

Country of Origin Information, Ethnocentrism and Perceived Quality of Mobile Phones: Experience from the Field

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This study seeks to investigate the importance of the country of origin information, level of ethnocentrism and perceived quality of mobile phones amongst private university students in Malaysia. These data were gathered in late 2010 from 122 private university students based on the Country of Origin Information of Products questionnaire by Lascu and Babb (1995) and the 17-item CETSCALE by Shimp and Sharma (1987). Perceived quality was based on the students' ranking of the country of manufacture of the mobile phones in five countries namely Malaysia, China, Japan, Finland and South Korea. The respondents' characteristics were also obtained from the questionnaire. This study found that this group of students' is impartial towards the country of origin information when making purchase decisions. They also tend to be less ethnocentric in their outlook. Overall, they view highly the quality of mobile phones manufactured in developed countries. The paper provides knowledge to foreign mobile phone firms that intend to penetrate into the Malaysian market and existing firms currently targeting their mobile phones towards Malaysian private university students.

Field of Research: International marketing/Country of origin information

1. Introduction

The mobile phone market in Malaysia is expected to grow at a Compounded Annual Growth Rate of 6% between 2009 and 2014. Sale of mobile phones especially smart phones is expected to rise in the near future. This is due to the government's initiative in early 2010 to upgrade the mobile broadband network coupled with current users upgrading their mobile phones to better and innovative phones (Euromonitor, 2010). In March 2010, the local Malaysian mainstream media, The Star reported that about 5.5 million mobile phones were sold in Malaysia in 2009 and as at end 2009 the country had 30.3 million mobile subscribers (Sidhu, 2010). This encouraging trend illustrates the importance of mobile phones in Malaysia. Coupled with the respondents' familiarity and usage frequency, this study hence has selected mobile phones as the product of investigation.

With a higher purchasing power and in keeping with current trends, private university students purchasing habits on mobile phones need careful study by marketers. Today, mobile phones not only serve as a necessity among university students but are used as a way to express themselves. Additionally, as this group of consumers still has a longer time span in using mobile phones and will potentially upgrade when newer mobile phones models are launched, it is important to understand their purchase preferences.

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Thus, it is crucial to examine whether the country of origin information, ethnocentrism and perceived quality have an influence on their purchase decision. This study is mainly targeted at private university students as they represent the current generation Y. The generation Y respondents were chosen as they are identified as being internet savvy and quick to adopt technological innovations such as mobile phones (Ferfuson, 2008).

Companies' worldwide continuously searches for manufacturing locations at lower cost with good infrastructure and resource availability. Nonetheless, the choice of manufacturing location may influence the consumer's perception on the quality of the product produced. A country of manufacture known for its stringent product quality gains stronger consumer confidence on its produce.

This study aims to contribute to the scarce literature pertaining to young Malaysian consumers' view on the importance of the country of origin information, their level of ethnocentrism and how they perceive the quality of mobile phones manufactured in specific countries.

Peterson and Jolibert (1995, as cited by Cornish-Ward and Lewandowska 1998) explained that researchers have used numerous dependent variables in country of origin studies without clearly resolving the issues associated with their interrelationships. They further emphasized that consumer response variables such as perceived quality, price perceptions, perceived value and purchase intent are distinct constructs whose nature and interactions merit further investigation. Thus, this study will investigate how the country of origin information will affect the perceived quality of mobile phones amongst students at private universities in Malaysia.

Shergill et al. (2010) cited the works of Ueltschy, 1998; Balabanis et al., 2001; Klein, 2002 and Wong et al., 2008 whom mentioned that it was typical to raise issues pertaining to ethnocentrism when discussing country of origin effects. Henceforth, this study will also be addressing ethnocentrism from the respondents' perspective.

2. Literature Review

Since the seminal studies by Robert Schooler in 1965, numerous studies on the importance of the country of origin information on purchase decisions have been made. Consumers make decisions based upon extrinsic and intrinsic information cues. Intrinsic cues include the product attributes itself such as the packaging, taste and performance. Price, money backed guarantee, brand name and country of origin forms the extrinsic information cues. Bruning (1997) explained that the country of origin is an important information cue when consumers are assessing a product's quality.

The term "Made in" was used by Nagashima (1970, 1977) to define the products country of origin. Johansson et al. (1985) explained that the country of origin is the country where the firm's corporate headquarters is located. Yong (1996) on the other hand defined it as "where the product is made". With the advent of globalization, the country of origin construct has been decomposed into multiple dimensions which include country of design, country of assembly, country of manufacture and also country of parts (Merunka and Hamzaoui, 2006). In this paper, country of origin will be studied

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from the perspective of where a product is originally conceived and produced and with which the brand is generally associated. This is in line with recent operationalisations of the country of origin construct which focuses on the country to which a brand has historical or development ties, regardless of its country of design, country of assembly or country of parts (Pharr, 2005).

Pharr (2005) cited the work of Papadopolous and Heslop (2002) who found that the country of origin construct has become one of the most researched concepts in marketing and consumer behaviour with over 700 published studies. They further cited the work of Peterson and Jolibert (1995) who called it “one of the most widely studied phenomena in all the international business, marketing and consumer behaviour literatures” combined.

These developments coupled with the proliferation of hybrid products with multiple country affiliations necessitates this study to investigate whether the country of origin information is still important today in the context of young Malaysian consumers.

2.1 Country of Origin Information and Buying Behavior

In their studies among undergraduates at a large US university, Zolfagharian and Sun (2010), explained that bicultural Mexican Americans undergraduates respond to country of origin information differentially depending on their specific coping mechanism. Alternators appear to be more open than integrators to brands originated in one of the countries with which they identify. They further elaborated since country of origin information is essentially an either-or message (i.e. products are either from the USA or from Mexico), alternators are likely to more strongly identify with it. Their research also found that bicultural Mexican Americans are less ethnocentric and are more open to American as well as local brands.

Bamber and Khan's (2007) study among 312 elite Pakistani student consumers (i.e. from high socioeconomic status) between the ages of 17 to 44 years, found that the elite Pakistani respondents could be divided into two segments, those who are sensitive to country of origin information and those for whom country of origin information is not an important factor where purchase decisions are concern. Country of origin information was found to be more important for young elite consumers (i.e. the Bachelor of Business Administration sub group) than the older consumers (i.e. the Master of Business Administration sub group). Older consumers relied on their extensive previous experiences to determine the quality of a product.

A study among 583 urban household in Tashkent, Uzbekistan by Zain and Yasin (1997) discovered that Uzbeks opined that country of origin information is valuable when making purchase decisions. This is especially true when they are buying new and expensive products, and products that have a high risk of malfunction.

On the other hand, Polish consumers were found to be less interested in the country of origin information if they are purchasing a less expensive item or a product that is accepted by family and friends as discovered by Lascu and Babb (1995).

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2.2 Ethnocentrism and Buying Behavior

Balabanis and Diamantopoulos (2004) highlighted that the origins of the consumer ethnocentrism construct can be traced to Sumner's work in 1906 which states an individual view of his or her own group is the centre of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it.

Ethnocentrism was subsequently conceptualised by Shimp and Sharma (1987), as a psychological construct that influences an individual's attitudes when purchasing foreign made goods. According to their studies ethnocentrism is the tendency for an individual to view domestically manufactured products as superior and it is unpatriotic to purchase goods that are made abroad. Allan et al. (2006) cited Booth, 1979 and Worchel & Cooper, 1979 who explained that generally ethnocentrism represents the universal proclivity for people to view their own group as the center of the universe, to interpret other social units from the perspective of their own group, and to reject persons who are culturally dissimilar while blindly accepting those who are culturally like themselves.

According to Shergill et al. (2010), New Zealanders between the ages of 16 to 25 years are about mid level internationally in terms of ethnocentrism when compared to shoppers across 11 other locations. These young shoppers' brand perceptions are not influenced by ethnocentrism thus providing a level playing field for foreign brands. In terms of self/brand user congruency, they found that there was a country of origin effect, but neither foreign nor local brands found strong positive congruency with the respondents.

Neoh et al. (2007) study among 180 consumers in Penang, Malaysia revealed that the country of origin of brand and consumer ethnocentrism were important factors that influence consumers' purchase preferences of motorcycles. 72% of their respondents preferred buying Japanese brand motorcycles over national brands.

Consumer ethnocentrism also influences purchase decisions if the country of origin is perceived to be culturally similar or dissimilar as examined by Watson and Wright (2000). They found that consumers in New Zealand who are culturally similar to the United States of America and United Kingdom preferred products from these countries while products from Singapore and Italy, which are culturally different to New Zealand were evaluated unfavorably.

2.3 Country of Origin Information and Perceived Quality

In their study among 200 respondents in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Ghazali et al. (2008) discovered that the Malaysian consumer attaches the country of origin information to the quality of the product purchased. However, the average Malaysian consumer does not consider the country of origin aspect to be high on their list in deciding to purchase a product. Other factors such product quality, technological prowess and price takes precedence. His study also showed that the respondents ranked Japan tops as the country with the highest product quality. Malaysia and China were ranked sixth and eighth placed out of the ten countries chosen in terms of product quality.

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Both Zain and Yasin (1997) also cited the work of Kaynak and Cavusgil (1983) which highlighted that consumer's make judgment of the quality of foreign products based on their knowledge about the country's reputation in producing superior or inferior products.

The review of current literature revealed that existing studies specifically in the Malaysian context have yet to address young Malaysian consumers' view on the importance of the country of origin information and their level of ethnocentrism.

3. Research Objective

This exploratory study was conducted among students at two major private universities in Malaysia to investigate students' view on the importance of the country of origin information, their level of ethnocentrism and how they perceive the quality of mobile phones manufactured in specific countries. As literature on these areas is scarce, this study will assist marketers and product managers when marketing foreign products in Malaysia. Certainly this study will also provide information among local marketers when promoting Malaysian made goods and services among private tertiary students in Malaysia.

It is hoped that this study will contribute further to the existing literature on country of origin information and ethnocentrism among Malaysian consumers particularly private university students. Additionally, the quality perception on mobile phones manufactured in the selected countries will benefit manufacturers and marketers of mobile phones.

The results from this study will provide knowledge to foreign mobile phone firms that intend to penetrate into the Malaysian market and existing firms currently targeting their products and services towards private university students. This is in line with Rogers, Kaminski, Schoenbachler and Gordon (1994) as cited by Panigrahi and Ede (2000), who suggested that in-depth understanding of consumer use of country of origin information will enhance the product-marketing strategies of business firms. The understanding of the respondents' level of ethnocentrism will also be beneficial to new and present local companies that plans to capture this particular market segment with their products and services.

The objectives of the present study are to:

- (a) determine the importance of the country of origin information among private university students in Malaysia
- (b) gauge the level of ethnocentrism among private university students in Malaysia
- (c) examine how private university students in Malaysia perceive the quality of mobile phones manufactured in specific countries.

On the basis of the literature and the objective of this research, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H₁: Country of origin has a weak influence on the purchase decisions of mobile phones among young Malaysian consumers.

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H₂: Young Malaysian consumers are less ethnocentric.

4. Methodology

A structured questionnaire was designed to collect the data for this study.

In Section A of the questionnaire, the Country of Origin Information of Products questionnaire developed by Lascu and Babb (1995) was used to seek the respondents' opinion on country of origin information. This questionnaire consisting of 13 constructs was used by Lascu and Babb to seek country of origin information from Polish residents. It was subsequently borrowed by Zain and Yasin (1997) when they were studying Uzbeks respond on country of origin information. The same questionnaire was adopted by Bamber and Khan (2007) when they were investigating Pakistani students' views on this matter. Although this questionnaire has been widely used in investigating country of origin information, it has not been widely employed in the Malaysian context.

Section B measured consumer ethnocentrism using the widely used 17-item CETSCALE developed by Shimp and Sharma (1987). In Section C, the respondents' feedback on the quality of mobile phones designed and manufactured and solely manufactured in five countries namely Malaysia, China, Japan, Finland and South Korea were sought. A five point Likert scale was developed to gauge the respondents' perception of quality of the mobile phones from "1= very low quality" to "5 = very high quality". Similar measurement was undertaken by Cornish-Ward and Lewandowska (1998).

This study adopts a quantitative approach. A self-administered data collection method was carried out among students at 2 major private universities in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Participants of the study were informed on the purpose of the study.

The survey questions targeted to assess respondents' view on the country of origin information. Respondents rated themselves on a five point Likert scale from "1 = strongly disagree" to "5= strongly agree". This study was based on a non-probability sampling. Convenience sampling was used in this study. The sample size of this study is 122 students. The sample size used is consistent with the sample size used by noted researchers, such as Baykan and Nacar (2007). According to Peterson (2001), undergraduate students are suitable as respondents as the likelihood of error within the measurement model being inflated by situational factors inherent in diverse samples (e.g. education, age, income and social class) is reduced when respondents are homogeneous across demographic and behavioral characteristics, thus resulting in less "extraneous variation". Furthermore, Sherman et al. (1999) also support the use of students as subjects within consumer research and confirm its acceptance by stating that 86 per cent of the articles published in the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* used students as their human subjects.

This is a cross-sectional study whereby data collection was done only once. At the private university where the researcher works, the survey was conducted during tutorial hours by the researcher with the help of the respective tutor. In the other university, the researcher sought the assistance of a former student with proper guidance provided.

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The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to process and analyse the data. The data were analysed using Factor Analysis. Factor Analysis was used to determine the validity of the Country of Origin Information of Products and the CETSCALE questionnaires from the respondents' perspective.

5. Results

5.1 Respondents' Profile

Approximately 130 students from 2 major private universities in Malaysia were surveyed by questionnaire; 122 students replied with a total response rate of 93.8%. The characteristics of the respondents which were from different gender, age, mobile phone brands currently owned and monthly allowances received are highlighted in Table I. The respondents are entirely Malaysians.

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Table I: Respondents' Profile

Variable	Frequency	Valid Percent (%)
<u>Gender:</u>		
Male	64	52.5
Female	58	47.5
<u>Age:</u>		
Below 20		
20	11	9.0
21	51	41.8
22	31	25.4
Above 22	21	17.2
	8	6.5
<u>Mobile phone brand owned:</u>		
Nokia		
Sony Ericson	44	36.1
Apple iPhone	34	27.9
Blackberry	16	13.1
Samsung	10	8.2
Others	3	2.5
	15	12.3
<u>Monthly allowances/pocket money</u>		
RM300 and below	35	28.7
Between RM301 to RM500	12	9.8
Between RM501 to RM1,000	45	36.9
RM1,001 and above	30	24.6

Out of the 122 respondents, 52.5% are males and 47.5% are females. 41.8% of the respondents are 20 years old while 25.4% are 21 years old. The 20 and 21 years old age group form bulk of the respondents.

Most of the respondents (36.1%) owned a Nokia mobile phone, followed by Sony Ericson (27.9%) and Apple iPhone (13.1%). This is line with the findings by Euromonitor (2010) that highlighted Nokia as the leading mobile phone brand in Malaysia given its user friendliness and durability. With Apple iPhone entering the Malaysian market in late 2009, the market share for this phone has certainly grown at the expense of other phones.

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61.5% of the respondents received monthly allowance/pocket money of RM501 and above. The sizeable portion of the respondents with high purchasing power indicates that they have the means to upgrade their mobile phones when newer models with better features are introduced in the market.

5.2 Measurement Assessment

In order to ensure the country of origin items that were used to measure the country of origin information achieve high internal consistency, these items were examined using Cronbach's α . Nunnally (1978) suggests a reliability coefficient of at least 0.7. The 13-items country of origin information for this study achieved a Cronbach's α of 0.90, which shows that it was highly reliable.

The CETSCALE which was used to measure consumer ethnocentrism had a Cronbach's α of 0.95, indicating a high internal consistency.

The mean scores from students' feedback on the country of origin statements rated on a scale of 1 to 5 whereby 1 denotes "strongly disagree" and 5 denoting "strongly agree" is shown in Table II.

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Table II: Mean scores on the Country of Origin statements

Statements	Mean scores	SD
A person should always look for country-of-origin information when buying a product that has a high risk of malfunctioning, eg. when buying a personal computer	3.60	1.147
I find out a product's country-of-origin to determine the quality of the product.	3.38	1.086
When buying an expensive item, such as a mobile phone, camera or personal computer I always seek to find out what country the product was made in.	3.31	1.234
When buying a product that is less expensive, such as a shirt, it is less important to look for the country-of-origin.	3.28	1.078
To make sure that I buy the highest quality product or brand, I look to see what country the product was made in.	3.26	1.184
I look for country-of-origin information to choose the best product available in a product class.	3.25	.984
I look for the "Made in" labels in clothing.	3.23	1.119
I feel that it is important to look for country-of-origin information when deciding which product to buy.	3.21	1.085
Seeking country-of-origin information is less important for inexpensive goods than for expensive goods.	3.17	1.058
If I have little experience with a product, I search for country-of-origin information about the product to help me make a more informed decision.	3.16	1.031
A person should seek country-of-origin information when buying a product with a fairly low risk of malfunctioning, e.g. when buying shoes.	2.95	.978
To buy a product that is acceptable to my friends and my family, I look for the product's country-of-origin.	2.87	.987
When I am buying a new product, the country of origin is the first piece of information that I consider.	2.81	1.047

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Based on Table II, the highest mean score of 3.60 indicates that the respondents regarded country of origin information as important when purchasing a product that has a high risk of malfunctioning. However, the remaining 12 statements have a mean score which tend towards 3.00. The statement with the lowest mean score of 2.81 is the statement which states that when purchasing a new product, its country of origin is the first piece of information that a respondent will consider. In Ghazali et al. (2008) study amongst Malaysian consumers this particular statement also had the lowest mean score of 3.08.

Overall, it can be concluded that this group of private university students' is impartial on the importance of the country of origin information when making purchase decisions. This finding partially supports H₁. It is very likely that the respondents will depend on factors such as price, product quality, acceptance by friends and others when purchasing a product. The country of origin information does not rank highly on their list when deciding to purchase a product.

The mean scores from the respondents' feedback on the ethnocentrism statements rated on a scale of 1 to 5 whereby 1 denotes "strongly disagree" and 5 denoting "strongly agree" is shown in Table III.

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Table III: Mean scores of the ethnocentrism statements

Statements	Mean scores	SD
Buy Malaysian-made products. Keep Malaysians working.	2.70	1.098
Only those products that are unavailable in Malaysia should be imported.	2.58	1.245
We should buy from foreign countries only those products that we cannot obtain within our own country.	2.51	1.070
There should be very little trading or purchasing of goods from other countries unless out of necessity.	2.44	1.013
Curbs should be put on all imports.	2.38	1.031
It may cost me in the long run but I prefer to support Malaysian products.	2.37	.947
We should purchase products manufactured in Malaysia instead of letting other countries get rich off us.	2.30	1.089
Malaysian products first, last and foremost.	2.28	.981
Malaysians should not buy foreign products because this hurts Malaysian business and causes unemployment.	2.25	1.049
It is always best to purchase Malaysian products.	2.24	1.029
Foreign products should be taxed heavily to reduce their entry into Malaysia.	2.17	1.224
Malaysian consumers who purchase products made in other countries are responsible for putting their fellow Malaysians out of work.	2.16	1.091
Malaysians should always buy Malaysian-made products instead of imports.	2.07	.989
Foreigners should not be allowed to put their products on our market.	2.07	1.158
It is not right to purchase foreign made products.	1.96	1.262
A real Malaysian should always buy Malaysian-made products.	1.90	1.032
Purchasing foreign-made products is un-Malaysian.	1.87	1.113

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The mean scores for this group of private tertiary students as shown in Table III tend towards 2.00. This indicated that they are less ethnocentric in their outlook when making purchases. This result is in support of H₂. These students generally prefer foreign made products over domestic goods. Evidently, they disagree that purchasing foreign made products is un-Malaysian as reflected by a mean score of 1.87. O’Cass and Kenny’s (2002) study among Singaporean university students also revealed that they had low ethnocentric tendencies and preferred brands of western origin over eastern origin brands. Generally, students have been known to be susceptible to the views, ideas and products of other cultures than older segments of society (Netemeyer, et.al., 1991).

These findings can also be attributed to the fact that these students who come from a high socioeconomic background are already exposed to a variety of foreign made products since young. Additionally, living in the capital city, Kuala Lumpur exposes and made these students more receptive towards foreign products.

In this study, the respondents perceived quality on mobile phones designed and manufactured and solely manufactured in 5 different countries were also sought. Their responses are shown in Table IV.

Table IV: Mean values for perceived quality of mobile phones

	Malaysia	China	Japan	Finland	South Korea
Mobile phones designed and manufactured in	2.25	2.49	4.11	3.74	3.64
Mobile phones manufactured in	2.43	2.54	4.20	3.75	3.57
Average mean values	2.34	2.51	4.16	3.75	3.60
Overall ranking	5	4	1	2	3

Note 1 : Perceived quality were ranked on a scale of 1-5 where

- 1= very low quality
- 2 = low quality
- 3 = neither high nor low quality
- 4 = high quality
- 5 = very high quality

Note 2: Overall ranking was based on 1 for the highest average mean values to 5 for the lowest average mean values.

Based on the mean average values, the overall ranking shows that Japan was perceived as the country that manufactures and designs high quality mobile phones. It is not surprising for Japan to be ranked highly given that it is acknowledge as a world leader in consumer electronics.

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Finland was ranked second, followed by South Korea and China. Mobile phones manufactured and design in Malaysia was perceived by the respondents as of low quality. The findings support Ghazali et al. (2008) which indicated that Malaysian made products do not rank highly with products made in developed countries in terms of quality. This could be mainly due to the fact that there are currently limited Malaysian made mobile phones in the Malaysian market.

China made mobile phones are perceived of having low quality possibly due to the stereotyping among these students on products coming from this country. With the Sanlu tainted milk case still fresh in their minds, this could likely make them have a negative impression of the quality of products made in China.

6. Discussion

The results of the present study indicate that the respondents are impartial on the country of origin information when making purchase decisions. This finding is consistent with Ghazali et al. (2008) who found that the average Malaysian consumer does not consider the country of origin aspect to be high on their list in deciding to purchase a product. A variety of other intrinsic and extrinsic cues such as price, product quality, product features, brand name are assessed to be used when the respondents evaluate a product. Thus, marketers and manufacturers of mobile phones should focus on these areas when marketing mobile phones among Malaysian private university students rather than be concern on the country of origin information. As mobile phones are conspicuous goods, the user will no doubt wish to be associated with a product or a brand from a developed country or a country renowned for its technological strength.

The study revealed that this group of students' are generally less ethnocentric and are favorable towards foreign made products. O'Cass & Kenny's (2002) study among undergraduate and postgraduate students in Singapore also revealed similar findings. The student group studied by them reported low ethnocentric tendencies and had a preference for brands of western origin over brands of an eastern origin. This is also consistent with Shimp and Sharma (1987) who discovered that younger respondents had lesser ethnocentric tendencies. The finding from this study is also in line with Neoh et al. (2007) who found that Malaysian consumers in general still prefer foreign products over locally produced. Certainly this will make it easier for foreign made mobile phones to capture the attention of this young consumer group. Notably, Malaysian mobile phones manufacturers may consider a strategic alliance with mobile phone makers from developed countries to enhance its reputation and image. The alliance could elevate the status of the Malaysian mobile phone manufacturers in the eyes of their young domestic consumers. On the contrary, Neoh et al. (2007) cited the studies of Papadopoulus & Heslop (1990), Peris, Newman & Chansakar (1993) and Kwok et al. (2006) who found that consumers in developed countries like France, Germany, Spain and Britain and China preferred domestic products over foreign products.

In terms of product quality, the respondents in this research tend to perceived mobile phones manufactured in developed countries like Japan and Finland to be of high quality as compared to those manufactured in China or even in their home country. Ghazali et al. (2008) explained that Malaysian products are still viewed skeptically by

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Malaysians although they are believed to be of a higher quality than those produced by countries such as Taiwan, China, Mexico and Thailand. They further concluded that the average Malaysian consumer relates the quality of a product with the economic development of the product's country of origin. Zain and Yasin's (1997) study among Uzbeks also revealed similar findings whereby products from developed countries like Japan and the United States of America were perceived of high quality as compared to products from less developing countries Uzbekistan and India. Hence, marketing managers should emphasis on areas like product quality, performance and technological features when promoting mobile phones among this group of students.

6.1 Limitations and Future Directions

The university student respondents are assessed appropriate as university students are among the heavy users of mobile phones. However, these findings may not reflect the typical Malaysian tertiary students view. To generalize the current results, future studies can include students in both the public and private universities. O'Cass & Kenny (2002) cited the meta analysis study by Verlegh, Jan-Benedict and Steenkamp (1999) who found that no differences exist between studies using students to those using non-students in country of origin studies. Thus this adds credence to the findings of this study and reduces the generally identified limitation of using student samples.

The respondents made a self assessment on the importance of the country of origin information. In future research, each students view of the country of origin information can be further probed through an observation or interviewing the students themselves. This would result in a richer understanding of the importance of the country of origin information. In addition, a qualitative approach towards examining the low ethnocentric tendencies among the respondents will be beneficial to local marketers. Similarly, it will also be interesting to find out why the respondents ranked mobile phones from some countries highly over other countries and even their own home country.

This study was confined solely to private university students. It would be interesting to investigate the general Malaysian public's respond on the country of origin information, their level of ethnocentrism and quality perception with regard to mobile phones. The views of Malaysians from various other parts of the country will surely add better insight in understanding these issues.

7. Conclusion

This research has been successful in determining the importance of the country of origin information and the level of ethnocentrism among private university students in Malaysia. It has also contributed further to the understanding of how these young Malaysian consumers perceived the quality of mobile phones manufactured in selected countries. The findings from this study have extended the works of Ghazali et al. (2008). This study focuses on young Malaysian consumers as compared to Ghazali et al. (2008) who were studying the general Malaysian population's view on the country of origin information. Firstly, it has uncovered that young Malaysian consumers are impartial on the importance of the country of origin information when making purchase decisions.

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Since this group of private university students is impartial towards the country of origin information, it would be beneficial for marketers to instead focus more on product quality, price, technological superiority and other aspects. Nonetheless, as mobile phones manufactured in developed countries are ranked highly, marketers should emphasize more on the “Made in” and “Imported from” labels for mobile phones manufactured in developed countries like Japan, Finland and the United States of America. However, for mobile phones manufactured in countries where its product quality is still viewed skeptically, marketers should focus more on other aspects of the product like its price rather than focusing on the country of origin. In such circumstances, emphasizing the country of origin may not be advisable.

These findings will be invaluable to marketers and manufacturers of mobile phones. Mobile phones more specifically smart phones will continue to evolve and include multi functions and features such navigation systems, compact cameras and portable computers which will continuously attract the consumer market. With the mobile phone market becoming ever increasingly competitive, both manufacturers and marketers must understand the underlying factors that influence consumers purchase decision. In order to reap the full benefit from this market segment, Malaysian mobile phone manufacturers must develop appropriate marketing strategies to woo this group of young Malaysian consumers.

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