., Bakar, S. Z. A., Yamin, F. M., & Anuar, A., 2022).

The main objective of this paper, therefore, is to investigate the Malaysians' perception and ethnocentrism scale when buying local products by analysing how they perceive Chinese products. Specific research questions were used to answer our study. What perspective do Malaysians customers have toward Chinese products? What beliefs and values do Malaysians have about China as a country? How do Malaysians feel about the electronic products from other countries, and how does that influence China? What factors among the Malaysian customers shape their perspective towards Chinese products? What challenges do domestic firms face in dealing with the competition of Chinese products. The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the review of literature, section 3 explains the data collection methods used, section 4 describes the data and the methodology. Finally, section 5 presents the empirical results, and section 6 discusses the results, conclusions are provided in the last section.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of country of origin has become a significant aspect of international trade. Countries claim that rules and regulations should be set in a manner that helps to regulate the practices in the country of origin (Yas, H., Mardani, A., Albayati, Y. K., Lootah, S. E., & Streimikiene, D., 2020). Countries such as America whose economy is developed tend to influence the global market as their products are highly demanded (Trebilcock et al., 2005). Scholars have the notion that consumers use COO in evaluating the quality and demand of goods, which is an irrational tactic. The quality of the product, safety measures, and consumer satisfaction, which are essential aspects for assessing a product, are instead ignored. Carneiro and Faria (2016) argue that the process of consumers evaluating products is associated with the cognitive process. Customers evaluate products based on particular features. In electronic products such as mobile phones, customers observe features such as performance, safety measures, and size. Such features help in ascertaining whether the product is of the relevant standard, if it has any default or if it is

different from other products in the market (Salloum, S., Al Marzouqi, A., Alderbashi, K. Y., Shwedeh, F., Aburayya, A., Al Saidat, M. R., & Al-Marroof, R. S., 2023).

The topic concerning country of origin has played a significant role in understanding the relationship that exists between consumer behaviors and their taste on certain goods (Piron, 2000). Research has indicated that consumers tend to use the information they have concerning the country of origin in evaluating products. A study by Šliburytė and Bankauskienė (2017) posits that customers apply the country of origin to assess their attitude towards products. These attitudes result in stereotyping and the formation of the belief that end up affecting the taste and preferences of customers (Yas, H., Mardani, A., & Alfarttoosi, A., 2020). China, for instance, has been stereotyped in manufacturing fake products (Smith et al., 2006). The opinion has changed over time as Chinese electronic firms have proven to compete favourably with other global firms such as Nokia, Samsung, and Apple (Aburayya, A., Salloum, S., Alderbashi, K., Shwedeh, F., Shaalan, Y., Alfaisal, R., Malaka, S. and Shaalan, K., 2023). Chinese firms have been able to utilize the market segmentation technique to divide their markets into groups based on customers' needs. By studying the market, Chinese firms have grown to have global influence changing the beliefs of people about the products they produce (Shwedeh, F., Hami, N., & Bakar, S. Z. A., 2021).

Country of origin influences product evaluation based on the brand position of the firm in question. For instance, several firms have invested in developing their brand through advertisement and other marketing techniques (Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2002). Such organizations have a high brand positioning as compared to others. Organizations such as Samsung and Apple have a top positioning brand that changes the perception of customers (Ravikumar, R., Kitana, A., Taamneh, A., Aburayya, A., Shwedeh, F., Salloum, S., & Shaalan, K., 2022). For firms having a developed brand, customers tend to purchase their products based on their already established name. Products competing against firms of an inferior brand thus experience higher sales. Similar research by Munasinghe and Dissanayake (2017) claims that customers tend to evaluate and categorize products based on their brands. In their study, customers have the belief that a product is of better quality best on the history of a particular country (Yas, H., Jusoh, A., Streimikiene, D., Mardani, A., Nor, K. M., Alatawi, A., & Umarlebbe, J. H., 2021). In Malaysia, for example, customers demand Chinese products based on the influence China has on the country. According to Doctor off (2012), Electronic products manufactured by Oppo, a Chinese firm has received positive market sales in Malaysia. The sales are attributed to the consistency of China, offering reliable products such as Huawei and Lenovo products.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research methodology refers to the steps, strategies and procedures used for data gathering and analysis in research (Polit & Beck 2008: 758). Burns & Grove (2005: 211) add that the research methodology is the blueprint for conducting the study that maximizes control over factors that could interfere with the validity of the findings. It guides the researcher in planning and implementing the study in a way most likely to achieve the intended goal (Yas, H., Alkaabi, A., Al Mansoori, H. M., Masoud, M., & Alessa, A., 2021). This chapter presents the research methodology used in this study, including the population and sampling frame, data collection procedures, data analysis, validity and reliability and the ethical considerations. In this study, the researcher employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches consisting of interviewing, focus group discussions and observations.

Several research methodologies were used to assess the perceptions of Malaysian customers on Chinese electronic products. Questionnaires have an advantage when used as a data collection tool over the other methods in that, they are relatively easy to analyze, large sample of the given population can be contacted at relatively low cost. Also,

questionnaires format is familiar to many respondents and that they are simple to administer. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used in analyzing the data. To get to understand the perspective Malaysian customers have toward Chinese products, we used surveying as a research method. To facilitate the survey process and gain information on various aspects of Malaysian customers, questionnaires were used. Both online and oral surveys were used. The majority of those who participated in the questionnaires were youths and adults from the age of 18 to 55.

During the study, the researcher focused on Malaysians who reported to have used the china's electronic gadgets and aged between the ages of 18 to 55 years. Since the exact population was not known the sample size was obtained using the Leslie Kish sample size formula (Kish, 1965). Total samples of two hundred eighty-nine (289) respondents were randomly selected from the population. The respondents were selected randomly from the market places, one from each household that uses the gadgets.

$$n = \frac{Z^2pq}{d^2}$$

Where; n = the required sample size z = the standard normal value corresponding to the required level of confidence (95%) = 1.96

p = the proportion of people satisfied with the gadget, 25%. (Since p is not known, 25% was used to give appropriate sample size)

q = (1 - p), the proportion of people who are not satisfied with the gadgets

d = The desired exactness of the estimate 5% (0.05)

Therefore,

$$n = \frac{Z^2p(1 - p)}{d^2}$$

$$n = \frac{1.96^2 * 0.25(1 - 0.25)}{0.05^2}$$

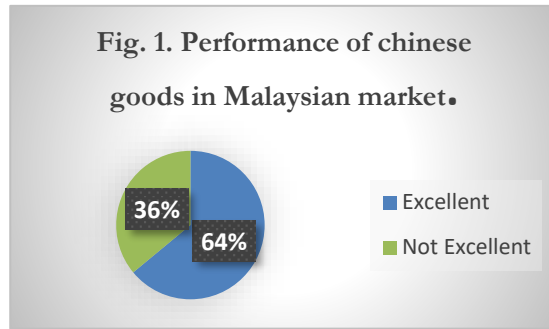
$$n = 289$$

The study was conducted on 289 Chinese product customers

Customers in Malaysia were interviewed to obtain their opinions towards China. During the interviews, people's opinion was captured and recorded to get an overall analysis. 289 people were interviewed, and the results obtained represent the entire population of Malaysia. Those who conducted the interview were encouraged to provide a genuine response to help the study process and obtain reliable feedback (Khudhair, H. Y., & Hamid, A. B. A., 2015). The questions used in the interview process were clear enough to the interviewers as well as expressing the intended purpose of the research. For that case, the questions asked required short answers such as yes or no. Sampling involves selecting a few subjects randomly that represent the entire population of the research process. With this method, the market of Malaysia was analysed to understand the extent to which Chinese electronic products are sold in the Malaysian market. In order to achieve that, selected shops in major cities in Malaysia were sampled and be used in the study. At the end of the study, 289 shops attendants who acted as our primary data source were used in examining the brands that are sold based on demand. Various tactics were used in the sampling process which included; judgmental and random sampling. For this study, Malaysian customers were the targeted population. Cluster sampling was used in grouping the selected population rather than studying the whole population. The method was more suitable for this study because it was anticipated that individuals within a cluster might exhibit similar characteristics.

4. EMPIRICAL RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The section presents the findings of the research per the research methodologies employed. The results were represented in tables, statistical representation, as well as graphs. The questionnaire was to examine the perspective of Chinese products. The data was then decoded using QDA Miner Lite software. From the surveys conducted, 64 percent of the participants responded by claiming that the performance of Chinese electronic products such as Huawei is of excellent performance. Claiming Huawei and other Chinese products to perform better was associated with these products being user-friendly as well as other productions such as the configuration of other elements.

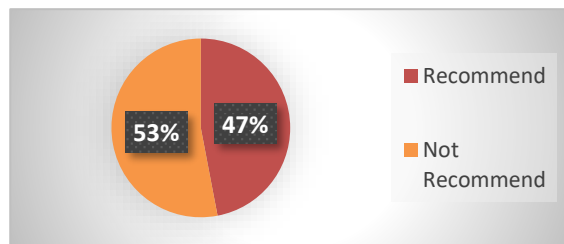


Data source; primary data 2018

The figure above, shows the performance of the Chinese products in the Malaysian market. 64% of the respondents said that Chinese products were excellent. The figure shows how the Chinese goods fair in the Malaysian market. Even though they are imports in the Malaysian market, they occupy a bigger share meaning that Malaysians buy the Chinese goods to a large extent.

Recommendation of the product to other customers

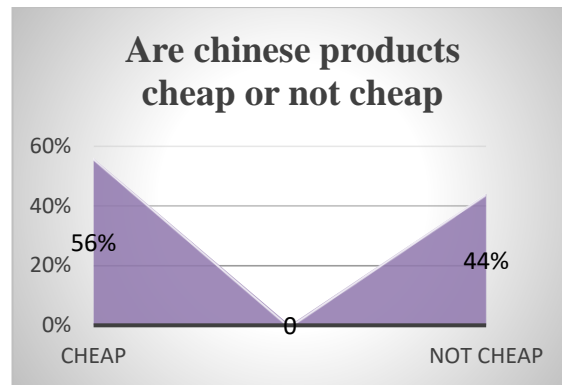
Among the respondents, 47 percent of them agreed that they are likely to recommend Chinese electronic products to their friends. This is quite a reasonable percentage given that the goods are trading in a foreign market. This is clearly shown by the below diagram that is Fig.2.



Data source; primary data 2018

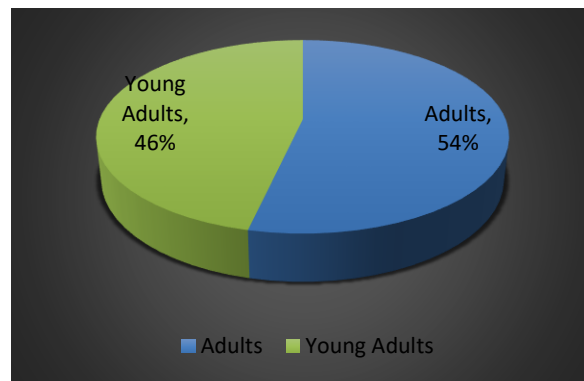
The results in the figure above shows the percentage of Malaysians who were ready to recommend Chinese products to their friends. 47% were willing to do so.

Based on the price of Chinese electronic products, 56 percent of participants claimed that they prefer Chinese products as they are affordable. Comparing Chinese products with other products such as Samsung and Apple, Malaysian customers claim that China offers quality products with an affordable market price (Ernst and Dolnicar, 2018). Of the 56 percent of participants, 30 percent where adults aged 33 to 55, while 26 percent constituted people aged 18 to 33 years.



Data source; primary data 2018

The results in the above figure also shows that 56% agreed that Chinese products are cheap and that is why they can recommend them to others. As from the above diagram 56% of the sampled population agreed that Chinese products are cheap and affordable and they were willing to recommend them to other people. Out of this 56%, 30 % were adults aging between 33 to 55 years and 26% constituted young adults aging between 18 to 33 years. This is clearly shown by the below diagram.



Data source; primary data 2018

The figure above shows the age of the sampled population that participated in the study and it indicates that most of the respondents were adults (54.0%) and about 46.0% were young adults.

Ethnocentrism is the belief that one's culture is superior to other people's cultures (Piekkari & Tiennari, 2017). In examining how Malaysians view their culture with that of the Chinese, an interview was conducted to obtaining opinions. From the two thousand individuals who participated in the interview, an opinion was obtained in understanding how Malaysians perceive China, their products, and the relationship between the two countries. To achieve objective results, a sampled ground that would represent Malaysian customers were selected. It involved youth, men as well as women from different social class as well as diverse educational qualifications. From the ethnocentric statements presented to the group that participated in the interview, three-quarters of the population had a positive opinion towards China.

Table 1: The Ethnocentric Statements Presented to the Group

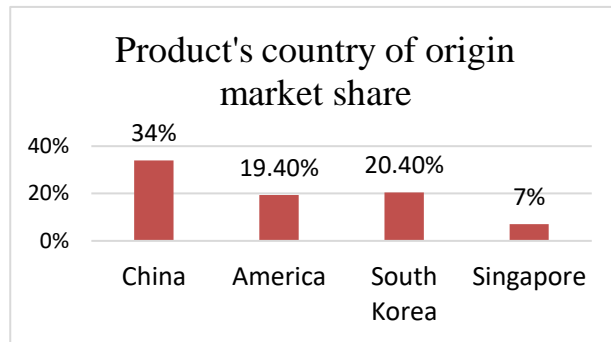
Ethnocentric statements	Findings
Chinese culture is eroding the Malaysian culture, and the relationship between the two countries should be stopped.	Contrary view
Malaysian firms should be funded to avoid foreign products.	Contrary view
Foreign firms should be prohibited from investing in Malaysia.	Contrary view

All imports from China should be stopped as they affect domestic firms.	Contrary view
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Data source; primary data 2018

The findings are as highlighted below. From the opinions presented to Malaysians, 75 percent of the population subjected to the interview opinions responded with a contrary view. The findings indicate that Malaysia has a higher index of cultural relativism. To have a clear picture of the sales margin of Chinese electronic products with those from other countries, shops were sampled to help in the study. The research also used observation skills to observe the electronic devices that most of the Malaysian customers use. While recording the market trends, the prices of products from different countries were also analysed. Costs and the performance of these electronic products were also observed, and an overall market trend was recorded. Major firms that supply these such as America, Singapore, South Korea, and China were used in the study. The Smartphone and their Country of origin were established.

Table 2: The Analysis of smartphones in the country of origin



Data source; primary data 2018

From Fig.5.above, China leads the market share owning 34% with her products being Huawei and Oppo. Americas Apple controls 19.4% of the market share, with South Korea’s Samsung having 20.4% and lastly Singapore’s Singtel only has 7% of the market share.

The above figure shows how the electronic products from different countries fair in the Malaysian market. China has the lions share with 34% and therefore leads in the market. This means that she has the largest customer base in the Malaysian market and also clears the stereotype that products from China are fake.

The table 3: The relationship between the socio-demographic variables and the performance of Chinese products in Malaysia

Variables	Categories	Performance of Chinese goods in Malaysian market		P-value
		Excellent(%age)	Not excellent(%age)	
Price of the products	Cheap	40	60	0.005
	Not cheap	51.9	48.1	
Foreign firms should be prohibited from investing in Malaysia,	Yes	43.5	56.5	0.00
	Now	0	100	
All imports from China	Yes	53.5	46.5	0.001

Variables	Categories	Performance of Chinese goods in Malaysian market		P-value
		Excellent(%age)	Not excellent(%age)	
should be stopped as they affect domestic firms,	No	62	38	
Recommendation of the products	recommended	42.3	57.7	0.615
	Not recommended	40.8	59.2	
Age of the respondents	Young adults	36	64	0.000
	Adults	48.1	51.9	
Products' country of origin	China	48.2	51.8	0.000
	America	47.1	52.9	
	South Korea	38.6	61.4	
	Singapore	21.6	78.4	
Malaysian firms should be funded so as to avoid foreign products	Yes	26	74	0.67
	No	45.1	54.9	
Chinese culture mixing eroded	Yes	44.7	55.3	0.041
	No	40.5	59.5	

Data source; primary data 2018

The table above contains results that assess the relationship between factors that influence the perception of the people on the consumption of china goods in Malaysia. The perception has been based on the classification of performance to whether its excellent or not excellent. The relationship was accessed using the p-value after running the cross tabulation between the independent variables and the dependent variable (Performance of Chinese goods in Malaysian market). The results show that the respondents who said that the products were cheap were more likely to report that the performance of the products in the market were not excellent (60.0%) and the relationship between the two were very significant with p-value of 0.005 at 95% confidence interval. Also products country of origin was seen significant in relation to performance in the market where by products from china were found averagely competing with other products from other countries but products from Singapore with a poor performance of (78.4%). This was found very significant with p-value of 0.00 at 95% confidence interval.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of the analysis concerning the impacts of the country of origin on Malaysian customers are discussed in detail. The results showed that the country of origin has a significant effect on their products. Malaysians, for instance, prefer Chinese electronic products based on the reputation of the country (Salameh, M., Taamneh, A., Kitana, A., Aburayya, A., Shwede, F., Salloum, S., and Varshney, D., 2022). China has always been a guru when it comes to production of quality products in the electronics field. Chinese companies like the Oppo are well known for production of quality products like the Lenovo laptops which are worldly used (SHWEDEH, F. F., 2021). The consistency of manufacturing quality products with exceptional performance has given them a competitive advantage in the Malaysian market. Last year, Huawei gained 2.9

billion dollars in the Malaysian market, which resulted in an 8.7 percent increase in the profit margin as compared to the previous year (Šliburytė and Bankauskienė, 2017). Despite China having a larger share in the Malaysia electronic products, the country is also facing competition from Apple and Samsung. Malaysia being developing country; majority of its citizens are categorized as middle earners. Chinese electronic products are fairly priced and therefore, they are highly demanded as opposed to South Korean and American products (Alkashami, M., Taamneh, A., Khadragy, S., Shwedeh, F., Aburayya, A., & Salloum, S., 2023).

Ethnocentrism has impacted the expansion of business and the growth of organizations negatively (Michailova et al., 2017). The interview conducted to determine the stereotype levels of Malaysian customers towards China, and her products showed that Malaysia is a cultural relativism nation. Malaysia does not view their culture as of a higher status than those of others, and this has encouraged foreign investors to flock the Malaysian market (Yas, H., Alsaud, A., Almaghrabi, H., Almaghrabi, A., & Othman, B., 2021). The stereotypes which have been that china's products are fake seemed not to be among Malaysians. They have a positive perception of China and her and especially the electronic products. Findings from the interview indicated that more than 75 percent of Malaysian customers believe in Chinese electronic products. Malaysian imports go up to a tune of 55 percent, this clearly demonstrates that the country is open to trade from the outside world. The country's policies too favour foreign firms and to invest in the country (Yas, H., Alnazawi, A. A., Alanazi, M. A., Alharbi, S. S., & Alghamdi, A., 2022). Electronic products constitute a more significant percentage. The competition between foreign firms and local organizations has led to the production of quality products that meet customer expectations.

Based on the market trends conducted in the Malaysian market to understand the electronic products that have a higher market share, the following results were obtained. Most of the Malaysian shops sell Chinese electronic products more as compared to electronic products from America, South Korea, and America (Khudhair, H. Y., Jusoh, A., Mardani, A., Nor, K. M., & Streimikiene, D., 2019). The higher market share of Chinese electronic products was attributed to the Product knowledge that customers have towards the country of origin (Yas, H., Mardani, A., & Alfarttoosi, A., 2020).. The brand of Chinese electronic products has gained influence in most Asian countries, including Malaysia. At least 23 percent of Malaysian customers were found to have bought Chinese products, while 17 percent claimed they have heard of Chinese brands such as Huawei and Oppo. In similar research, 14 percent of the customers said their experience with Chinese electronic products was excellent. The product knowledge that Malaysians have on Chinese electronic products was pinned to factors such as COO and brand (Nagy, 2017).

Customer characteristics such as age, education, and taste have also been said to affect the country of origin. Malaysian customers aged 33 to 55 prefer electronic products from both South Korea, China, and America. Customers of 33 years and below showed influential attachments to Chinese products as compared to the other countries. There were no links found between education and the country of origin and how it affected electronic products. The taste of customers, on the other hand, was linked to factors such as market trends, culture, and level of income. Jaggi and Bahl's (2019) ideas claim that a country that has a supporting culture is likely to gain a foreign market. China, for instance, through the Confucius culture, advocates for trust and honesty has made the country gain market. Malaysian customers have been seen to accept electronic products from China based on their lifestyle (Khudhair, H. Y., Jusoh, A., Mardani, A., & Nor, K. M., 2019). The majority of citizen's ions Malaysia are middle earners, and Chinese products fit their preference as Chinese electronic Products aim at middle-class customers.

6. CONCLUSION

The study has been important in that it has enabled us to establish the impacts of a country's origin towards customer's evaluation of foreign products. To accomplish the research, Malaysian customers were used as respondents of the research. Questions and statements that required customer's opinions were formulated and were administered as required. They formed the bigger part of the research methodologies. Different research methods, such as observation, interviews, case studies, and use of questionnaires as data collection tool were used. While doing this study, other certain aspects together with the country of origin, helped in determining the consumer's purchasing behavior. Such as brand, product knowledge, countries belief, price, and product quality help in evaluating products. The following findings helped in assessing the effects of COO on Malaysian customers. The find is out how Malaysian customers perceive Chinese electronic products, structured questionnaires were used, with about three hundred respondents filling them. From the polls, it was concluded that Malaysians perceive Chinese products to be better with about 54 percent recommending their performance to be excellent. Among the factors, they stated while rating Chinese electronic products include excellent performance and affordable prices. To establish the image of China among the Malaysians, stereotype opinions were presented to inform of interviews. The research indicated that Malaysians are positive towards Chinese firms and products. Malaysians perceive Chinese to be kind, loyal, and honest, and as a result, they see their products to be legit. The research also established the role of product knowledge and its role in affecting the customer's choice. The study showed that 12 percent of Malaysians know about Chinese electronic products due to the brand image of these firms.

7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The research was limited by the research methodologies used. The study experienced challenges from the participants in that not all customers were ready to take part in the study that is, filling in the questionnaire. Others claimed of being too busy such that they cannot answer our calls for interviews. Notably, the cluster sampling method is not entirely reliable as some clusters may be overrepresented or underrepresented (Levy & Leweshow, 2013). Also, most of the online interviews and questionnaires were not responded on time, which delayed the research findings. Also, we faced financial constrains while conducting this study. At some point we even lacked means to do online interviews. This delayed the data collection which also delayed the research findings. In the future, we recommend the use of advanced data collection tools, and even data analysis tools. These would help in analysing a bigger population within a shorter time. That will help in obtaining objective results as it will get an opinion from the majority of the customers. Furthermore, the effects of external elements such as market trends affect the proper understanding of how COO affects consumer's decisions towards products. I would commend that the above recommendations be taken into account in future studies as they will smoothen and ease the whole research process.

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