

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter summarises the investigation and discusses the conclusions from this thesis in the light of previous research. Implications for research are then discussed, followed by the managerial implications. Limitations of the present research and future research directions are discussed toward the end of the chapter.

The present research built up a conceptual framework explaining the interrelationships between country-of-origin effects and consumer-based brand equity in a given product category. The proposed model developed in the thesis was one of the first to explain the relationships between country-of-origin effects and consumer-based brand equity. The results of the empirical study provided support for the proposed model. Confirmatory factor analysis established the multidimensionality of consumer-based brand equity. The hypothesised four-dimensional construct was supported by the data, across two product categories and six brands. Brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty were the observed dimensions of consumer-based brand equity. The findings confirm often-voiced yet untested sentiments in the literature that country-of-origin effects influence the equity of brands (e.g., Aaker 1991; Keller 1993; Shocker, Srivastava & Ruekert 1994; Thakor & Katsanis 1997). MANOVA of the data derived from the confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity in a given product category significantly varied according to the (i) country-of-origin of the brand (ii) product category and (iii) brand name within a product category. In addition, the consumer-based equity of a brand was found to be positively and significantly related to the *macro* and *micro* images of the country-of-origin of the brand.

### 7.2 OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

The confirmatory factor analysis established the multidimensionality of consumer-based brand equity, consistent with the conceptualisation of Aaker (1991). The four-dimensional construct found in this thesis was similar to Cobb-Walgren, Ruble and Donthu (1995), but contrasted the findings of other researchers. For example, Yoo and Donthu (2001) and Yoo, Donthu and Lee (2000) developed a consumer-based brand equity measure based on Aaker's (1991) and Keller's (1993) conceptualisation, but observed only three brand equity dimensions. They combined the dimensions of brand awareness and brand associations into one.

The results also indicated that compared to Malaysia and China, respondents held stronger product category-country associations for Japan for both cars and televisions. Compared to Malaysia, respondents held stronger product category-country associations for China for both product categories. Respondents perceived larger differences between Japan and the other two countries (China and Malaysia), but perceived smaller differences between China and Malaysia, in terms of product category-country associations.

Further, respondents perceived a hierarchy among the brands in both the product categories, in terms of product category-brand associations. The results indicated that, compared to Toshiba and Hitachi, respondents held stronger product category-brand associations for Sony for televisions. Respondents also held stronger product category-brand associations for Toshiba compared to Hitachi. The hierarchy of the brands, in terms of product category-brand associations for the television category was: Sony, Toshiba and Hitachi. The results also indicated that, compared to Mitsubishi and Suzuki, respondents held stronger product category-brand associations for Toyota for cars. Respondents also held stronger product category-brand associations for Mitsubishi compared to Suzuki for cars. The hierarchy of the brands in terms of product category-brand associations in the car category was: Toyota, Mitsubishi and Suzuki.

Factor analysis and repeated measures ANOVA of the data indicated that respondents' country image perceptions of Japan, Malaysia and China were significantly different at both *macro* and *micro* levels. Respondents held favourable country image for Japan compared to Malaysia and China, at both *macro* and *micro* levels. Respondents held favourable country image of Malaysia compared to China at both *macro* and *micro* levels. These findings were consistent with previous research. Several studies (e.g., Agarwal & Sikri 1996; Han & Terpstra 1988; Heslop & Papadopoulos 1993; Okechuku 1994; Papadopoulos & Heslop 1988) found that consumers perceived products from Japan positively.

### **7.2.1 Conclusions about Research Hypotheses**

Hypothesis H<sub>1</sub> stated that consumer-based equity of a brand varies according to its country-of-origin (see section 3.3.2). The major substantive finding from the testing of the model is that, for the product categories of televisions and cars in the Australian market, the consumer-based equity of a brand varied significantly according to its country-of-origin (see section 6.2.1). Further, the results indicated that this occurred where consumers perceived substantive differences between countries in terms of their country images and

strength of association with the product category. The consumer-based brand equity levels of brands made in a country with a more favourable country image and stronger product category-country associations (e.g., Japan) were significantly higher than those of the same brands made in a country with a less favourable image and weaker product category-country associations (e.g., Malaysia/China). This finding confirms the predictions of previous researchers that country-of-origin impacts brand equity (e.g., Aaker 1991; Keller 1993; Shocker, Srivastava & Ruekert 1994; Thakor & Katsanis 1997). This finding also lends support to Ahmed and d' Astous (1996) who argued that the equity of a brand may be 'enhanced or detracted by the brand's associations with new and different countries of origin' (p 94).

While a large body of previous research has (i) demonstrated the impact of country-of-origin on consumers' product evaluations and purchase intentions (e.g., Chao 1993; Hong & Wyer 1990; Johansson, Douglas & Nonaka 1985) and (ii) examined the relative importance of brand and country-of-origin cues (e.g., d' Astous & Ahmed 1992; Haubl 1996; Nebenzahl & Jaffe 1996; Okechuku 1994; Wall, Liefeld & Heslop 1991), the present study has confirmed empirically the impact of country-of-origin on the consumer-based equity of a brand.

The finding regarding country-of-origin main effect is unique in the sense that, at the time of writing this chapter and to the best of the author's knowledge, the present study is the first to investigate the relationship between country-of-origin effects and consumer-based brand equity. As previously mentioned, the country-of-origin has been partitioned into cues such as 'country of manufacture', 'country of design', and 'country of brand' and 'country of assembly'. It is interesting to view the findings of the present study in the context of the research on the relative importance of such cues on consumers' product evaluations. Ahmed and d' Astous (1995) found that 'country of manufacture' was more important to consumers than 'country of design' for the product category consumer electronic goods (VCRs), whereas 'country of manufacture' was equally important as 'country of design' for 'automobiles'. Han (1988) found that 'country of manufacture' had a greater effect compared to the 'country of design', for both automobiles and televisions. Chao (1993) found that both 'country of design' and 'country of assembly' had equal impact on consumers' perception of quality of products, whereas Ulgado and Lee (1993) found that 'country of brand' had a greater impact than the 'country of manufacture'. Further, Amonini, Keogh and Sweeney (1999) found that 'country of manufacture' had a greater effect than the 'country of the brand'. The conflicting findings in the literature led

Amonini, Keogh and Sweeney to conclude that ‘the relative influence of the ‘country of brand’ and the ‘country of manufacture’ may be product or situation specific’ (p 20). In the present study, the consumer-based equity for a brand made in its home country was found to be significantly higher than that for the same brand made in other countries.

Hypotheses  $H_{1a}$ ,  $H_{1b}$  and  $H_{1c}$  predicted the relationship between country-of-origin of a brand and three of the dimensions of its consumer-based equity (see section 3.3.2). Each of the three consumer-based equity dimensions of a brand (e.g., brand associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty) was expected to vary significantly by the country-of-origin. The results confirmed this (see section 6.2.1). Further, results suggested that this occurred where consumers perceived substantive differences between the countries in terms of their country images and their product category-country associations. That is, the consumer-based equity dimensions of a brand made in a country with favourable country image and stronger product category-country associations (e.g., Japan), were significantly higher than that of the same brand made in a country with a less favourable image and weaker product category-country associations (e.g., Malaysia/China). This conclusion is based on synthesising the results of MANOVA (section 6.2.1) with the results of repeated measures one-way ANOVA of country image (see section 5.5) and respondents’ association outcomes (see section 5.2.1).

As previously discussed, the relationship between country-of-origin and brand awareness was not predicted as it was not possible to manipulate consumer mindset regarding brand awareness (see section 3.3.2). However, brand awareness varied significantly according to the country-of-origin of the brand (see section 6.2.1). One plausible explanation for this is that the results might have occurred because of demand artefacts. For example, the question related to brand recall required the respondents to list the names of upto six brands from a given product category. Recall that the brand awareness measures were not systematically varied among the three groups of respondents. Each respondent was asked to evaluate the brand equity measures from only one of the three countries: Japan, Malaysia or China (see section 4.6.2). However, respondents might have answered the question on brand awareness towards the end, by which time they might have (incorrectly) presumed that, their awareness of brands made in a particular country was questioned. Lim and Darley (1997) demonstrated that country-of-origin studies are susceptible to demand artefacts

The findings of the present study provide support for Aaker’s (1991) and Keller’s (1993) argument that country-of-origin associations are secondary associations to brand

associations. Respondents' associations for a brand made in a country with favourable image and strong associations with the product category were significantly higher than those for the same brand made in a country with a less favourable image and weaker association with the product category. The impact of country-of-origin associations on brand associations was not directly measured in the study. However, the findings from MANOVA related to country-of-origin and brand associations (see section 6.2.1) suggest that consumers' country-of-origin associations do influence their brand associations.

Several researchers demonstrated that a product's country-of-origin influenced consumers' perception of quality of products from the country (Chao 1998; Heslop, Liefeld & Wall 1987; Kaynak & Cavusgil 1983; Nagashima 1970, 1977; Reiersen 1966). The present study further confirmed that country-of-origin influenced the perceived quality of products. Researchers observed that the impact of country-of-origin was the largest in relation to perceived quality compared to its impact on purchase intention (e.g., Lim, Darley & Summers 1994; Verlegh & Steenkamp 1999). The present study also found that the differences by country-of-origin were the largest for 'perceived quality'. For example, the differences by country-of-origin for 'perceived quality' were approximately twice those observed for 'brand loyalty', and one and half times those for 'brand associations' (see Table 6.4).

As previously mentioned, Agarwal and Sikri (1996) found that country-of-origin effects in one product category transferred to new product categories from the same country. The results of the present study lend credence to Agarwal and Sikri's argument of 'transference of beliefs'. For example, respondents in the present study were found to be more loyal towards a brand made in a country with favourable image and strong association with the product category compared to the same brand made in a country with a less favourable image and weaker association with the product category. This suggests that respondent beliefs about a country/products from a country (e.g., Malaysia/China) transferred to foreign brands (e.g., Sony/Toyota) made in that country (e.g., Malaysia/China). Support for hypothesis H<sub>1c</sub> also lends credence to the notion of country loyalty. This finding supports the argument of Ahmed and d' Astous (1996, p 199) who argued that consumers develop loyalty towards countries and in turn, consumers might continue to prefer cars from Japan or shoes from Italy.

Hypothesis H<sub>2</sub> stated that the consumer-based equity of a brand varies according to the product category (see section 3.3.3). The results indicated that consumer-based equity of brands significantly varied by product category (see section 6.2.1). The consumer-based

equity of brands for cars was significantly different from that of televisions. Hypotheses H<sub>2a</sub>, H<sub>2b</sub>, H<sub>2c</sub> and H<sub>2d</sub> predicted that each of the four consumer-based equity dimensions for a brand would vary by product category (see section 3.3.3), and these predictions were confirmed (see section 6.2.1). The issue of whether brand equity or its dimensions are product category specific had never been examined in the extant literature. Hence, the findings of the present study are somewhat unique.

Hypothesis H<sub>3</sub> predicted that consumer-based equity of brands, within a given product category, would vary by brand name (see section 3.3.4). Specifically, hypotheses H<sub>3a</sub>, H<sub>3b</sub>, H<sub>3c</sub> and H<sub>3d</sub> predicted that each of the four dimensions of consumer-based brand equity would vary by the brand name (see section 3.3.4), and these predictions were confirmed by the results of the present study (see section 6.2.1). The results suggest that changes in the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity occur where consumers have varying degrees of product category-brand associations for the brands. The consumer-based equity of a brand with strong product category-brand associations was significantly higher than that of a brand with weaker product category-brand associations. Each of the consumer-based equity dimensions of a brand with strong product category-brand associations was significantly higher than those of a brand with weaker product category-brand associations.

The variables country-of-origin and product category explained a relatively small amount of variance in the consumer-based brand equity compared to brand name (see section 6.2). MANOVA results indicated that while country-of-origin (3.4%) and product category (4.4%) accounted for small proportions of the variance in consumer-based brand equity, brand name (57.4%) explained a large proportion of the variance in consumer-based brand equity (see Table 6.2). This leads to the conclusion that country-of-origin has a small but significant influence on consumer-based brand equity.

Hypotheses H<sub>4</sub> and H<sub>5</sub> stated that *macro* and *micro* country images of a country respectively would be related to the consumer-based equity dimensions of a brand from the country (see section 3.3.5). Canonical correlation analyses of the data obtained from factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis confirmed that there was a significant and substantive relationship between consumer-based brand equity dimensions and the *macro* and *micro* country images of the brand (see section 6.3). The relationship between these two sets of constructs was positive as well as product category specific. Both *macro* and *micro* country images were equally important in the relationship with consumer-based

brand equity for cars, whereas the importance of *macro* country image was relatively stronger than that of *micro* country image for televisions.

The results suggested that cars as a product category are much more sensitive to country image impacts than televisions both at *macro* and *micro* levels (see section 6.3.3). The canonical correlation relationship was stronger for all brands of cars than for all brands of televisions. This might be because advertisers tend to highlight country-of-origin for cars, whereas this tends not to happen for televisions. For example, advertisements for Mercedes emphasise the ‘German engineering’ of the car. This might also be because of the performance risk associated with the two product categories. Cars are a high risk product category compared to televisions. Country-of-origin effects were known to vary by the perceived risk associated with the product category (Baumgartner & Jolibert 1977; Cordell 1992). Hence, consumers might use country-of-origin more strongly as an evaluative criterion for cars compared to televisions.

The contribution of each consumer-based brand equity dimension to the relationship varied by the product category. Perceived quality made higher contributions to the relationship, compared to brand associations and brand loyalty, in the case of cars. Brand associations made a stronger contribution, compared to perceived quality and brand loyalty, in the case of televisions. Brand awareness did not make a substantive contribution to the relationships between the two sets of variables in either of the selected product categories.

Amonini, Keogh and Sweeney (1999) found that *micro* country image had a greater effect than *macro* country image on consumers’ perceived product quality. The results of the present study contrast with those findings, since *macro* country image was found to have a greater effect than *micro* country image for televisions whereas *macro* and *micro* country images were equally important for cars. However, Amonini, Keogh and Sweeney used ‘shirts’ as the product category where as televisions and cars were used as the product categories in the present study. This leads to the conclusion that the impact of *macro* and *micro* country images on perceived quality may indeed be product category specific.

As previously mentioned, consumer-based equity level for a brand made in Japan was higher than that of the same brand made in Malaysia and China. Likewise, consumer-based equity level for a brand made in China was higher than that of the same brand made in Malaysia. From the discussion on consumers’ country images for the three countries, it was observed that the order of the countries in the hierarchy was Japan, Malaysia and China (see section 5.5). Hence, although respondents had a more favourable country image

for Malaysia compared to China, the consumer-based equity level for a brand made in Malaysia was lower than that for a Japanese brand made in China. It should be noted that, in terms of respondents' product category-country associations, the order of the countries in the hierarchy was Japan, China and Malaysia (see section 5.2). That is, respondents had more product category-country associations for China compared to Malaysia. Thus, the consumer-based equity level of a brand varied by country-of-origin, where respondents perceived substantial differences between the countries not only in terms of their country images, but also in terms of product category-country associations. This is similar to the situation where consumers are known to highly value rugs from Afghanistan, an underdeveloped country with a less favourable country image (Jaffe & Nebenzahl 2001). This conclusion was based on linking the results from (i) MANOVA (section 6.2) (ii) repeated measures one-way ANOVA (section 5.5) and (iii) respondents' associations (section 5.2).

While the literature (Kaynak & Cavusgil 1983; Wall, Liefeld & Heslop 1991) shows that country-of-origin effects are product category specific, the MANOVA did not give a strong enough indication of this to clearly interpret. The two-way interaction for country-of-origin and product category in the MANOVA was not technically significant (see section 6.2.1). However, the smaller p value (0.09) could suggest a possible interaction. Linking the results of the MANOVA (section 6.2.1) with the results of canonical correlation analysis (section 6.3) provides additional insights. It is interesting to note that the canonical correlation relationship was stronger for all brands of cars than for all brands of television (see section 6.3.3). This adds credence to the suggestion that country-of-origin effects are product category specific. That is, cars as a product category appear to be much more sensitive to country image impacts than televisions both at *macro* and *micro* levels. This also provides evidence which indicates that the impact of country-of-origin on consumer-based brand equity could well be product category specific. However, further research with other product categories is required to understand if the impact of country-of-origin on consumer-based brand equity is indeed product category-specific.

The present research aimed to provide a theoretical framework explaining the interrelationships between country-of-origin effects and consumer-based brand equity. A model of the effect of country-of-origin on consumer-based brand equity was examined empirically. For comparative purposes, two product categories and three brands in each product category were included. The results validated the concern of previous researchers (e.g., Shocker, Srivastava & Ruekert 1994) who thought that a brand's country-of-origin

could affect its equity. It was demonstrated that the consumer-based equity of a brand made in a country with a favourable country image and strong associations was significantly higher than that of the same brand made in a country with a less favourable image and weaker associations to the product category.

### 7.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY

This section outlines the theoretical implications of the research. Researchers advocated the integration of country-of-origin effects into the existing body of marketing literature to enhance their validity and practical utility (Samiee 1994). Shimp, Samiee and Madden (1993) suggested that linking the two concepts *country equity* and *brand equity* would be a 'valuable way of thinking about global brands' (p 328). Despite prolific research in the area of country-of-origin (Peterson & Jolibert 1995), there have been virtually no studies explaining the impact of country-of-origin effects on consumer-based brand equity. Hence, the present study filled an important gap in the extant literature regarding the interactions between country-of-origin effects and consumer-based brand equity. The principle contribution of the present research is a conceptual framework explaining the impact of country-of-origin effects on consumer-based brand equity for a given product category in a given market. Following the tradition of earlier researchers (e.g., Erickson, Johansson & Chao 1984; Han 1989; Hong & Wyer 1989; Johansson, Douglas & Nonaka 1985; Nebenzahl & Jaffe 1996; Nebenzahl, Jaffe & Lampert 1997; Roth & Romeo 1992; Samiee 1994) the present research contributes to the international marketing literature in the form of a theoretical model. In addition to explaining the linkages between country-of-origin effects and brand equity for a selected product category, in a given market, the present research provides a better understanding of the sources of brand equity in the international context and extends existing theory in the area of brand equity.

While previous studies (e.g., Nebenzahl & Jaffe 1993) investigated consumers' perceptions of products from one country (e.g., Japan) made in other countries (e.g., Korea), their investigations focused on country image (product level) differences. They also examined the impact of country-of-origin on brand image (Nebenzahl & Jaffe 1996). The present study investigated differences in consumer-based brand equity levels by country-of-origin of the brand.

Previous researchers found that several marketing variables affected brand equity (Buchanan, Simmons & Bickart 1999; Cornwell, Ray & Steinard 2001). The present

research complemented and extended Aaker's (1991) and Keller's (1993) work on brand equity by incorporating and testing for the specific influences of country-of-origin effects.

The present study complements existing research investigating the attitudes of Australian consumers towards foreign products. Though country-of-origin effects are widely researched in the international marketing literature (Peterson & Jolibert 1995), relatively fewer studies (e.g., Amonini, Keogh & Sweeney 1999; Cameron & Elliot 1999; Patterson & Tai 1991; Quester, Marr & Yeoh 1996) have examined the attitudes of Australian consumers or purchasing agents (e.g., Quester, Dzever & Chetty 2000) towards foreign products.

The present research avoided a noted limitation of previous country-of-origin studies. Country-of-origin research is generally criticised for its lack of theory or conceptual frameworks and the prevalence of empirical generalisations (Samiee 1994). The present research provided a theoretical framework that can contribute towards the advancement of theory in the area of international marketing in general, and country-of-origin effects in particular. The present study also provided empirical support for the impact of country-of-origin effects on consumer-based brand equity.

#### **7.4 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The present research identified a theory that is highly relevant in the market place. Understanding brand equity in the international context has relevance for both marketing academics and practitioners. The research is helpful to academics because of its pioneering nature in the selected area but also to the marketing practitioner because of the applied nature of the research with a framework which can help in better marketing decision-making. Notably, the present study used a sample of actual consumers, and therefore its findings are more open to generalisation than most previous research based on student samples (e.g. Johansson, Douglas & Nonaka 1985; Ettenson, Wagner & Gaeth 1988)

The results of the study have implications for multinational production, global branding, brand equity measurement and positioning strategies. Traditionally, the availability of cheap labour has driven multinationals to move their production to other countries, without much consideration for issues such as to what extent consumers associate the product category with the country in question. For example, Nike had shifted shoe manufacturing to China, a country not very strongly associated with the product category (athletic shoes). Companies base their sourcing decisions on 'comparative advantage or cost differentials' often ignoring the effect of country image (Jaffe &

Nebenzahl 2001, p 21). A particularly important implication of the present study is that such moves could adversely influence the consumer-based equity of this brand in the selected product category. The findings of the study suggest that marketing managers considering offshore manufacturing/sourcing decisions should weigh cost considerations with possible erosion of brand equity.

The results suggest that the impact of country-of-origin on consumer-based equity of a brand depends on consumers' country image perceptions as well as on consumers' product category-country associations. Thus, results suggest that when making overseas manufacturing decisions, Japanese automobile/television manufacturers would be better off selecting China compared to Malaysia as a manufacturing location. Marketing managers will also need to conduct surveys in target countries to examine consumers' 'product-category' associations as well as country images.

The results have implications for Australian importers of the brands Sony, Toshiba and Hitachi (televisions) and Toyota, Mitsubishi and Suzuki (cars). Our findings suggest that Australian importers (in the product categories of cars and televisions) would be better off importing these brands from Japan, rather than from China or Malaysia, and selecting brands made in China compared to those made in Malaysia.

Results of the present study have also indicated that country-of-origin affects the four dimensions of consumer-based brand equity. Brand managers will have to take the variable country-of-origin into consideration in their global branding decisions. That is, marketing managers will have to manage the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity more effectively. For example, the dimension 'brand associations' must be managed in such a way that the brand's country-of-origin effects contribute to the overall equity of the brand. Leveraging secondary associations is an important way of building a brand's equity (Keller 1998). Results of the present study could help brand managers by suggesting from which countries-of-origin they can leverage secondary associations for a brand.

Results of the present study indicate that country-of-origin is an important variable which can affect the equity of a brand. Marketing managers operating in the international context must identify the sources of brand equity, and understand the importance of incorporating country-of-origin into their brand equity measurement. Nowadays, brands from one country are usually available to consumers in other countries. In such instances, brand managers will have to estimate the influence of country-of-origin of the brand, while tracking or estimating brand equity in the host country.

Another important finding of the study is that consumer-based brand equity is product category-specific. When a brand (e.g., Sony) offers a variety of product categories (e.g., video tapes, televisions), brand managers will have to monitor and track the brand's consumer-based equity for each product category. That is, higher brand equity in one product category does not necessarily mean similarly high brand equity levels in other product categories.

The results of the study also have implications for global positioning strategy. Consumer-based equity of a brand appears to depend on the country-of-origin of the brand and on the extent of consumers' association between the product category and the country-of-origin. A favourable image of the country-of-origin is a necessary but not sufficient condition. For the country-of-origin origin of the brand to contribute to its consumer-based equity, it must enjoy a favourable image in consumers' minds and consumers need to strongly associate the country-of-origin with the product category in question. Marketing managers will have to consider this when determining their marketing communications. Managers will not only need to focus their positioning strategies on developing a favourable image for the country-of-origin of the brand but also work toward developing strong 'country-product category' associations in the target consumers' minds.

The results indicate that *macro* country image as well as *micro* country image affects a brand's consumer-based equity. Traditionally, marketers' focus has been on developing the country's reputation for the quality of the products. The results show that marketers would need to go a step further and manage the image of the country at both *macro* and *micro* levels, while also managing their marketing mix. This might mean liaising with national governments and lobbying for the marketing of their country's image.

There are also implications in our results for national governments to engage in managing the images of their countries and products from their countries. For example, Australian and New Zealand governments should oversee the marketing of their countries in overseas markets. The results of the present study suggest that it would be beneficial to the Australian and New Zealand governments to manage *macro* and *micro* images of their 'countries' and their products (particularly for product categories such as wool and butter respectively) in their overseas markets. This is because both *macro* and *micro* images seem to affect the consumer-based equity of brands. Any Australian/New Zealand brands are likely to be benefited by such measures from these two governments. The results could also be useful to organisations such as the Australian Business Foundation, which looks after the marketing interests of several Australian organisations.

## 7.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE PRESENT RESEARCH

As with any research undertaking, some limitations must be acknowledged in this thesis. First, the model developed in this thesis was tested for only two product categories. Further testing is therefore required for the generalisability of the results, as only three countries and six brands were included in the study due to the nature of the quasi-experimental design, which constrained the number of countries and product categories included. Clearly, researchers should use other brands and product categories: both products used in the present study (cars and televisions) are durable goods and fall into the category of shopping or speciality goods. Future studies should use different types of products such as convenience goods (e.g., soap or toothpaste) and non-durable goods (e.g., beer), or even services.

Country-of-origin effects were found to be larger in studies comparing products from more developed countries to less developed countries, than for studies that compared products from either 'all less developed countries' or 'all more developed countries' (Verlegh & Steenkamp 1999, p 532). The present study compared products from 'more developed countries' to those from 'less developed countries', and may therefore have revealed larger than typical country-of-origin effects. Country-of-origin effects were also found to be larger for studies using between-subjects designs compared to studies that used within-subjects designs (Verlegh & Steenkamp 1999, p 532). Given that country-of-origin was used as a between-subjects factor in the doubly-multivariate design in the present study, the present study may have produced larger country-of-origin effects.

A further limitation of the present study was the reliance on indirect inference based on patterns between two different analyses. That is, the results from repeated measures one-way ANOVA and respondents' product category-country associations were synthesised with the results of MANOVA to infer that the consumer-based equity of a brand varies by the country-of-origin, where respondents perceived significant differences between the countries in terms of their images and association with the product category.

The present study used a convenience sample from a single shopping and business precinct in one large Australian capital city. As a result, it is possible that this sample may not be representative of consumers nationwide. Additional research with national samples would help in establishing the generalisability of the results. However, it should be noted that Adelaide is often used for test marketing, as its population is considered representative of the larger Australian population (McCarthy, Perreault & Quester 2001). A non-probability sample was used in the present study hence statistical generalisability was a

possible problem. A small proportion (7.5%) of respondents in the sample, who had lived in Australia for less than five years (but more than 1 year) were also included in the analysis. This might have biased the results. Country-of-origin effects are known to vary by consumer nationality (Bilkey & Nes 1982) and culture (Gurhan-Canli & Maheswaran 2000). Respondents who had lived in Australia for less than five years might exhibit different degrees of *assimilation* into the Australian culture and hence different country-of-origin perceptions compared to respondents who had lived in Australia for more than five years (Parameswaran & Pisharodi 2002).

## 7.6 FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

An important direction for future research involves assessing the impact of *instance dominance* on consumer-based brand equity. Researchers should explore how *instance dominance* (strength of 'brand-product category' association) would influence the consumer-based equity of a brand. The results would be useful in identifying the product categories to which a given brand could be extended. Researchers could also investigate how *instance dominance* with respect to a country (strength of 'country-product category' associations) could affect consumer-based equity of a brand, in case of change of country-of-origin.

The present research focussed on measuring changes in consumer-based brand equity when the country-of-origin changed from a country with favourable image and strong association with the product category, to a country with a less favourable image and weaker association with the product category. An important direction for future research would be to examine how the consumer-based equity of a brand would be affected, if the country-of-origin were changed in the opposite direction. That is, if the country-of-origin were changed from a country with less favourable image and weaker association with the product category, to a country with favourable image and strong association with the product category - what would be the effect on the consumer-based equity of a brand? The results would be useful to MNCs contemplating international manufacturing. For example, it would be beneficial to the Korean automobile maker Hyundai, to know whether shifting the production of its high priced vehicles to countries such as Australia, would result in increased equity for the brand. It would be hard to predict the results. Some researchers argued that once a brand is made in a country different from its country-of-origin (home country), it would create diffused brand images in consumers' minds (e.g., Haubl & Telrod 1999). For example, Japanese brands when made in USA (an economically developed

country with favourable country image) suffered erosion of brand image (Han & Terpstra 1988; Johansson & Nebenzahl 1986). The results of the present study suggest that the consumer-based equity of a brand from a country with a less favourable image and weaker association with the product category would be significantly lower than that of the same brand made in a country with a favourable image and strong association with the product category.

The present study examined the impact of respondents' 'overall' or 'general' product-level image of a country (not the image of a country specific to a product category) on the consumer-based equity of brands from that country. Future studies should examine the impact of specific product category level image of the country on the consumer-based equity of brands from that country. For example, future researchers could examine the impact which consumers' image of cars from Japan has on the consumer-based equity of car brands from Japan.

Priority in further research in this area should be given to replicating the present study with different product categories, brands and countries. The present research tested the conceptual framework in two product categories. Country-of-origin effects are known to be product category specific (Jaffe & Nebenzahl 2001; Kaynak & Cavusgil 1983). It would be useful to conduct future studies with other product categories including 'services' (of varying degree of intangibility). Chao and Gupta (1995) found that country-of-origin effects were not only product category specific but also vehicle type specific. Researchers may explore whether or not country-of-origin effects on consumer-based brand equity for cars is vehicle type specific. Future research should include only more developed countries or only less developed countries as countries of origin, since country-of-origin effects were larger in studies that used a mixture of types of countries together as the stimuli (Verlegh & Steenkamp 1999). The brand names included in the study were different for car (e.g., Toyota) and television (e.g., Sony) product categories. Future research should examine if a brand name would have different levels of consumer-based equity in different product categories. That is, would the consumer-based equity of Sony in the product categories DVDs be significantly different from its equity levels for Televisions? This would be helpful to marketing managers to understand how the equity of a brand changes from one product category to another. In turn, marketing managers can base their marketing management decisions in line with expected changes in the equity of a brand.

It was observed in the present research that the consumer-based equity of a brand was product category specific. Future researchers should explore the reasons behind such

differences. The two product categories included in the present study enjoyed varying degree of consumer product involvement. Researchers could therefore examine for differences in consumer-based brand equity of brands from two low involvement or two high involvement product categories. This would help marketers understand whether the degree of involvement with a product category moderates the consumer-based equity of a brand.

The effect of country-of-origin on consumer-based brand equity may be moderated by variables other than consumers' product category-country associations. For example, consumers' animosity (Klien, Ettenson & Morris 1998) to the country-of-origin of the brand or the degree of economic development of the country could influence the effect of country-of-origin on consumer-based brand equity. Country image was argued to be dynamic and is believed to change with time (Jaffe & Nebenzahl 2001). Future researchers could examine whether the impact of country-of-origin on the consumer-based equity of a brand changes over time. For example, positive changes in the country image of Malaysia could eventually negate the negative impact of producing a Japanese brand in Malaysia. Similarly, events such as September 11, and the war in Iraq could impact the country image of USA (positively/negatively) and possibly the brands associated with it. World events such as SARS are also likely to influence consumers' country images of countries concerned (e.g., China) and possibly the brands from such countries. All these events provide avenues for further research in this area.

In the present study, the results of MANOVA were linked to the results of repeated measures one-way ANOVA and respondents' product category-country associations to infer that consumer-based equity levels of a brand made in a country with favourable image and strong associations with the product category was significantly higher than that of the same brand made in a country with a less favourable image and weaker associations with the product category. Future studies should include more elaborate designs supporting statistical tests examining formally the influence of the moderating role of product category-country associations on consumer-based equity of a brand.

Recall the gaps identified in the literature review (e.g. which market segments of consumers seek country of origin information, what factors contribute to country of origin effects), one important direction for future research would be to begin address these gaps.

Finally, the present study used Australian consumers as respondents. The present study should be replicated with consumer samples from other countries. Furthermore, the

present study used a non-probability sample and therefore future studies should attempt probability samples.

The literature suggests that country-of-origin could impact brand equity. The present research provided a conceptual framework articulating the relationships between country-of-origin effects and consumer-based equity. The empirical study demonstrated that consumer-based equity of a brand and its four dimensions, vary according to the country-of-origin of the brand. At a time of increasing manufacturing relocation and of intense globalisation, the present study contributes usefully to the knowledge required by marketing managers aiming to build or maintain brands in the future.

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