
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Moderating Effect of the Country of Origin on Smartphones' Brand Equity and Brand Preference on Customer Purchase Intention

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| ABSTRACT

A smartphone is now part of Filipino consumers' lifestyles, so smartphone brands are becoming more competitive and innovative to become the top brand in consumers' choice. There are many factors to consider in determining how Filipino consumers choose their preferred smartphone brands. As past studies show, Filipino consumers are xenocentric and prefer to buy products made internationally and not locally. The researchers focused on three (3) Independent variables and one (1) Moderating Variable to understand if Filipino consumers are xenocentric in buying smartphones. (1) Brand Preference, to understand the factors that affect their preference in buying. (2) Brand Equity, to study how the consumers value the brand. (3) Purchase Intention, to know the factors that contribute to the consumers' purchase decision, and (1) Country of Origin as moderating variable on the three (3) variables. The result revealed that the Country of Origin has no moderating influence on the three (3) Independent variables. This study used the descriptive-correlational and quantitative method in collecting data from the respondents through an online questionnaire. The survey was divided into sections to aid researchers in determining the relationship between these three variables. Country of Origin is not the priority of Filipino consumers in terms of smartphone brands. Consumers are focusing more on their Brand Preference and Brand Equity in purchasing smartphones.

| KEYWORDS

Country of Origin, Purchase Intention, Brand Preference, Brand Equity, Smartphone brands

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

As technology continues innovating in the Philippines, the demand for smartphones has increased rapidly. It has now become part of everyone's life. The Philippines will have 79 million smartphone users in 2020, up from 77 million in 2017. By 2025, the country is expected to have 91.5 million smartphone users, according to forecasts (Statistica, 2021). Due to their ability to offer several services such as mobile banking, e-commerce, and mobile payments, smartphones have become a vital part of customers' lives. 2017 (Baganzi, Shin, and Wu). These are just some of the features and reasons smartphones keep improving and become a need in today's digital era. In the Philippines, there are many options for smartphone brands. Due to roller-coaster economic conditions, some Filipinos favored low-priced and lesser-known brands. Still, many consumers prefer well-established and premium product lines because of superior quality and features. Indeed, consumer preference varies per brand (Mobile Phones in the Philippines Euromonitor, 2016).

There is a bigger chance for consumers living in countries with an emerging market to identify a foreign product with quality and prestige, indicating that a global brand has a higher perceived value in terms of its functional and psychological importance (Lee and Ngyuten, 2017). Consumers in the Philippines often have varied opinions on things depending on their country of origin. According to Nguyen and Alcantara's (2020) research, products that came from developed countries: the United States, Japan, and

Germany, are affiliated with premium quality, whereas products that are made from the Philippines, Malaysia, and China are frequently perceived as having lower quality and reliability. The study specifically aims to know how Filipino consumers' perception is influenced by country of origin that moderately affects the brand equity and preference for consumers' purchase intention. Consumers have different perceptions of the country where the smartphone brands are from. Sevanandee & Damar-Ladkoo (2018). The study will determine the characteristics of certain smartphone brands that consumers are looking for and the Filipino market features to progress. Consumers are highly evaluated for local brands based on domestic biases, ethnocentric tendencies, national identification, and brand ownership (Nguyen and Alcantara, 2020). Moreover, this also aims to determine the specific characteristics that the Filipino market should adapt to.

1.2 Research Problem

The researchers are interested in learning how other countries brand their smartphones. They also intend to understand what factors are considered when consumers in a particular country perceive a brand. The study differs from previous studies as it focuses on Filipino consumers' perceptions of local smartphone brands compared to imported brands.

- A. What are the characteristics of the respondents in terms of
 - a. Age
 - b. Gender
 - c. Civil Status
 - d. Household Income
 - e. Occupation
 - f. Smartphone Brand
- B. What is the respondent's level of agreement on the brand equity of the smartphone?
- C. What is the respondent's level of agreement on the brand preference of smartphones?
- D. What is the respondent's extent of customer purchase intention?
- E. Does brand equity influence brand preference?
- F. Does brand preference influence the customer purchase intention?

1.3 Significance of the Study

The goal of this study is to learn more about what Filipino consumers are considering when it comes to local and international smartphone brands that can be a factor in influencing their purchases. This study will benefit four sectors: Filipino Consumers, Local Brands, Foreign Brands, and Future Researchers, who would be able to use our study as a springboard into digging deeper into the influence of brands in smartphone choices. This study aims to raise awareness to Filipino consumers about local smartphone brands that they can buy that have the same quality or attributes as foreign smartphone brands. This research will determine the characteristics that consumers are looking for when purchasing. Local smartphone brands can use it as a reference for coming up with their brand's product developments, strategies, and likes. As for foreign smartphone brands, the results will help them determine Filipino consumers' behavior and attributes. This can help them see what strategies have worked on this Target Market to support their plans and areas they should disregard or revise. Lastly, this will serve as their reference for future researchers for future studies. This research aims to determine Filipino consumers' attributes to certain smartphone brands from China, the USA, Japan, and South Korea.

1.4 Scope and Limitations

The study seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of the brand's country of origin based on Filipino consumers. The researchers would like to determine why consumers perceive different brands based on their particular country. The study will be limited to Filipino consumers around the Philippines' National Capital Region (NCR) since this is the country's capital and a commercial area where international smartphone brands are exposed and widely available. Hence, Filipino consumers outside NCR would not be included in the study. Filipino consumers. Selected respondents would be included in the study with an age range of eighteen (18) to forty-four (44) or the Gen Z and millennials since most of them are working or have buying power. Therefore, outside age would not be included in the study. The data collection of the paper would be conducted online by providing the respondents with online questionnaires/interviews.

1.5 Definition of Terms

1. Brand Equity - how the consumers see the value of the brand.
2. Brand Identity - the brand's trademark
3. Brand Meaning - the impact of the brand on the customers
4. Brand Preference - the brand that customers prefer.
5. Brand Resonance - the brand's relationship with the customers
6. Brand Response - the brand's interaction with the customers.

- 7. Country of Origin - a country where the brand originated from.
- 8. Place - the channel where the brand is available or accessible.
- 9. Price - the measure of the smartphone's value.
- 10. Promotion - the brand's exposure or awareness.
- 11. Product - the physical features of a smartphone.
- 12. Purchase Intention - factors that contribute to the customer's purchase decision.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Theoretical Framework

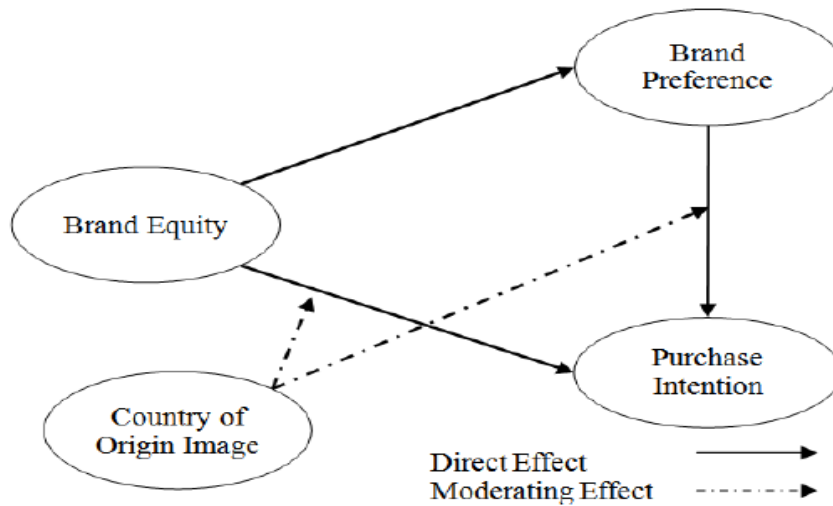
Moradi & Zarei (2011) developed a framework that integrates brand preference, purchase intention as a result of brand equity, and where the country of origin is considered a moderate variable. The framework was created to better understand the influence of brand equity on brand preference and purchase intent, two factors that there is a direct impact on a consumer's brand preference and brand loyalty.

2.2 Literature Review

2.2.1 Country of Origin

2.2.2 The USA

In the Philippines, the United States is a major exporter of many brands (PSA). Consumers have a tendency to consider the country of origin as their basis for evaluating products if they know where the country originated from, according to the study of Barrameda, Alaras, and Mondia, 2019. US brands are well known as high quality or prestige brands, and consumers are willing to buy more despite having a high cost compared to local brands. (Lee & Nguyen, 2017). American brands are preferred over Asian brands as consumers perceive them better (Kumar & Paul, 2018). Consumers tend to choose products made from the USA because they associate these with positive economic effects. The second-largest mobile phone market in the world is in the United States. According to the Pew Research Internet Project, in the United States, fifty-eight percent (58%) of adults own a smartphone (Sidharth et al., 2015). The United States and Canada have high rankings in terms of image, whereas Korea and China have the lowest orders in a country's image (Rezvani et al., 2012).



2.2.2.1 Japan

In a study conducted by Bautista (2019), consumers' purchase intentions are most likely impacted by the product's value and place of origin. A study from Karoui & Khemakem (2019) mentioned that many studies have shown that consumers from developing and least developed countries are more likely to buy imported goods rather than support their local interests. An example would be the country of Japan. Japan has always been known around the world for providing high-quality products. Notably, Japan is one of the biggest suppliers in Asia for brands, namely Panasonic, Hitachi, and Denso (Philipp Borgstedt, Bastian Neyer, & Gerhard Schewe, 2017). As a result, many consumers are most likely to own at least one Japanese brand appliance in their household. Aside from devices, Japan was also known for its smartphone brands. Moreover, Japanese products are usually cheap with high quality; that's why it is well known, especially in ASEAN countries (SaangJoon Baak)

2.2.2.2 South Korea

Technological advancements are rapidly growing in smartphones or mobile commerce (Han & Cho, 2016). In Korea, its mobile phones started in 1980 and evolved into smartphones in 2010 (Jin, 2017). Samsung and LG are well-known smartphone brands in Korea, whereas Korean consumers have the highest interest in Samsung (Kim et al., 2020). Samsung, for example, invests in its Research and Development, resulting in a creative strategy for manufacturing smartphones that meet the needs of consumers (Haizar et al., 2020). Due to Korea's successful technological advancements, they were the first to commercialize the 5G technology, which is now becoming an essential benchmark in other countries (Ho, 2020).

2.2.2.3 China

Various aesthetic and utilitarian produced-related factors influence smartphone repurchase intention, including design and user satisfaction. Socio-cultural factors include normative beliefs and mianzi/face factors and factors related to brands such as popularity, loyalty, the origin of the products, and its perceived qualities. The proposed structure also considers factors that affect mianzi/face enhancement, upkeep, and preservation (Filiari et al., 2017). Because smartphones are a top-rated product among Chinese customers, who make up the world's largest smartphone market, the survey focused on smartphone companies. This study contributes to the global business literature by applying CBBE in China. According to the findings of the qualitative interviews, three variables are significant to customers in China when choosing a smartphone brand: brand popularity, place of origin, and brand mianzi (Filiari et al., 2018). Huawei Technologies Co., China's leading electronics company and ranks second after Samsung Electronics Co. as the largest smartphone manufacturer in the world, is the most prominent example of this trend, according to Mariani and Bertolini (2019). Global identity positively impacts Chinese smartphone businesses, but antagonism and ethnocentrism negatively affect them. Previous research has looked at the role of ethnocentrism and hostility in the realms of different countries such as China and the United States. Still, the current study looks at the impact of global identity, ethnocentrism, and antagonism between India and China (Raman & Aashish, 2020). Furthermore, in 2016, China surpassed the United States as the world's leading consumer market, accounting for thirty-one percent (31%) of worldwide luxury sales (Ding, 2017).

2.2.2.4 Philippines

Local brands of smartphones in the Philippines keep on emerging and innovating to keep up with the trend of the smartphone industry. They make their products more affordable and try to improve the entertainment features (Florentino, 2020). Local brands of smartphones pride themselves as locally made. However, consumers purchase different brands based on their market presence and availability about their origin (Halkias, Davvetas & Diamantopoulos, 2016). Filipinos have a colonial mentality that lacks a national perspective and prefers foreign goods (Baquillas, 2018). Self-belongingness to a social group affects the social identity of someone (Nguyen & Alcantara, 2020), which means the preference of Filipino consumers depends on the importance of the consumer's environment (Castillo, 2018). It leads to xenocentrism among consumers, who believe that local items are inferior to foreign goods (Yu-Lun, Sahar, and Tsunwai 2020). Once a local product or brand has been developed, discrimination of the brand begins as a result of low self-integrity among consumers, and it becomes inferior to other brands (Herz & Diamantopoulos, 2017). Customers' social preference for foreign products over locally created products is xenocentrism (Camacho, Concha & Correa, 2020). When it comes to multinational brands, Filipino consumers experience a feeling of pride, self-expression, satisfaction, brand image, and product quality (Bautista, Takanori & Luz Suplico, 2020). As explained in these studies, factors affect Filipino consumers' perception of local and international brands of a smartphone depending on the country of origin. The social view of the market regarding the products and brands affects the consumer's perception

2.2.3 Brand Preference

2.2.3.1 Product

As Kotler defines, a product is a crucial element that gives up customer value in the market. Product quality influences a consumer's purchase decision since it affects the product's performance, which affects the customer's value and satisfaction (Alam, 2020). Likewise, Santy (2019) concluded that product quality satisfies user needs, including various features and enhancing product performance.

2.2.3.2 Price

Price is one of the aspects that customers usually consider when buying a smartphone. The consumer's value pricing and mobile phone features are critical variables. It also served as a motivator, influencing their purchase of a mobile phone (Sata, 2013). Price is the driving factor in purchasing decisions (Lay-Yee, Kok-Siew & Yin-Fah, 2013). Good quality of the products would lead to a higher price (Roseli, Azhar, Samsudin, Johari & Ismail, 2016). Companies cannot rule out price as the only factor in the marketing mix frequently used by consumers in their purchasing decisions (Asdi & Putra, 2020).

2.2.3.2 Place

In the marketplace, The Place is the essential aspect that consumers consider. However, because of the modernization of the retail system, it's been a challenge for some retailers and manufacturers to determine what influences the shopper inside the store and

how to increase the demand for the products and services (Bellini, 2017). According to a study conducted by Khatwani (2017), one of the advantages of online shopping is that you can easily compare the products you are planning to purchase. The specifications of the products can easily be accessed online, and you can see other options. On the other hand, Physical stores have become a crucial part of the decision-making process of consumers (Bellini, 2017). Many smartphone retailers use Face-to-face interaction with their consumers: many consumers prefer to inspect the smartphones they plan to purchase. When it comes to the store locations, consumers decide to shop based on whether or not a retail location can be found. For example, customers prefer to shop at retail spaces accessible to them. If customers find the location difficult to reach, they will choose an accessible shop (Sugeng, 2018). Therefore, the number of retail stores and accessibility to consumers are significant for physical stores.

2.2.3.4 Promotion

Promotion is an essential activity for smartphone brands in order to stand out. Doing this would attract customers and increase purchases (Hadi, 2021). Fintikasari & Ardyan (2018) found that social media, mainly digital marketing, is one of the most influential venues, particularly millennials (Fintikasari & Ardyan, 2018). It provides an excellent platform for creating effective brand awareness (Tamanna, 2021). By doing this, smartphone brands are exposed and thus will gain more recognition and customers.

2.2.4 Brand Equity

2.2.4.1 Brand Identity

Companies manage brand identity as a collection of strategic instruments to raise brand awareness, set themselves apart from competitors, and build customer loyalty and brand value. (Mao et al., 2020). As it establishes links between the customer and the brand, brand identity obtains the customer's perspective identification (Yeh, Wang, and Yieh, 2016) and (Mao et al., 2020). Customers appreciate the value of a brand's identity (Patek and Ruzzier, 2013) because of its physical uniqueness, which identifies the brand in the minds of consumers; brand identity sets it apart from other brands.

2.2.4.2 Brand Meaning

The actual work or output done by a given unit or entity in an organization is referred to as business performance (Molinillo et al., 2018). Their sales determine the performance of the brands. According to the study, brand identity, through brand preference and affective brand identification, indirectly influences the willingness to pay a premium price. Furthermore, when customers have had a positive and memorable encounter with the service brand, brand identification has a strong mediating effect (Casidy, 2018).

2.2.4.3 Brand Response

It is essential to consider the brand response of a smartphone. This would provide awareness and associations or images (Lencastre & Real, 2013). One way that consumers tend to respond to a brand is through social media. Facebook and Youtube ads are commonly used. It can either have a positive or negative impact depending on the advertisement you show (Rashid & Zeeshan, 2018). Having a brand response, you can measure how effectively your brand will affect your customers.

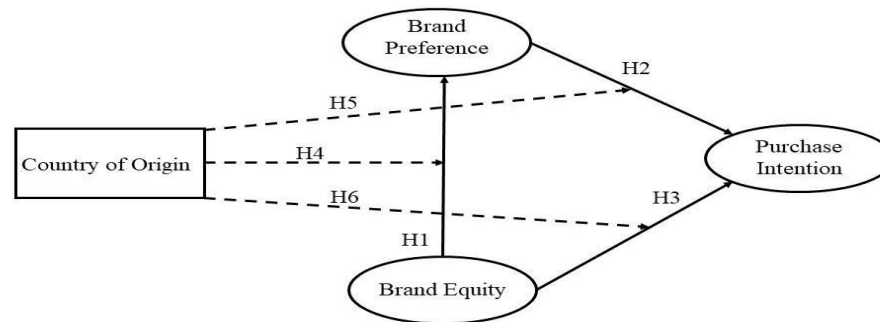
2.2.4.4 Brand Resonance

According to Huang et al. (2014), brand resonance causes customers to develop behavioral connections and loyalty, impacting their purchase intentions. The nature of the consumer-brand interaction and, more particularly, the amount to which a person resonates or connects with a brand and feels "in sync" with it is referred to as brand resonance (Jang et al., 2020).

2.2.4.5 Purchase Intention

In this study, brand preference and equity impact purchase intention, which is a dependent variable. Consumer behavior and attitudes, as well as their expectations, are referred to as purchase intention (Rai, 2021). If the product value does not meet the consumer's needs, Purchase intention will lower if the product satisfies the consumer's needs. Purchase intentions will become stronger and higher. (Wong, 2019). Consumers' evaluation of a product before purchasing it refers to purchase intention. (Younus, Rasheed & Zia, 2015). It studies the reason to buy a product and may be influenced by quality and value. (Mirabi, Akbariyeh, Tahmasebifard, 2015).

2.3 Conceptual framework



H1: Brand equity positively affects brand preference.

H2: Brand equity positively affects customer purchase intention.

H3: Brand preference positively affects customer purchase intention.

H4: Country of origin moderates the effect of brand equity on brand preference.

H5: Country of origin moderates the effect of brand equity on customer purchase intention.

H6: Country of origin moderates the effect of brand preference on customer purchase intention.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers will collect data using a descriptive-correlational approach by conducting online surveys to gather unbiased data from respondents to answer this. The survey will be composed of different parts to help the researchers determine the link between these three variables. The participants of this research will be Working millennials and Generation Z (ages 18 to 44 years old) who are currently residing in Metro Manila. The population size of Metro Manila is 4,430,700, and from this, a sample size of 200 will be used as respondents.

3.2 Research Instruments

The study will take a mixed-method approach, with the researchers collecting data through a survey questionnaire as their primary tool. The survey's questions were designed by the researchers, and they will be separated into four sections. The first part consists of the demographics and screener questions to help the researchers determine the respondents' profile, such as their location, socio-economic class, etc. A screener question will determine if the respondents are qualified. The Likert scale will be used in the second half of the survey questionnaire, divided into four sections: brand preference, brand equity, country of origin, and purchase intention. The next part is a single-question part that will allow the respondents to rate the given countries according to their consumer preferences.

Furthermore, the last part consists of multiple-choice questions wherein the respondents will be asked to choose their three choices corresponding to the factors given. These questions will allow the researchers to gather data to help them answer their research questions and hypotheses.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

The researchers were successfully able to gather data from 200 respondents that fit the study's criteria; however, only 190 respondents were validated because of the screener questions in the questionnaire. Table 1 shows the characteristics of the respondents. The results from the survey showed that most of the respondents consist of female (66.8%), 98% of them were single 18-24 years of age (85.3%), and they came from Quezon City (26.8%), Manila (18.9%) and Paranaque (11.6%). Based on the results, 78.4% of the respondents were students who mostly belonged to Class C (23.2%) socioeconomic class.

Demographics	Group	Frequency	Percentage
Brand	Apple	75	39.5
	Apple, Asus	1	0.5
	Apple, Huawei	2	1.1
	Apple, Oppo	1	0.5
	Apple, Samsung	15	7.9
	Apple, Samsung, Oppo, Xiaomi	1	0.5
	Asus	2	1.1
	Cherry Mobile, Samsung, Sony	1	0.5
	Huawei	17	8.9
	Infinix	1	0.5
	Lenovo	1	0.5
	MI	1	0.5
	Oppo	12	6.3
	Pocophone	1	0.5
	Real Me	1	0.5
	Realme	2	1.1
	Samsung	40	21.1
	Samsung, Xiaomi	1	0.5
	Techno	1	0.5
	Vivo	5	2.6
Xiaomi	2	1.1	
Xiaomi	6	3.2	
Xiaomi, Asus	1	0.5	
Promotion	Yes	190	100
Smartphone Brand	Apple	21	11.1
	Apple, Cherry Mobile, Google Pixel, Huawei, Motorola, MyPhone, Oppo, Samsung, Vivo, Realme	1	0.5
	Apple, Cherry Mobile, Google Pixel, LG, Samsung	1	0.5
	Apple, Cherry Mobile, Huawei, LG, Oppo, Samsung, Sony, Vivo	1	0.5

Apple, Cherry Mobile, Huawei, LG, Oppo, Samsung, Toshiba, Vivo	1	0.5
Apple, Cherry Mobile, Huawei, MyPhone, Oppo, Samsung, Vivo	1	0.5
Apple, Cherry Mobile, Huawei, Oppo, Samsung, Vivo	1	0.5
Apple, Google Pixel	1	0.5
Apple, Google, Huawei, LG, Oppo, Samsung, Sony, Toshiba, Vivo	1	0.5
Apple, Google Pixel, Huawei, Oppo, Samsung	1	0.5
Apple, Google Pixel, Oppo, Samsung	1	0.5
Apple, Google Pixel, Samsung	2	1.1
Apple, Goggle Pixel, Samsung, Xiaomi	1	0.5
Apple, Huawei	1	0.5
Apple, Huawei, LG, Oppo, Samsung, Sony, Vivo	1	0.5
Apple, Huawei, LG, Oppo, Samsung, Vivo	1	0.5
Apple, Huawei, LG, Oppo, Vivo	1	0.5
Apple, Huawei, LG, Samsung	1	0.5
Apple, Huawei, MyPhone, Oppo	1	0.5
Apple, Huawei, MyPhone, Samsung	1	0.5
Apple, Huawei, Oppo	1	0.5
Apple, Huawei, Oppo, Samsung	8	4.2
Apple, Huawei, Oppo, Samsung, Sony	1	0.5
Apple, Huawei, Oppo, Samsung, Vivo	15	7.9
Apple, Huawei, Oppo, Samsung, Vivo, Realme, Xiaomi	1	0.5

Apple, Huawei, Oppo, Samsung, Vivo, Xiaomi	1	0.5
Apple, Huawei, Oppo, Samsung, Vivo, xiaomi, realme	1	0.5
Apple, Huawei, Oppo, Vivo	2	1.1
Apple, Huawei, Oppo, Xiaomi	1	0.5
Apple, Huawei, Samsung	23	12.1
Apple, Huawei, Samsung, Sony, Vivo	1	0.5
Apple, Huawei, Samsung, Vivo	6	3.2
Apple, Huawei, Samsung, Xiaomi	2	1.1
Apple, LG, Oppo, Samsung, Vivo	1	0.5
Apple, Oppo	1	0.5
Apple, Oppo, Samsung	3	1.6
Apple, Oppo, Samsung, Sony	1	0.5
Apple, Oppo, Samsung, Vivo	6	3.2
Apple, Oppo, Samsung, Vivo, Xiaomi	1	0.5
Apple, Samsung	21	11.1
Apple, Samsung, Sony	1	0.5
Apple, Samsung, Vivo	5	2.5
Apple, Sony	1	0.5
Apple, Vivo	1	0.5
Cherry Mobile, Huawei, LG, Samsung	1	0.5
Cherry Mobile, Oppo, Samsung, Vivo	1	0.5
Google Pixel, Huawei, Oppo, Samsung, Vivo	1	0.5
Google Pixel, MyPhone, Sony, Huawei	4	2.1
Huawei, Oppo	3	1.6
Huawei, Oppo, Samsung, Vivo	3	0.5
Huawei, Oppo, Vivo	1	0.5
Huawei, Oppo, Xiaomi	1	0.5

	Huawei, Samsung	3	1.6
	LG, Samsung, Vivo	1	0.5
	MyPhone, Oppo, Samsung	1	0.5
	Oppo	1	0.5
	Oppo, Samsung	1	0.5
	Oppo, Samsung, Vivo	3	1.6
	poco	1	0.5
	Samsung	14	7.4
	Vivo	2	1.1
	Xiaomi	1	0.5
Location	Caloocan	10	5.3
	Las Piñas	15	7.9
	Makati	7	3.7
	Malabon	1	0.5
	Mandaluyong	4	2.1
	Manila	36	18.9
	Marikina	6	3.2
	Muntinlupa	14	7.4
	Parañaque	22	11.6
	Pasay	4	2.1
	Pasig	2	1.1
	Quezon City	51	26.83
	San Juan	2	1.1
	Taguig	7	3.7
Valenzuela	9	4.7	
Age	18 - 24 years old	162	85.3
	25 - 29 years old	19	10
	30 - 34 years old	3	1.6
	35 - 39 years old	2	1.1
	40 - 44 years old	4	2.1
Gender	Female	127	66.8
	Male	63	33.2
Status	Married	5	2.6

	Separated/Annuled/Divorced	1	0.5
	Single	184	96.8
Income	Class A: P219,140 and above monthly income	26	13.7
	Class B: P131, 483 to P219,140 monthly income	27	14.2
	Class C: P76,669 to P131,484 monthly income	44	23.2
	Class C1: P76,669 to P131,484 monthly income	37	19.5
	Class C2: P21,914 to P43,828 monthly income	34	17.9
	Class C3: P10,957 to P21,914 monthly income	12	6.3
	Class D: P10,957 and below monthly income	10	5.3
Occupation	Employed	38	20
	Student	149	78.4
	Unemployed	3	1.6

Table 1 Demographic Characteristic of the Respondents (n=190)

Country of Origin	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
I am aware of the country where my smartphone brand originated	4.879	1.277	Agree
I don't mind the country of origin of the brand.	4.584	1.277	Agree
I prefer international brands.	4.921	1.14	Agree
I prefer local brands.	3.237	1.29	Slightly Disagree
I associate the brand of my phone with.	4.732	1.211	Agree
Overall	4.471	1.239	Agree

Table 2 shows the respondents' level of agreement on the Country of Origin of smartphones.

Table 2 shows the respondents' understanding of the Country of Origin of smartphones. Results revealed that respondents agree that they "prefer international brands" (Mean = 4.921, SD = 1.140), and "they are aware of the country where their smartphone brand originated" (Mean = 4.879, SD = 1.277). In addition, results revealed that respondents slightly disagree that they "prefer local brands" (Mean = 3.237, SD = 1.290). This indicates that consumers of Smartphones are considered the country of origin.

Brand Equity	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
I can recognize the brand of my phone among other brands	5.211	1.033	Strongly Agree
I can easily recognize the symbol or logo of smartphone from the brand	5.558	0.8	Strongly Agree
The brand of my phone meets the quality that I am looking for	5.416	0.855	Strongly Agree
I chose the brand of my phone because of its performance	5.311	0.933	Strongly Agree
I usually associate the brand name of my phone with my social class.	3.953	1.575	Strongly Agree
I usually associate the brand of my phone with affordability	4.737	1.241	Agree
I can easily remember the brand of my phone based on some of its	5.011	1.277	Agree
The brand of my phone is my first choice when buying a smartphone	4.995	1.339	Agree
I consider the brand of my phone to be my phone with affordability.	4.453	1.51	Agree
Overall	4.96	1.174	Agree

Table 3 shows the respondents' perception of Brand Equity.

Table 3 shows the respondents' perception of Brand Equity. Results revealed that respondents strongly agree that "they can easily recognize the symbol or logo of smartphones from the brand of their phone" (Mean = 5.558, SD = .880, "the brand of their phone meets the quality that they are looking for (Mean = 5.416, SD = .885). In addition, results revealed that respondents agree that "they consider the brand of their phone to be superior to other brands" (Mean = 4.453, SD = 1.510). This indicates that respondents considered the brand equity of their smartphones to be high.

Brand Preference	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
I consider the accessibility of the brand	5.379	0.916	Strongly Agree
I prefer to buy from the physical store where my preferred smartphone brand is available	5.495	0.919	Strongly Agree
I prefer checking the product physically	5.468	0.918	Strongly Agree
I pay attention to the promotions of the brand	5.679	1.271	Agree
Promotion is not my priority	4.226	1.405	Slightly Agree
I consider the brand endorsers	2.821	1.603	Slightly Disagree
I don't mind who promotes the brand	5.084	1.286	Agree

I consider the recommendations from people I know	5.195	0.937	Strongly Agree
I prefer the brands that I know	5.563	0.723	Strongly Agree
I consider the aesthetics of the brand (e.g., Color, Size, etc.)	5.163	1.103	Agree
I buy the brand that I want regardless of the price	4.005	1.412	Slightly Agree
I consider the brand that is more affordable.	4.779	1.227	Agree

Table 4 shows the respondents' perception of Brand Preference.

Table 4 shows the respondents' perception of Brand Preference. Results revealed that respondents strongly agree that "they can easily recognize the symbol or logo of smartphones from the brand of their phone" (Mean = 5.558, SD = .880, "the brand of their phone meets the quality that they are looking for (Mean = 5.416, SD = .885). In addition, results revealed that respondents agree that "they consider the brand of their phone to be superior to other brands" (Mean = 4.453, SD = 1.510). This indicates that respondents considered the brand equity of their smartphones to be high.

Purchase Intention	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
I am willing to purchase a new smartphone when my preferred brand releases a new product	3.732	1.635	Slightly Agree
I would likely buy the smartphone brand recommended to me by other people	4.311	1.307	Slightly Agree
I would likely buy the smartphone brand that I saw on commercial or other advertising platforms	3.763	1.415	Slightly Agree
Overall	3.935	1.452	Slightly Agree

Table 5 shows the Extent of respondents' Purchase Intention.

Table 5 shows the respondents' perception of Purchase Intention shows the respondents' level of agreement in terms of Purchase Intention. Results revealed that respondents slightly agree that they are willing to purchase new smartphones when their preferred brand releases a new product (Mean = 3.732, SD = 1.635). In addition, respondents also slightly agreed that they would buy the smartphone brand when recommended by other people (Mean = 4.311, SD = 1.307). Lastly, the respondents agree that they will buy the smartphone when seen on commercials or other advertising platforms (Mean = 3.763, SD = 1.415).

Brand Equity	Factor Loading	EigenValue	% Variance	Cronbach Alpha
Brand Recall		3.628	40.313	0.77
I can easily recognize the brand of my phone among other brands through its physical attributes (Size, Color, Design, etc.)	0.587			

I usually associate the brand name of my phone with my social class (In terms of price)	0.532			
I can easily remember the brand of my phone based on some of its characteristics. (e.g., light colors)	0.557			
The brand of my phone is my first choice when buying a smartphone	0.697			
Based on my personal experience, I consider the brand of my phone to be superior to other brands.	0.623			
Brand Attributes		1.155	12.833	0.722
The brand of my phone meets the quality that I am looking for. (e.g., competitiveness, consistency, distinctiveness, etc.)	0.595			
I chose the brand of my phone because of its specifications.	0.844			

Kaiser-Mayer Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy = 0.871

Table 6 Factor Analysis of the Brand Equity

To find out the underlying dimensions, Brand Equity indicators were factor-analyzed with the use of the principal axis method and varimax rotation. The Kaiser-Mayer Olkin sampling adequacy measure (KMO=.871) shows that the sample of 190 respondents is sufficient enough for factor analysis. To assess the reliability of each scale, a reliability coefficient (Cronbach Alpha) was calculated for every factor component. Both factors satisfied the criterion for reliability which is above 0.70.

The number of items was then reduced further through rejecting all of the following items with factor loading and commonalities that is less than 0.40, eigenvalues of less than one, and percent variance of less than four percent (4%).

The rules decision above resulted in the elimination of 2 of the 9 items measuring Brand Equity, exposing two factors (Table 6), in the order of reducing the explained variance. The first factor, termed Brand Recall, is applicable to Brand Equity 1, 5, 7, 8, and 9. Brand Equity 3 and 4 are referred to in Factor 2, which is labeled as Brand Attributes.

Brand Preference	Factor Loading	EigenValue	% Variance	Cronbach Alpha
Brand Salience		3.004	25.032	0.722
I consider the availability of the brand	0.431			
I prioritize buying my preferred smartphone brand in physical stores.	0.666			
I prefer checking the product physically.	0.846			
I pay attention to the promotions of the brand	0.423			

I prefer the brands that I know	0.561			
I consider the aesthetic of the brand (e.g., Color, Size, etc.)	0.474			
Brand Resonance		1.552	12.937	0.71
I consider the brand endorsers	0.755			
I buy the brand that I want regardless of the price	0.604			
Brand Image		1.358	11.32	0.706
I consider a recommendation from people I know	0.411			
I consider the brand is more affordable	0.57			
Brand Promotion		1.292	10.769	0.718
Promotion is not my priority	0.423			
I don't mind who promotes the brand	0.556			

Kaiser-Mayer Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy = 0.871

Table 7 Factor Analysis of the Brand Preference

To determine the underlying dimension, the Brand Preference indicators were analyzed per factor using the principal-axis method and varimax rotation. The Kaiser-Mayer Olkin sampling adequacy measure (KMO=.821) indicates that the sample of 190 respondents is sufficient for factor analysis to continue. To estimate scale accuracy, Cronbach Alpha was calculated. All factors satisfied the criterion for reliability which is above 0.70. The items were then reduced further by rejecting all of the following items with factor loading and commonalities that are less than 0.40, an eigenvalue of less than one, and less than four percent (4%) of percentage variance. There were no articles rejected, resulting in the identification of four factors (Table 7) in order of decreasing the explained variance. Factor 1, termed as Brand Salience, is related to Brand Preferences 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, and 10. Factor 2 is termed Brand Resonance, and it refers to Brand Preferences 6 and 11. Factor 3, termed as Brand Image, is related to Brand Preferences 8 and 10. Finally, Factor 4 marked as Brand Promotion applies to Brand Preferences 5 and 7.

Construct	Items	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Ave. Variances Extracted
Brand Equity	Factor 1	0.875	0.727	0.829	0.528
	Factor 2	0.882			
Brand Preference	Factor 1	0.712	0.719	0.824	0.568
	Factor 2	0.524			
	Factor 3	0.685			
	Factor 4	0.571			
Purchase Intention	PurIntent1	0.809	0.74	0.853	0.659

	PurIntent2	0.762	
	PurIntent3	0.861	

Table 8. Latent Variable Coefficients

The coefficients shown in Table 8 have been used to evaluate the construct reliability, internal consistency, and convergent validity of the indicator sets. In assessing construct reliability, Cronbach alpha and composite reliability are frequently applied (Roldan & Sanchez-Franco, 2012; Kock, 2017). To indicate good internal consistency and reliability, the composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha (CA) values have to be at least 0.7. (Nunnally, 1978; Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Based on table 8, findings indicated that the Cronbach Alpha for Brand Equity resulted in (.727), Brand Preference resulted in (.719), and Purchase Intention resulted (.740) satisfied the criterion for reliability. Also, the value of composite reliability for Brand Equity which is (.829), Brand Preference that is (.824), and Purchase Intention, resulted in (.853) fitting the criterion for internal consistency of the research instrument. Convergent validity also assesses the quality of a research instrument's group of items or inquiry statements. Convergent validity means that respondents understand the items or question statements for each concept in the same way that the designers intended (Kock, 2017). Convergent validity is established once the values of item loadings are at least 0.5 and the p-values will be less than .05 (Hair, Anderson, & Tatham, 1987; Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2009; Kock, 2017). Similarly, the average variance extracted (AVE) measures the number of variance of each construct from its items relative to the amount due to error of measurement (Chin, 1998; Amora et al., 2016). According to Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2011), there is validation for the construct if the average variance extracted (AVEs) is greater than 0.50. Table 4 results show that all indicator item loadings are significant statistically (Range = .524 - .882, p.05), and the range of average variance extracted (.528 - .659) meets the necessary value, indicating that the research instrument has convergent and validity will be acceptable.

Latent Variables	Brand Equity	Brand Preference	Purchase Intention
Brand Equity	0.812		
Brand Preference	0.301	0.726	
Purchase Intention	0.517	0.513	0.607

Diagonal values are the square roots of AVE, and off-diagonals are inter-construct squared correlations
 Table 9 Square Roots of AVE Coefficients and Correlation Coefficients

Table 9 displays the latent variable correlations with square roots of AVE coefficients to assess the instrument's discriminant validity. Discriminant validity tests are performed to ensure that the statements related to each latent variable will not lead to confusion when respondents complete the questionnaire. Furthermore, it determines whether statements related to one variable, for example, are not contradictory to items relating to other variables (Kock, 2017). The square root of the AVEs for each variable should be significantly larger than any of the correlations involving that variable. If the values on the main diagonal are greater than the values off the diagonal, the latent variables have appropriate discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The values on the main diagonal demonstrated that the research instrument has discriminant validity, and it clearly shows that the study's assessment measures have discriminant validity.

4.1.1 Structural Model and Hypotheses

Measure	Estimate	Threshold	Interpretation
Average Path Coefficient (APC)	0.392, p < .001	p < 0.5	Acceptable
Average R-squared (ARS)	0.318, p < .001	p < 0.5	Acceptable
Average Full Collinearity VIF (AFVIF)	1.471	≤ 3.3	Ideally
Tenenhaus Goodness of Fit (GoF)	0.406	≥ .36	Large

Table 10. Model Fit Indices of the Emerging Model

Table 10 displays the overall model fit measures for the proposed model. Various global fit indices have been used to evaluate the model's acceptability. These indices were used to assess the new structural model's acceptability. The main level of importance of the structural model is one of the evaluation criteria for Average Path Coefficients (p-value of APC) and the level of significance of the Average R-squared (p-value of ARS). Notably, both the Average Path Coefficient (APC = .392, p.001) and the Average R-squared (ARS = .318 p.001) are above the acceptable range (p.05). This indicates that the emerging model fits the study well.

4.1.2 Emerging Model

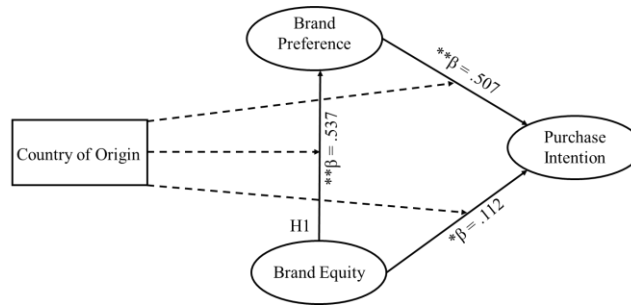


Figure 1

4.2 Discussions

Hypothesis	Exogenous Variable	Endogenous Variable	Moderating Variable	Path Coefficients (β)	P - values	Effect Sizes (f ²)	Effect Size Interpretation (Cohen, 1988)**	Description	Decision
H1:	Brand Equity	→ Brand Preference		0.537	< 0.001	0.294	Medium	Significant	Accept H1
H2:	Brand Equity	→ Purchase Intention		0.112	0.049	0.042	Small	Significant	Accept H2
H3:	Brand Preference	→ Purchase Intention		0.507	< 0.001	0.290	Medium	Significant	Accept H3
H4:	Brand Equity	→ Brand Preference	Country of Origin	-0.018	0.403	0.002	NA	Not Significant	Reject H4
H5:	Brand Equity	→ Purchase Intention	Country of Origin	0.039	.297	0.008	NA	Not Significant	Reject H5
H6:	Brand Preference	→ Purchase Intention	Country of Origin	-0.029	0.342	0.006	NA	Not Significant	Reject H6

**0.02 – small, 0.15 – medium, 0.36 - large

Table 11. Results and Hypotheses Test

4.2.1 Brand Equity to Brand Preference

The researchers look at the route coefficients and their probability values to see if Brand Equity has an impact on Brand Preference. According to Table 11, Brand Equity has a substantial positive effect on Brand Preference (β= 0.537, p 0.001), implying that a rise in Brand Equity will result in an increase in Brand Preference. Furthermore, the scale of Cohen suggests that Brand Equity has a medium effect (f² =.294) on Brand Preference (1988).

The researchers looked at the path coefficients of the results and the probability values to see whether brand equity impacts brand preference. According to Table 11, Brand Equity positively affects brand preference (β = 0.537, p < 0.001), which implies that a rise in Brand equity will increase brand preference. Furthermore, the scale of Cohen (1988) suggests that there is a medium effect (f² = .294) when it comes to brand preference.

This leads to the acceptance of hypothesis 1: Brand equity positively affects brand preference. This indicates that Brand equity can influence brand preference. The findings support Moradi and Zarei's (2011) hypothesis, according to which brand equity has a positive and direct influence on brand preferences. Brand loyalty, perceived quality, brand association, and brand awareness are all factors that affect brand equity, according to their findings. As a result, customers tend to favor brands that have the features they seek in a smartphone.

4.2.2 Brand Equity to Purchase Intention

To see if Brand Equity had an impact on Purchase Intention. According to Table 11, Brand Equity has a substantial positive effect on Purchase Intention ($\beta = -0.018$, $p = 0.49$), implying that an increase in Brand Equity will show an increase in Purchase Intention. Furthermore, as the scale of Cohen suggests, Brand Equity has a little effect ($f^2 = .049$) on Purchase Intention (1988).

This leads to the acceptance of hypothesis 2: Brand Equity has a positive effect on purchase intention. This suggests that brand equity can increase a customer's desire to buy a smartphone. This conclusion supports Siraj's (2020) findings that brand equity positively impacts purchase intentions. The author went on to say that because brand equity has such an impact on purchase intention, more marketers are striving to influence their customers by focusing on strategies that would develop loyal customers. Furthermore, Madhobi et al. (2018) discovered a link between brand equity factors and the customer's purchasing behavior in a study. This demonstrates that buyers care more about the quality of the smartphone they wish to buy.

4.2.3 Brand Preference to Purchase Intention

To see if Preference had an impact on Purchase Intention. According to Table 11, Preference has a substantial positive effect on Purchase Intention ($\beta = 0.507$, $p = 0.001$), implying that as the level of Preference increases, so does the extent of Purchase Intention. Furthermore, the scale of Cohen suggests that Preference has a medium effect ($f^2 = .290$) on Purchase Intention (1988).

This leads to the acceptance of hypothesis 3: Brand Preference positively affects purchase intention. This indicates that Brand Preference can increase the purchase intention of Smartphone customers. The results are comparable to Dam's (2020) empirical study, "Influence of Brand Trust, Perceived Value on Brand Preference and Purchase Intention," demonstrating that brand preference positively impacts purchase intention. Brand preference has a favorable impact on purchase intention, according to a study done by (Moradi and Zarei, 2011) utilizing structural equation modeling. The outcome confirms the study's findings (Vinh and Huy, 2015). From the results of structural modeling, there is a positive correlation between brand preference and purchasing intention. The data demonstrated that brand preference and purchase intent were well aligned.

4.2.4 Moderating Effect of Country of Origin on Brand Equity and Brand Preference

The moderating influence of country of origin on the link between Brand Equity and Brand Preference is depicted in Table 11. The findings revealed that country of origin has no effect on the link between Brand Equity and Brand Preference ($\beta = -0.018$, $p = 0.403$) in smartphones, indicating that hypothesis 4: Country of origin moderates the effect of brand equity on brand preference has been rejected. This means that Brand Equity and Brand Preference have no interacting effect on the country of origin.

The results are backed up by Moradi and Zarei's (2011) study, which found that the country has no substantial impact on brand equity and brand preference. According to the findings, brand equity is determined through brand loyalty, perceived quality, association, and awareness of the brand. This proves that the country of origin has little bearing on the consumers.

4.2.5 Moderating Effect of Country of Origin on Brand Equity and Purchase Intention

The moderating influence of country of origin on Brand Equity and Purchase Intention was shown in Table 11. The findings revealed that country of origin had no effect on the link between Brand Equity and Smartphone Purchase Intention ($\beta = 0.039$, $p = 0.297$), indicating that hypothesis 5: Country of origin moderates the effect of Brand Equity on Purchase Intention has been rejected. This shows that Brand Equity and Purchase Intention have no interacting effect on Brand Equity and Purchase Intention. According to the findings, the country of origin has no interacting effect that demonstrates that brand preference has a positive impact on purchase intention.

Brand Equity, as Wibowo S. et al. (2021)'s study concurs that the country of origin has no positive effect on the purchasing intention of consumers. This shows no effect on which country originated on the smartphone brand to purchase intention.

4.2.6 Moderating Effect of Country of Origin on Brand Preference and Purchase Intention

The moderating influence of country of origin on Brand Preference and Purchase Intention was shown in Table 11. The findings showed that country of origin has no effect on the link between Brand Preference and Purchase Intention ($\beta = -0.029$, $p = 0.342$) in smartphones, indicating that hypothesis 6: Country of origin moderates the effect of Brand Preference on Purchase Intention has been rejected. This implies that whether the smartphone brand is from China, Korea, or the United States, customers' brand preferences and purchase intention will not be affected.

This conclusion was backed by Moradi and Zarei's (2011) research. Consumer views of a country almost usually correspond with the uniqueness of a brand that a country develops, according to them. These consumers feel that goods made in countries with a positive image are more trustworthy than brands made in countries with a bad image, notwithstanding the findings of the COO

hypothesis. This issue supports the idea that country image has little to no impact on consumers because of globalization and the fact that consumers are used to seeing products from all over the world made by countries other than the brand owner.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The goal of this research is to identify if there is a moderating impact on brand preference, brand equity, and purchase intention on the smartphone's country of origin. To determine the link between the factors, the researchers investigated six hypotheses. According to the researchers, consumer brand preferences and purchasing intentions are positively influenced by brand equity. At the same time, brand preference also positively influences purchase intent. On the other hand, the researchers also proved that in terms of brand preference, the country of origin does not have any significance on brand equity. In addition, there is no moderating effect on brand equity in terms of purchasing intention. Finally, it has no moderating effect on brand preference regarding buying intention. The researchers concluded that the country of origin has no moderating influence on brand preference, brand equity, and purchasing intention based on their findings supported by Moradi and Zarei's 2011 research.

5.2 Recommendation

If any researcher is interested in further exploring this topic, the researchers of this study recommend further increasing the number of survey respondents so that they will be able to gather more information and data from their sample size. Since the population of this study is people residing in Metro Manila, the sample size of 190 is a little small. In addition, the number of survey respondents per city in Metro Manila should be divided according to the ratio of its population, a thing that the researchers failed to accomplish due to time constraints. The majority of respondents were also students, which might be one of the reasons why the researchers were able to conclude the following results. The researchers recommend further expanding the survey respondents to a variety of people, not just students, to widen the perspective and to be able to gather more information.

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