Exploring the Impact of Country-of-Origin Image and Purchase Intention in Cross-Border E-Commerce

Ying Bao, University of International Business and Economics, China

Xusen Cheng, Renmin University of China, China*

Alex Zarifis, University of Loughborough, UK

iD https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3103-4601

ABSTRACT

Product country-of-origin (COO) is now playing a central role in consumers' purchase behavior. Previous studies have investigated several factors that impact COO. However, little attention has been paid to the impact of COO on consumers' product evaluation on Chinese products, especially in the cross-border e-commerce context. Using a multi-methods design, this study first unearthed the antecedents of COO image towards Chinese products from the qualitative data in Study 1 by drawing on the legitimacy theory and then developed a contextual model of consumers' product evaluation and purchase intention, integrating the role of a product with a different level of involvement. Using quantitative survey data from 252 foreign consumers, the study tests the research model in Study 2. The findings provide empirical evidence to support the model and highlight the importance of COO cues on foreign consumers' purchase intention towards Chinese products. The results also enhance our understanding of consumers' purchase decision in cross-border e-commerce.

KEYWORDS

Country-of-Origin Image, Cross-Border E-Commerce, Product Evaluation, Product Involvement, Purchase Intention

INTRODUCTION

With the proliferation of cross-border e-commerce (CBEC), consumers are now faced with a wide variety of products from the global market. The consuming process involves products and brands from different countries. country-of-origin (COO) image has become an important issue in this context (Papadopoulos & Heslop, 1993). COO image can be considered as an essential external cue, not directly related to the product, for consumers to evaluate the product (Votola & Unnava, 2006). Along with the manufacturing boom in China, Chinese products have now become attractive and expanded rapidly in the global market (Wang et al., 2012). Therefore, Chinese products are suitable and representative for us to develop a deep understanding of the impact of the COO image in this study (Lu & Xiong, 2004).

In an e-commerce setting, consumers can only view a listing of products at an online site, which will lead to uncertainty about the product evaluation (Ba & Pavlou, 2002). Compared with traditional exchanges, the feedback mechanisms of an online website will provide consumers with more additional information and reduce uncertainty. Based on the consumers' unique needs, values, and interests,

they will perceive a different level of personal relevance with the product. Therefore, a different personal involvement with the product will lead the consumers to different evaluation levels. Given the heterogeneity of consumers' product involvement, an in-depth investigation into the relationship between COO image and product evaluation with different involvement is needed, especially in the Chinese market. (Insch & McBride, 2004; Liu & Du, 2019).

Previous research has focused on several factors that impact consumers' product evaluation and purchase intention when engaging in international marketing, including product quality (Insch & McBride, 2004), price level (Baldauf et al., 2009), advertising effort (Buil et al., 2013), product-country image (Baldauf et al., 2009), social interactions and trust (Gefen & Heart, 2006; Mou et al., 2020). While there is much work on the antecedents of consumers' product evaluation (Zhang, 1996), there is little research on the relationship between COO image and product evaluation, especially involving the in-depth investigation into the product involvement. Thus, this article intends to investigate the following research questions:

Research question 1 (RQ1): *What factors influence consumers' country-of-origin image of Chinese products in the context of cross-border e-commerce?*
Research question 2 (RQ2): *How do country-of-origin image cues impact consumers' evaluation and purchase intention for Chinese products with different involvement types?*

Legitimacy is defined as "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (Suchman, 1995, p.574). According to legitimacy theory, consumers may consider not only the product but also the product-origin country legitimacy when making purchase decisions (Wang et al., 2014). International brands or products are embedded in the global institutional environment, and thus are consistent with the host country's social norms (Wang et al., 2014). Drawing upon the legitimacy theory, this study investigated the impact of the COO image on consumers' product evaluation and purchase intention, involving the heterogeneity of different product involvement. Our research design was based on a multi-method research design, which enabled us to develop in-depth insights into the research questions (Venkatesh et al., 2013; Venkatesh et al., 2016). The rest of this paper has been organized in the following way. The next section introduces the theoretical background of the study. Next, the authors outline the methodology and report the results of the two studies. Finally, the authors conclude with the theoretical and practical implications of the findings and offer suggestions for future research.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Legitimacy Theory

According to institutional theory, legitimacy has been considered as a key factor that contributes to organizations' and individuals' success (Grayson et al., 2008). Legitimate actions are considered to be proper and appropriate for the social environment. Institutional rules encourage individuals who are in the same system to think and behave as the system's institutions expect (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996). Widely accepted norms or legitimacy actions will help people to predict others' behavior and operate more efficiently in this context (Nelson & Sampat, 2001). In the context of CBEC, two types of legitimacy matter to consumers' purchase intention, including pragmatic legitimacy and social legitimacy (Handelman & Arnold, 1999). Take the social legitimacy as an example, consumers may take the norms or cultures of the country or the product's legitimacy into consideration when buying foreign products (Wang et al., 2014). What's more, some legitimacy cues may be effective in a specific environment but not necessarily efficient in another context (Grayson et al., 2008). Therefore, the phenomenon of legitimacy in the context of CBEC requires further investigation.

Country of Origin Image

The concept of COO image has been one of the most persistent concerns in international marketing. According to Parameswaran and Pisharodi (1994), COO image consists of three facets, including the general country attributes (GCA), general product attributes (GPA), and specific product attributes (SPA). GCA refers to consumers' general attitude towards the product-origin country or people, including the standard of living, technical skills of the country, and how likable the people are. Martin and Eroglu (1993) also measured a multi-dimensional construct of country image, which includes three distinct factors: political dimension, economic dimension, and technological dimension. GPA (Hsieh et al., 2004) is defined as the reliability, safety, or durability of products. The present literature also distinguishes between the attributes of different products. For example, Insch and McBride (2004) tested the COO cues of multiple products (television, athletic shoes, and mountain bikes) to explore the impact of a specific product. Following Ba and Pavlou (2002), the difference between information that buyers and sellers possess will lead to information asymmetry, which could cause mistrust or other forms of market failure. In this research, the authors don't take the specific types of products into consideration, therefore, SPA is not included in the research model. As a result, the authors took the other two facets of the COO image (GCA and GPA) into consideration and distinguished between consumers' evaluation and purchase decision towards the products into two types: high involvement products and low involvement products.

Product Involvement

Product involvement is defined as "A person's perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values, and interests" (Zaichkowsky, 1985, p.342). Information asymmetry is a very important predictor of consumers' behavior in online transactions (Ba & Pavlou, 2002). Some products are listed as "Made in China" on the e-commerce sites, while some information about the original country of a product may not be provided by the e-commerce sites. In the CBEC setting, consumers are used to referring to information provided by other consumers via the online review mechanism (Liu & Du, 2019) and other social media. They may take time or energy to search for information about the product and make a comparison between different products from many facets (Wang et al., 2014). Following Kassarjian (1981), there are high-and-low involvement product types. If consumers intend to buy some products that have relatively low cost and they are purchased repeatedly on a daily basis, these are considered as low importance and low-involvement products. Under this condition, consumers may perceive a relative lack of motivation to seek more information about other similar products or brands (Zaichkowsky, 1985). For some other products, whose costs are relatively high and they are purchased infrequently, consumers may prefer to search for more information and spend more time seeking a better selection (Xiao & Benbasat, 2011). For example, when considering buying an alternate peripheral, the high cost of this kind of product will lead consumers to search for more information before making a purchase decision.

Product Evaluation and Purchase Intention

Following Cordell (1997), product evaluation refers to consumers' purchase judgement, or choices, among different products based on the provided cues or information about the products. Previous studies have investigated several facets of the relationship between COO image and consumers' product evaluation (Manrai et al., 1998; Lee & Lee, 2009). Topics of product evaluation vary from the heterogeneity of a different product category (Manrai et al., 1998) to the role of product knowledge (Lee & Lee, 2009). Similarly, purchase intention is also depicted as consumers' psychological state towards a product. Following Spears and Singh (2004), purchase intention was conceptualized as consumers' conscious decision to purchase a product or a brand. Although extant research has been conducted on the antecedents of product evaluation and purchase intention (Zhao et al., 2020), the topic of the heterogeneity of product involvement has been greatly overlooked. In this study, the authors intend to provide detailed insight into consumers' evaluation and purchase intention for different products.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a multi-methods research design to gain additional insights into the research model (Venkatesh et al., 2013; Venkatesh et al., 2016). A multi-method research design can provide stronger inferences and produce complementary views (Venkatesh et al., 2016). Qualitative methods generally tend to discover or explore a process or describe a deep understanding of experiences (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006). Quantitative methods have been used in confirmatory studies to test the hypotheses and causal relationships. The interviews in Study 1 yielded the qualitative data. After the coding process, the authors conceptualized the outcomes and yielded the measurement scale. Hypotheses and the research model were also constructed from the qualitative data and the relevant literature. A quantitative method was then employed in Study 2 to empirically test the research model.

Research Design

Study 1 Qualitative Study

The qualitative study sought to answer **RQ1**. A total of 20 foreign students in the international school in China were recruited (including consumers from Indonesia, Russia, Ukraine, Australia, Belarus, France, USA, Germany et al.) on their purchase intentions based on their previous purchase experiences in Study 1. The interviewees stated that they had already engaged in CBEC and had purchased Chinese products before. The interview questions consisted of both open-ended and closed questions (see Table 5 in Appendix 1). Each interview was recorded and transcribed into post-transcription. The authors followed the instructions for interpretive research from Klein and Myers (1999) to complete the data analysis. The authors used an inductive paradigm to make sense of the qualitative data (Wunderlich et al., 2019). Following Klein and Myers (1999), the authors adopted dynamic adjustment on the interview questions based on their interaction with the participants and iterated between the data and literature in the coding process, yielding three rounds of analysis.

The first round of analysis provided us with a general understanding of foreign consumers' perception of Chinese products in online transactions. The results indicated several concerns of consumers when engaging in CBEC purchasing, ranging from product-internal cues (e.g. product quality, price advantage) to product external cues (e.g. online reviews, delivery speed, product-country image) (see Table 6 in Appendix 2). In the first stage of coding, some expressions that may be related to the COO image of China and Chinese products were marked with "(ax)". The second round of analysis focused on the specific cues of the image of the country the product originated from. The authors simplified and refined the statements in the first round of coding. In this process, several key constructs in this study emerged, which were marked with "(Ax)". The third round of coding paid more attention to the distinction between GPI and GCI. The outcome of the three rounds of coding was marked with "(AAx)". The three rounds of the coding process are shown in Appendix 2 (Table 6).

Conceptual Model and Hypothesis Development

GPI refers to consumers' cognitive, affective and conative impression of products from a specific country (Parameswaran & Pisharodi, 1994), or their beliefs regarding products of the given country (Wang et al., 2012). For example, some people believe that products made in China are durable and have good quality. One of our interviewees argued that "Chinese products are cheaper than other countries. Products are of reasonable quality. It is also easy to find what I want." The authors argue that consumers who have a positive image in general of Chinese products will perceive more value in acquiring the product. In this research context, the authors intend to compare the difference of consumers' evaluation and purchase intention of Chinese products, between high-and-low involvement products, when engaging in CBEC. The authors hypothesize that COO image will impact consumers' psychological state differently due to the different types of products (high and low involvement products). Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1a: The general product image positively influences consumers' evaluation of high involvement products.

H1b: The general product image positively influences consumers' evaluation of low involvement products.

Legitimacy theory provides researchers with a focus on analyzing the relationship between organizational behaviors and the surrounding social environment (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975). In the CBEC context, consumers will choose products from the country, which they believe, conforms to social norms and social values. Manrai et al. (1998) also established a conceptual model of the interaction and relationship between COO and product evaluations. For example, one of our interviewees said that "Country's image is important, for example, some countries are more trustworthy, like Germany for example." Hence, the authors hypothesize:

H2a: The general country image positively influences consumers' evaluation of high involvement products.

H2b: The general country image positively influences consumers' evaluation of low involvement products.

Previous studies argued that consumers' evaluation of a product is defined as their perceived value of obtaining the product (Lam & Mukherjee, 2005). The perceived high value of a product can lead to consumers' willingness to buy it. Furthermore, the linkage between consumers' attitude and intention, is supported well by prior literature (Lam & Mukherjee, 2005). Therefore, in the context of CBEC, the authors posit that:

H3a: Consumers' evaluation of high involvement products positively influences their purchase intention of high involvement products.

H3b: Consumers' evaluation of low involvement products positively influences their purchase intention of low involvement products.

The authors also investigated consumer ethnocentrism in this model. Following Shimp and Sharma (1987), consumer ethnocentrism is defined as "the beliefs held by consumers about the appropriateness, indeed morality, of purchasing foreign-made products." Some consumers prefer to purchase products from their own country, instead of importing them from other countries. Consumers with strong ethnocentric beliefs are also proved to be more likely to perceive a low evaluation of foreign products (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). The reason is that they think purchasing products from other countries will hurt the domestic economy or lead to loss of jobs (Steenkamp & De Jong, 2010). Therefore, despite a perceived high evaluation of products from a foreign country, ethnocentric consumers are likely to reduce their purchasing from other countries, especially for the low involvement products because they are purchased more frequently than high involvement products. Consumers that hold strong ethnocentric beliefs will regard those low involvement products as a threat to domestic manufacture. It is thus hypothesized that:

H4: Consumer ethnocentrism moderates the relationship between consumers' evaluation and purchase intention of low involvement products.

Figure 1 presents the hypotheses and research model in this study.

Figure 1. Impacts of COO image on product evaluation and purchase intention
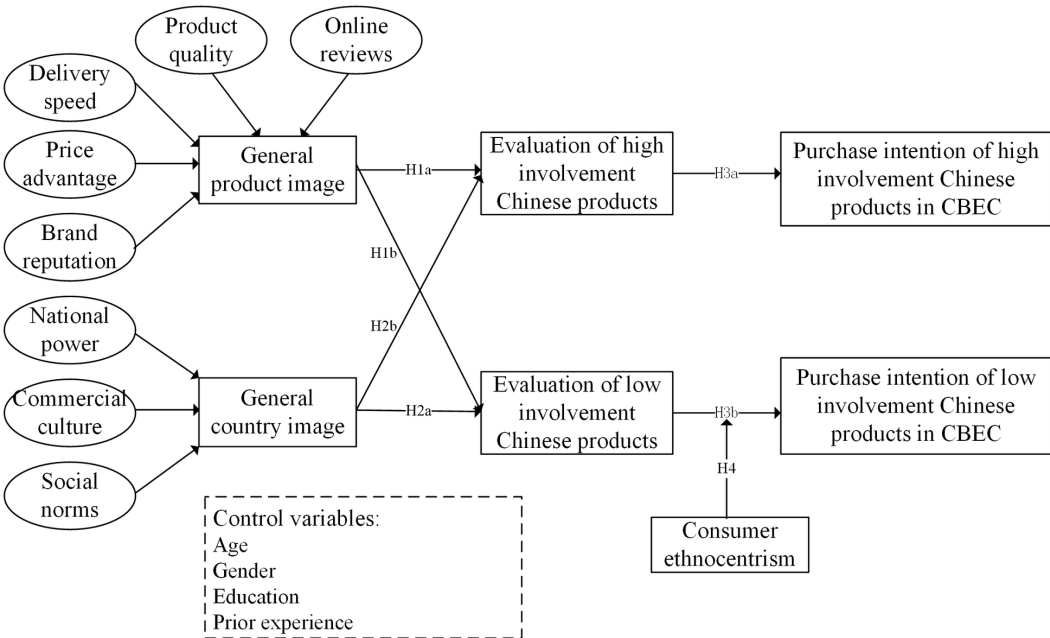
Study 2 Quantitative Study

Sample and Nonresponse Bias

Study 2 sought to answer **RQ2**. The target population was foreign consumers who had purchasing experience of Chinese products on the CBEC platform before. The authors collected data by providing URLs linked to the surveys to the respondents via social media. The sample consisted of 252 foreign respondents who had engaged in CBEC before. Using G*power 3.1 software, the authors conducted a power analysis and calculated the appropriate sample size for this research (Hua et al., 2019). The results indicated that a total sample size of 111 was adequate using a two-tailed test with an effect size of 0.3, a statistical power of 0.95, and a confidence level of 0.95. After discarding the incomplete and rushed responses, there were in total of 230 usable responses, resulting in a response rate of 91%. The nonresponse bias test was also recommended to report in the results of PLS (Gefen et al., 2011). Nonresponse bias is usually caused by the nonresponding samples and will lead to bias in the results (Shiau et al., 2020). Following existing research, the authors conducted a series of t-tests of the demographic characteristics between the first 10% of the respondents and the last 10% of the respondents (Ye & Kankanhalli, 2018). Results indicated no significant difference between the two groups. Thus, nonresponse bias is not likely to be a concern in this study.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 summarizes the demographic data of the respondents. The sample consists of 25.2% male and 74.8% female respondents. Approximately 89% are younger than 35 years old, which is acceptable in this study as most of the CBEC consumers are youngsters. More specifically, among the 230 usable responses, 21.7% are from North American countries (i.e. the USA, Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Canadian, Dominican, and Grenada), 60.4% are from African countries (i.e. Angola, Cameroun, Cabo Verde, Ethiopia, Ghana, Jamaica, Kenya, Lesotho, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe), 3.9% are from Asian countries (i.e. Indian, Indonesia,

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

Constructs and measurement items	Category	Frequency (N=230)	%
Gender	Males Females	58 172	25.2 74.8
Age	<25 26-35 36-45 >45	89 116 20 4	38.7 50.4 8.7 1.7
Last time Chinese products were purchased on CBEC websites	<3months 3months-6months 6months-12months >12months	144 23 25 37	62.6 10 10.9 16.1

Kazakhstan, Malaysian, Mongolia, Pakistan, and Thailand), 7.8% are from European countries (i.e. British, Lithuania, Russia, Serbia, and Ukraine) and 1.7% are from Oceanian countries (i.e. Papua New Guinea). Most of these countries are along the "Belt and Road" initiative of China (Duan et al., 2018). Also, almost 84% percent of the respondents have purchased Chinese products via CBEC platforms within one year. Therefore, these samples can be considered representative in this research context.

Measures

Following previous research and the constructs derived from Study 1, the authors adapted multiple-item scales to measure each construct with a seven-point Likert scale. General product image (GPI) and general country image (GCI) are multidimensional formative constructs in this research. The other five reflective constructs in this research model include evaluation of high involvement product (EHP), evaluation of low involvement product (ELP), purchase intention of high involvement product (PHP), purchase intention of low involvement product (PLP), and consumer ethnocentrism (CE). The authors also controlled for consumers' age, gender, educational background, and their prior experience of engaging in CBEC for Chinese products. The scale and items are displayed in Appendix 3 (Table 7).

Data Analysis

The authors used partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) to test the measurement validation and research hypotheses in Study 2, using Advanced Analysis of Composites (ADANCO) 2.0.1. PLS-SEM was deemed appropriate for this study due to its following advantages: Firstly, PLS-SEM relaxes the assumptions of normal distribution required by the maximum likelihood method, when testing models with covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM). Secondly, PLS-SEM is more suitable for handling complex and large models with smaller sample sizes (Hair et al., 2019; Shiau et al., 2019; Khan et al., 2019). Additionally, PLS-SEM is an appropriate method to choose when testing a theoretical model from a prediction perspective (Gefen et al., 2011; Hair et al., 2019). PLS-SEM is also suitable for models with formative constructs.

Measurement Model Evaluation

Following the instruction of PLS-SEM evaluation stages (Sarstedt et al., 2014), the indicator loading, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity should be assessed. Therefore, the authors tested the reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and multicollinearity before the structural model evaluation. Reliability is tested using Cronbach's alpha (α). As presented in Table 2, the Cronbach's α coefficients all exceed 0.7, which indicates acceptable reliability. According to Anderson and Gerbing (1988), convergent validity is satisfied if the AVE value is greater than 0.500. Almost all item loadings are greater than 0.7. Therefore, the convergent

Table 2. Psychometric properties of measures.

Constructs	VIF (<10)	Factor loadings (>0.7)	Cronbach's α (>0.7)	Average variance extracted (AVE) (>0.5)
GCI	1.263 1.815 1.705	0.666*** 0.885*** 0.860***	0.736	0.656
GPI	1.237 1.237	0.882*** 0.809***	0.609	0.717
ELP	3.017 3.017	0.953*** 0.953***	0.899	0.908
EHP	3.868 5.288 4.275	0.937*** 0.956*** 0.940***	0.940	0.893
PLP	1.600 1.600	0.924*** 0.867***	0.759	0.803
PHP	5.582 5.684 2.419	0.952*** 0.954*** 0.881***	0.922	0.865
CE	1.612 1.555 1.454	0.898*** 0.764*** 0.779***	0.758	0.665

Note: VIF—Variance Inflation Factor.
*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

validity can be regarded as satisfactory. The authors tested multicollinearity based on the variance inflation factor (VIF). As shown in Table 2, the VIF values are lower than 10 and multicollinearity is not a problem in our constructs. Discriminant validity was tested with the following criteria: (1) a construct's AVE should be greater than its correlation with all other constructs (Henseler, 2017). (2) the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) should be lower than 0.9 (Henseler, 2017). Specifically, as the research model contains two formative constructs, the authors tested the discriminant validity following two steps: the first-order reflective model test and the formative measurement model test. The results of the discriminant validity tests are shown in Table 3 and Table 4. According to the results, all values confirm the discriminant validity.

Common Method Bias

Common method bias (CMB) may potentially arise from the self-reported data and the single source, which will lead to measurement error (Chin et al., 2012; Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). In order to test the CMB, the authors adopted two most popular assessments: Harman's single factor test and marker variable method (Shiau et al., 2020; Cheng et al., 2020). The unrotated factor solution indicates that the first factor accounts for 38.6% of the variance and no single factor accounts for more than 50% of the variance. Moreover, the authors also conducted the marker variable test to address CMB. Following Griffith and Lusch (2007), the authors used the age of the participants as a marker variable in this research. Results of the marker variable test indicate that the significance of the original paths has not changed after adding the marker variable. Thus, the results all suggest that CMB is not a critical concern in this research.

Table 3. Discriminant validity of the first-order measurement model based on heterotrait–monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT)

Construct	GCI1	GCI2	GCI3	GPI1	GPI2	ELP	EHP	PLP	PHP	CE
GCI1										
GCI2	0.456									
GCI3	0.399	0.653								
GPI1	0.195	0.463	0.524							
GPI2	0.240	0.374	0.354	0.436						
ELP	0.254	0.442	0.467	0.514	0.363					
EHP	0.373	0.552	0.506	0.446	0.421	0.616				
PLP	0.293	0.482	0.502	0.600	0.411	0.870	0.631			
PHP	0.318	0.507	0.439	0.477	0.401	0.628	0.884	0.809		
CE	0.198	0.082	0.132	0.104	0.119	0.078	0.108	0.154	0.062	

Note: Diagonal elements (bold) are the square root of AVE for each construct. Below-diagonal elements are the criterion of the HTMT.

Table 4. Discriminant validity of the second-order measurement model based on Fornell-Larcker criterion and heterotrait–monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT)

Construct	GCI	GPI	ELP	EHP	PLP	PHP	CE
GCI	**0.656**	*0.800*	*0.576*	*0.680*	*0.594*	*0.605*	*0.173*
GPI	0.315	**0.717**	*0.637*	*0.646*	*0.763*	*0.659*	*0.001*
ELP	0.234	0.231	**0.908**	*0.608*	*0.871*	*0.619*	*0.023*
EHP	0.303	0.239	0.313	**0.893**	*0.619*	*0.883*	*0.110*
PLP	0.208	0.276	0.538	0.278	**0.803**	*0.799*	*0.107*
PHP	0.257	0.245	0.317	0.671	0.443	**0.865**	*0.047*
CE	0.008	0.000	0.000	0.007	0.006	0.000	**0.665**

Note: Diagonal elements (bold) are the square root of AVE for each construct. Below-diagonal elements are the criterion of the Fornell-Larcker, above-diagonal elements are the criterion of the HTMT (in italics).

Structural Model Evaluation

The structural model evaluation is based on the test of our hypothesized relationships. The R^2 values suggest that the model explains 36.5% of the variance in consumers' evaluation of high involvement products, 29.3% of the variance in consumers' evaluation of low involvement products, 67.8% of the variance in consumers' purchase intention of high involvement products and 53.8% of the variance in consumers' purchase intention of low involvement products. In addition, the hypothesized positive relationship between GPI, GCI and the evaluation of high (low) involvement products (H1a, H1b, H2a, H2b) was supported ($\beta=0.244$, $p<0.001$; $\beta=0.316$, $p<0.001$; $\beta=0.312$, $p<0.001$; $\beta=0.438$, $p<0.001$). Moreover, the impact of GPI is stronger in consumers' evaluation of low involvement products, than in high involvement products (0.316>0.224). On the contrary, the impact of GCI is stronger in consumers' evaluation of high involvement products, than in low involvement products (0.438>0.312). One possible explanation for this finding is that consumers may pay more attention to their general image of the product-origin country, than to the product itself, when purchasing high-involvement products on the CBEC platform. On the other hand, when intending to buy low-involvement products, that are regularly bought and won't cost too much time, they care more about the product itself, instead of their prior knowledge of the product-origin country. The results also supported H3a and H3b at

0.001 level respectively. To test the moderation effect of consumer ethnocentrism, the authors mean-centered the values to reduce collinearity, before creating the interaction terms (Aiken et al., 1991). The results show that there is no significant evidence to support the moderation effect, indicating that H4 is not supported.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

Concerning RQ1, the qualitative data analysis in Study 1 identifies several product-internal and product-external cues, including product quality, online reviews, delivery speed, price advantage, brand reputation, national power, commercial culture, and social norms. Specifically, from the perspective of GPI, consumers' perceived high product quality, acceptable online reviews, high delivery speed, high price advantages over products from other countries and good brand reputation will increase foreign consumers' acceptance of Chinese products. From the perspective of GCI, consumers may not only care about product quality but also consider the product-origin country image. Based on these cues, consumers can make judgments on the country's and products' legitimation and then make a purchase decision. Concerning RQ2, the findings in Study 2 are as follows: (1) GPI and GCI both have a positive impact on consumers' evaluation of Chinese products. (2) The impact of GPI is stronger in consumers' evaluation of low involvement Chinese products than in high involvement Chinese products. (3) On the contrary, the impact of GCI is stronger in consumers' evaluation of high involvement Chinese products than in low involvement Chinese products. (4) Consumers' evaluation of products will positively impact their purchase intention for Chinese products in the context of CBEC. Surprisingly, consumer ethnocentrism (CE) is not supported to moderate the relationship between consumers' evaluation and purchase intention towards low involvement products in this study context. One explanation for this finding is that it is not consumer ethnocentrism that influences their purchase intention, but rather their evaluation of the products.

Theoretical Contributions

Firstly, this study has some implications for CBEC literature. The proposed model provides a holistic view of consumers' perceived COO image towards Chinese products in CBEC. Previous studies primarily investigate the platform characteristics or consumers' engagement, such as perceived value of the products (Chiu et al., 2014), platform service quality, and website design (Young Kim & Kim, 2004). Researchers have recently called for more attention in the studying of product-country image (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). In addition, as the authors are concerned with the nature of the CBEC, consumers' perceived product-country image plays an essential role in their engagement and motivation. This study focuses on the impact of other country-specific cues and expands our understanding of consumer behavior in the CBEC.

Secondly, this study extends the literature of COO image from traditional international marketing to the CBEC context. This extension is meaningful in today's business practice because consumers are highly engaged in CBEC purchasing these days and are highly concerned with product cues, as they face so many alternative products (Papadopoulos & Heslop, 1993). Additionally, previous research on COO image ignored the product involvement identification and consumers' interaction, such as consumers' evaluation and purchase intention of different involvement products. In this sense, this study is especially relevant to the analysis of consumers' psychological state in the transaction process with Chinese products in CBEC.

Thirdly, the authors applied the legitimacy theory to a new context. The authors found that apart from the cues that were investigated in previous research (Lam & Mukherjee, 2005), external cues of products also constitute consumers' perceived image of the general purchase intention of a

product. Specifically, consumers are likely to be more attentive when the product-origin country has appropriate and proper social norms or commercial culture (Suchman, 1995).

Practical Implications

Firstly, this study highlights several significant factors that may enable CBEC managers to enhance consumers' purchase intention of Chinese products. In detail, CBEC platforms should improve product quality, cost control, brand image, and enterprise strength, which is the fundamental guarantee for Chinese products to be recognized by foreign consumers. Additionally, platforms should obey international business norms and establish a favorable image.

Additionally, as discussed in relation to the effect of different product involvement, CBEC platforms should provide different advertising or marketing strategies for products with a different level of involvement. For example, for low-involvement products, managers should put more advertising effort into the product itself and emphasize the quality of the product and the high speed of delivery. While for high-involvement products, more advertising or marketing effort should be conducted to emphasize the image of the product's country of origin.

Thirdly, the findings of this study can also raise some alarm and attention for the CBEC industry, including CBEC companies and the relevant supervision department. Consumers' nowadays may perceive more external-product cues, instead of the product itself. On one hand, CBEC platform managers should be aware that the product COO image is an important determinant of the consumers' perceived product value when engaging in CBEC purchasing. On the other hand, the supervision department should pay more attention to CBEC companies' social norms and commercial behaviors, and develop effective policies to maintain consumers' rights and interests.

Limitations and Future Research

There are several limitations in this study. Firstly, like many other studies, the data was collected with many young participants. Although young participants are among the most active users in the cyberspace and CBEC service, different demographics and culture should be included in future research. Secondly, the findings of this research are mainly based on consumers' awareness of COO image. However, the process of consumer purchase decision in CBEC is complex and COO is only one of the several extrinsic factors that will affect consumers' purchasing decision (Hong & Wyer Jr, 1990; Insch & McBride, 2004). Other extrinsic and intrinsic factors can also affect consumers' processing of the product information. Moreover, studies also argue that consumers recently attach more importance to products' brand origin rather than COO. Thirdly, consumers' product knowledge may also lead to different findings (Li et al., 2000). When consumers' level of product knowledge is low, they will be not familiar with the product and be more likely to use the COO information to judge the product. Nowadays, products are always designed, manufactured, and shipped from several countries. Sometimes consumers may not have complete knowledge about the product brand or manufacturing place. As such, the hybridization of the products should also be considered (Lee & Lee, 2009; Lee et al., 2013). Last, existing research argued that the different cultural background of the consumers may also impact their purchasing decision (Zhang, 1996; Lu & Xiong, 2004). Respondents in Study 2 contains different nationalities. The uneven distribution of nationality across continents may bring about other factors (e.g. cultural background, consumption habits) that can also affect the findings of this study. More factors about the consumers' characteristics should be involved in future research. Therefore, the authors should control more factors about consumers' purchase intention in the CBEC context in the future.

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APPENDIX 1

Table 5. Interview questions

Number	Questions	Reference
1	Please briefly introduce your basic situation of purchasing Chinese products through cross-border e-commerce websites. (open)	
2	What are your concerns when buying Chinese products online? What factors will affect your purchase decision or intention?	Hsieh et al., 2004
3	Do you pay attention to the overall image of the country of origin when engaging in cross-border shopping online?	Min Han, 1990
4	Could you tell me your general impression of China?	
5	What factors will affect your overall or favorable impression of China?	Scholtens & Dam, 2007
6	Could you briefly talk about your impression on Chinese products?	
7	What factors will affect your impression or favorable impression of Chinese products when you engage in cross-border shopping online?	Baldauf et al. 2009
8	In the process of cross-border shopping, what other factors affect your impression and goodwill towards Chinese products and the country as a whole? (open)	

APPENDIX 2

Table 6. Three rounds of coding process

Illustrative quotes	Second order categories	Third order categories
"Quality and whether the products actually look like the picture or not." (a1)	A1 Product quality	AA1 General product image (GPI)
"Today China is one of the leaders in the field of innovations and product quality is increasing." (a2)		
"(I) Concern mostly about product quality if its high enough or if its brand is it a real one." (a3)		
"I make the decision to purchase products, I have to look at the comment first and also the review of these products." (a4)	A2 Online reviews	
"I personally attract at product quality reviews and brand reputation." (a5)		
"It depends on the product, you know. I will look at the reviews." (a6)		
"I concern about delivery time and also afraid about fake products." (a7)	A3 Delivery speed	
"Delivery time matters to me during the cross-border purchasing process" (a8)		
"When I buy online my main concern is that I can save time I order the product and easily received it." (a9)		
"China's economy has grown because of rising of the production volume, quality was an issue. But lower price was attractive." (a10)	A4 Price advantage	
"Large number of choices from cheap products with average quality to high-tech products." (a11)		
"I personally attract at product quality reviews and brand reputation." (a12)	A5 Brand reputation	
"For electrical products or skin care/makeup products, brand reputation is the priority." (a13)		
"China has a large network of reliable suppliers and many businesses here thrive on the quality of their work." (a14)		
"China has interesting culture and a deep history, China will be a center for the development of innovative technologies." (a15)	A6 National power	AA2 General country image (GCI)
"Country's image is important, for example some countries are more trustworthy, like Germany for example. Today we are witnessing a rise of a new empire (China)." (a16)		
"I favor in (Chinese) business culture because it is quite the same as my country (Thailand)." (a17)	A7 Commercial culture	
"I think business cultural in china is just a lot of things tight close together, which make things complicated. Overall, business culture in China is not very trustworthy." (a18)		
"I think national power and social norm and due to safe environment business culture is promoting in China." (a19)		
"China has very interesting and rich culture, but unfortunately a lot of regular Chinese people are so poorly mannered." (a20)	A8 Social norms	
"I think the strongest characteristics I have about China are how nice Chinese people are towards foreigners, and how different their mentality is from western countries." (a21)		
"Business ethics and professionalism are the main issues I have had with businesses in China in the past and thus they remain the main factors that affect my decisions when deciding upon any purchase in china." (a22)		

APPENDIX 3

Table 7. Construct measurements

Constructs and measurement items	Definition	References
GCI • This country (China) has clear policies and procedures on bribery and corruption. • This country (China) has an honest business atmosphere. • This country (China) has achieved high social norm standards.	The mental representation of a country and its people, including cognitive believes of the country's economical and technological development stages, as well as the affective evaluations of its social and political systems or standpoints	Scholtens & Dam, 2007; Wang et al., 2012 (p. 1041)
GPI • The quality of Chinese products is high. • Chinese brands have higher level of reputation compared with their competitors.	The general perceptions that consumers have of a particular country's products.	Baldauf et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2012 (p. 1042)
ELP • I like this kind of products in China. • I think this kind of products in China are desirable.	Refers to an attitude toward a product, which consumers engage in limited pre-purchase information searches and processing.	Lam & Mukherjee, 2005; Gu et al., 2012 (p.186)
EHP • I think this kind of products in China are good. • I like this kind of products in China. • I think this kind of products in China are desirable.	Refers to an attitude toward a product, which consumers engage in much pre-purchase information searches and processing.	Gu et al., 2012(p.186)
PLP (If you intend to buy some Chinese products online that won't cost you too much time or energy (e.g. necessities)) • I have a strong intention to purchase the product. • I choose to buy Chinese product without any hesitation when purchasing goods on the Internet.	Intention to buy the products, which consumers engage in limited pre-purchase information searches and processing.	Teng & Laroche, 2007
PHP (If you intend to buy some Chinese products online that will cost you more time or energy (e.g. luxury)) • I would definitely intend to buy this product. • I have a strong intention to purchase the product • I choose to buy Chinese product without any hesitation when purchasing goods on the Internet.	Intention to buy the products, which consumers engage in much pre-purchase information searches and processing.	Teng & Laroche, 2007
CE • We should purchase products manufactured in my own country instead of letting other countries get rich off us. • There should be very little trading or purchasing of goods from other countries unless out of necessity. • It is always best to purchase products made in my own country.	The beliefs held by consumers about the appropriateness, indeed morality, of purchasing foreign made products	Shimp & Sharma, 1987

Ying Bao is a PhD candidate in the School of Information Technology and Management in the University of International Business and Economics, Beijing, China. Her interests focus on user behaviors and trust in sharing economy. Her papers have also been presented in the leading conferences such as Hawaii International Conference of System Science (HICSS) and China Summer Workshop on Information Management (CSWIM).

Xusen Cheng is a Full Professor in the School of Information in Renmin University of China. He has obtained his PhD degree in Manchester Business School of University of Manchester in the UK . His research focuses on trust development in information system and collaboration design. His research paper has appeared in journals such as Journal of Management Information Systems, Information Technology and People, Group Decision and Negotiation, International Journal of Information Management, Computers in Human Behavior, Information Processing and Management, Journal of Information Sciences, British Journal of Educational Technology and Journal of Global Information Technology Management. His papers have also been presented in the leading conferences such as International Conference of Information System (ICIS), Hawaii International Conference of System Science (HICSS). He is the corresponding author of this paper.

Alex Zarifis is a research associate in the School of Business and Economics in the University of Loughborough. His first degree was a BSc in Management with Information Systems from the University of Leeds, followed by an MSc in Business Information Technology and a PhD in Business Administration both from the University of Manchester. His research focuses on E-commerce, trust, privacy, online collaboration, artificial intelligence, fintech, project management, leadership, blockchain, online education. His research has featured in journals such as Computers in Human Behavior, Information Technology & People, Electronic Commerce Research and International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning. His research has been presented in the conferences such as the AIS European Conference on Information Systems (ECIS).