

The Impact of Price and Country of Origin Labels on Food Product Quality Perceptions among Pakistani Consumers

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Article History:	ABSTRACT
Received: 16 Jan, 2019	Purpose: The main objective behind the study is to probe into the impact casted by price and country of origin labels on product quality perceptions among Pakistani consumers. The argument is based on the proposition that both of the variables are important in the formation of quality perceptions.
Revised: 12 Apr, 2019	Design/Methodology: A self-administered questionnaire was floated among 504 respondents using a systematic random sampling technique. Big and famous malls of Rawalpindi and Islamabad were selected on the basis of customer turnout. PLS-SEM was used for inferential analysis of the data.
Accepted: 14 Apr, 2019	Findings: The results indicate that country of origin does not have an impact on product quality perceptions in Pakistani consumer market whereas price casted a major impact on the perceptions. Implications: The perceptions of the consumers regarding food packaging cues has not been addressed taking a comprehensive set of cues in a holistic view which is a theoretical gap this study fills up. Key Words: Price; Country of origin, Product Quality Perceptions; Food packaging.

1. Introduction

Taking into consideration the enhancement of the life standards, the modern consumer has become much more witty and alarmed about their health and consumption. The packaged is replacing the loose food due to contemporary trends (Magnusson et al., 2003). In order to make their product look noticeable at the shelves and points of displays, the companies spend a huge budget because packaging stays with the consumer (Ab Talib & Johan, 2012). Furthermore, the argument is strengthened by Hasenbeck et al. (2014) that the marketing professionals as well as the packaging designers are giving substantial percentage of their budget to the packaging of the products in order to devise them in a way that they are handy as well as attractive. Miao and Mattila (2013) have also argued that product packaging have become the most popular advertising tool.

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With the passing time and increase in research, a wide variety of innovations in food packaging have incurred (Risch, 2009). The food packaging is becoming more handy and convenient to use as well as they are embedded with the quality cues for the consumers (Fernqvist & Ekelund, 2014). The companies are investing a lot to embed attractive and understandable quality cues on the food packages. The demand of the quality food by consumers is increasing day by day, hence contributing to the innovative packaging (Piqueras-Fiszman & Spence, 2012). The attitudes and beliefs regarding food packaging may integrate with the consumer knowledge to evoke a greater value proposition (Tiwari & Herstatt, 2012). Previous studies have established that consumer tends to have confidence in price of the packaged food product as quality cue. Looking at the Pakistani context there is very less research on packaged food price and perceived product quality (Joiya & Shahzad, 2013). According to the results of Zaidi and Muhammad (2012) price is a major indicator of quality in Pakistani consumer purchase cycle. The perception of food quality by looking at the price is influenced by both rational and psychological factors. Kirmani and Rao (2000) suggested that the nexus of price and packaged food product should be tested in various markets to check its generalizability. By considering the suggestion of Kirmani and Rao (2000) investigating the existence and strength of the relationship between price and product quality perception would be an important contribution. Country of origin is an effective stimulus which impacts the consumer quality judgments about the product ((Tran & Fabrice, 2013). A strong and positive country of origin image not only contributes to the image of the brand but also promotes the positive country image (Chattalas et al., 2008). Pakistan posits enormous investment opportunities because of its growing economy (Saeed et al., 2013). The Pakistani elite class consumers take country of origin into consideration as a symbol of quality and class while going for any purchase, with reference to the extrinsic cues like price, brand name and product quality (Khan et al., 2012).

1.1 Problem Statement

Consumer behavior is an area of foremost interest in marketing (Horner & Swarbrooke, 2016). The product quality perception is a vibrant topic in the domain of consumer behavior (Kaya, 2016). The quality perceptions of the consumers regarding the food product have a unique affection with the organization (Kaya, 2016). The cognitive processing of the food packaging cues and perceived product quality is complex and less investigated (Diallo et al., 2015). It is indicated by Diallo et al. (2015) that quality perceptions regarding the packaged food products is an important area for further research. The issue of perceived product quality is always an area of interest for the researchers, because quality is the basic and major concern of the consumer (Magnier et al., 2016).

Accordingly, the study of the product quality perceptions of consumers in Pakistan developed from food packaging cues is vital from the perspective of marketing. The increasing number of households and growing trend of urbanization in Pakistan makes it prospective market for the usage of packaged food items (Anam et al., 2018). Most of the past studies have taken into

account the effect of food packaging cues on the purchase intention and generally reported a positive association (Li et al., 2012). The necessity of studying perceptions of the consumers based on the food packaging cues in variety of markets has been stressed by various researchers (Qasem et al., 2016).

Even though, the scholars have attempted to explain the phenomenon of perceived product quality with various perspectives Argo and White (2012), they tend to neglect the important aspect of extrinsic packaging cues (Wardy et al., 2017). In signaling context, the product quality perceptions are greatly influenced by the cues (Amine et al., 2005). From the practical perspective, the packaged food industry in Pakistan has flourished (Zafar et al., 2017). The trend of urbanization is increasing in Pakistan and urban consumers are changing lifestyles as compared to their rural counterparts. This trend has given a boost not only to the packaged food processing companies in Pakistan but also to the media houses to develop advertising campaigns. The food companies have invested in packaged food production but the perceptions of the consumers regarding the quality of them still remains uncertain.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1 Product Quality Perception

The concept of product perceived quality has been defined by Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) as “product perceived quality is a unique kind of association created in the mind of consumers which not only impact the brand associations on the minds of consumers but also the profitability of the manufacturer.” In the studies of marketing the concept of perceived product quality is explained on the foundations of the cues that the consumer can extract from the shopping environment. The marketers are obliged to understand the perceptions of the consumers regarding the product quality in order to develop an offering which comply with expectations. According to Loebnitz and Grunert (2018) the perceived product quality is a vast concept which cannot be captured in few words. Ergin and Akbay (2010) established his study by concluding that comprehension of the consumer perceptions is the part and parcel of the establishment of an attractive product offering. The product oriented quality refers to all physical aspects of the product which gives an overall precise description of the product. The process oriented quality refers to the way the food has been manufactured. The quality controls refer to the fact that which standards a product needs to conform in order to be approved as quality food product. The technical specifications of the product are linked to the objective quality of the product, and the marketers aim to keep improving the products according to the perceptions of the consumers (Schnurr et al., 2017).

2.2 Country of Origin

Not long ago, the domestic markets were self-sufficient and there were no foreign competitors. The growing trend of globalization has circulated the products. The foreign products are entering into the markets which not only give competition to the domestic products also increases the range of consumers to choose from (Kalicharan, 2014). With the increased internationalization has made country of origin as an important variable to study. The findings of this study will enable the enterprises to plan better about their products and devise unique marketing strategies (Amine et al., 2005). From past few decades, the effect of country of origin on consumer's quality perception has taken a vivid place in consumer behavior studies.

Before employing country of origin as an extrinsic cue in the studies, customer used price and brand names to evaluate the quality extensively till 1960's. The preliminary studies on country of origin started to capture attention by the researchers in early 1960's (Sadiq Sohail, 2005). The investigation on this area started to get popular in 1965 in Finland and Guatemala. In this era scholars asserted that country of origin label has an impact on the quality perceptions (Zbib et al., 2010). Furthermore, discussing about the scenario of country of origin effect in Pakistani market, consumers base their opinions on the country of origin image of the product. Country of origin is an effective stimulus which impacts the consumer quality judgments about the product (Tran & Fabrizze, 2013). The recent academic debates are focusing on the expansion of the concept of country of origin (Carsana & Jolibert, 2017; Hsu et al., 2017). The term country of origin is now combined with region of origin and province of origin (Bruwer & Johnson, 2010). According to Newman et al. (2014) the country of origin casts an impact on the minds of consumers in the context of food products. Various studies have shown the relationship that country of origin labels cast a positive impact on the perceptions of quality in the minds of consumers (Diamantopoulos & Zeugner-Roth, 2010; Rezvani et al., 2012). Taking into consideration of the previous studies that have proved the positive effect of country of origin on perceived product quality this study hypothesizes that:

H₁: Country of origin label has a significant impact on perceived product quality.

2.3 Price

According to (Grewal et al., 1998) consumers infer quality from the price being displayed on the product. Grewal et al. (1998) studied the impact of price along with the cue of store name and brand name on quality perceptions of the consumer. A positive relationship between price and perceived quality has been reported. It has been proposed by that the price as a cue is of central importance which can be used reciprocally to infer the quality of the product (Cristo et al., 2017). Kirmani and Rao (2000) suggests that the impact of price on quality perceptions in newly launched products is significant, hence more product categories should be selected like food items and vehicles to test the relationship. The link between price and perceived quality should be tested in various markets to check its generalizability (Mazumdar et al., 2005).

The relation between price cue and the quality perception is statistically significant (Fraccaro & Macé, 2014). Similar, kind of findings have been reported by (Rao & Monroe, 1989). Many scholars have reported a significant relationship of price cue with product quality perception (Bolton et al., 2010). It has been suggested by Campbell (2007) that price should be fair for the positive evaluation of the product, negative consequences could occur with unfair pricing which could tarnish the brand image.

Previous studies have established that consumer tends to have confidence in price of the packaged food product as quality cue (Cristo et al., 2017). Looking at the Pakistani context there is very less research on packaged food price and perceived product quality. According to the results of (Zaidi & Muhammad, 2012) price is a major indicator of quality in Pakistani consumer purchase cycle. Past studies have proved the relationship between the price and product perceived quality. The factor of the price tag on food package casts a psychological impact of superior quality. Brucks et al. (2000) reported a significant relationship between price and product quality perception. Similarly, Widyastuti and Said (2017) demonstrate a significant nexus between price and the product quality perception.

H₂: Price has a significant impact on perceived product quality.

2.4 Signalling Theory

The signalling theory has been presented by (Spence, 1978). Connelly et al. (2011) stated that signalling theory practically aids in the mapping of consumer behaviour. The prior studies using signalling theory considered consumer purchase behaviour and formation of quality perceptions through packaging elements serving as quality signals (Kirmani & Rao, 2000). According to the argument of Connelly et al. (2011) the signals extended towards the consumers are in the form of favorable cue regarding the product about to be sold. Piqueras-Fiszman and Spence (2015) stated that the fundamental focus of the theory is towards the reduction of information asymmetry among the buyers and sellers. Connelly et al. (2011) argue that the consumer interprets the signal being communicated to him by the seller. The signals sent out towards the consumers include price, advertising appeals and all other apparent extrinsic cues.

In marketing, signals can be shown by delivering information about seller characteristics to buyers to examine and appraise the validity and credibility of a seller's qualities, and the costs of deceptively making up a signal must exceed the benefits of faking it (Mavlanova et al., 2012). In addition, for companies, systematic approaches for formulating an effective signal can help reduce information asymmetries for their customers and can provide a strong competitive edge (Moss et al., 2015). The desired goal of signaling primarily focuses on positive information communication to deliver the positive attributes of product quality, service quality, or organization function to facilitate purchase intentions, investment, etc. (Wells et al., 2011). Pezzulo et al. (2013) based on signalling theory propose that various apparent signals communicate the quality meanings of the

product or service. DeAndrea (2014) based her argument on signalling theory that the external cues like warranties for life time gives an impression about the quality of the product as well as the credibility of company. Recently, various researchers have used signalling theory in terms of communication perspective (Spence, 2002).

The impact of food packaging cues on food quality perception has not been yet tested in developing country context in general and in Pakistani market specifically (Khan et al., 2018). The independent variables in this study consist of country of origin Kalicharan (2014) and price (Cristo et al., 2017). The framework that presents the variables under study is illustrated below:

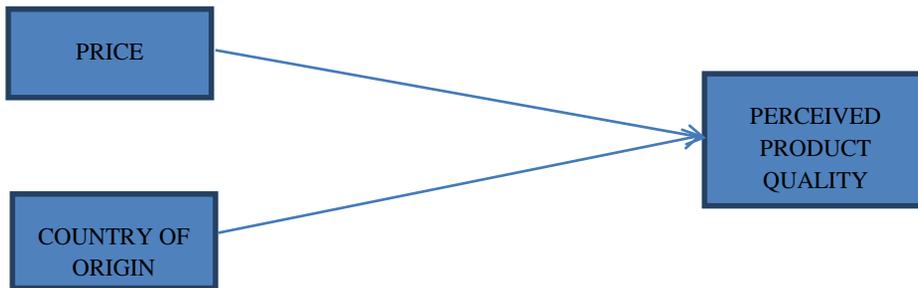


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

3. Research Methodology

Methodology is referred as the process of development of research by the researcher whereas method is actually the technique used by the researcher. The sections explain research design, variables ‘operationalization, population and sampling issues, instrumentation aspects, sources and methods of data collection, analysis methods, reasons to rely on structural equation modelling, and the pilot test and its analysis. This study was conducted using survey method in shopping malls across the metropolitan cities of Pakistan i.e., Islamabad and Rawalpindi (Javeed et al., 2018). The questionnaire was personally administered in the seven big shopping malls of the cities. Data collection for this particular study was carried out for several weeks after pilot testing. A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect the data from the Pakistani consumer market. In the early stage of data analysis, an official letter from Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) was obtained. This letter helped the researcher to get responses from the target sample. The data collected for the study was analysed on Statistical package of social sciences (SPSS) for descriptive analysis whereas PLS-SEM was used for hypotheses testing.

3.1 Research Design

Methodology is defined by Holloway (1997) as “*Principles and philosophy on which researchers base their procedures and strategies, and the assumptions that they hold about the nature of the research they carry out.*” An attempt to explore the solution to a problem through methodological manner is called research. The outcomes of the study ultimately add to base of knowledge.

3.1.1 Quantitative Research

The theories are being confirmed and verified by using a relationship among the variables in the quantitative study design. Quantitative study starts with the theory and formation of study hypotheses. Objectivity as well as neutrality is maximized by applying quantitative research. In this particular study the quantitative research design was followed. The questionnaire was used for collecting the data in the study as this is the most widely used in the hypotheses based studies.

4. Analysis

4.1 Response Rate

Among 504 distributed questionnaires by the researcher, all of them were returned back on the spot receiving a response rate of 100%. Out of the returned questionnaires, 478 of them could be used by the researcher which achieved a valid response rate of 95%. The unusable questionnaires had missing entries because of which they could not be administered to analysis.

4.2 Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive analysis of the study gives an overview regarding the principle features of the collected data. The descriptive analysis comprises of mean, standard deviation and variance (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). Table 1 shows the descriptive analysis of the model under consideration.

Construct	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Country of origin	478	1	5	3.8316	0.8513
Price	478	1	5	3.9979	0.6455
Perceived quality	478	1	5	4.0553	0.6787

4.3 Evaluation of Outer Model (Measurement Model)

Reliability and validity are the basic standards for measuring the measurement (outer) model (Hair et al., 2013). According to Uma and Roger (2003) reliability measures the consistency of measuring instrument whatever it is measuring whereas validity measures how well the instrument measures for which it is intended to measure. The assessment of outer model largely depends on the nature of model either it is comprised of reflective or formative measures.

4.4 Content Validity

The content validity connotes the suitability of the indicators to measure the main concept under the study. Moving on further, principal component analysis (PCA) is preferred by (Heise & Bohrnstedt, 1970). Principal component analysis (PCA) is being used by Smart PLS, hence it was used to generate all the factor loadings for the indicators. It is necessitated that the respective items must portray highest loadings on theory construct as compared to any other construct. All the indicators selected for the study were selected only after assuring that they belong to the respective constructs. The factor loadings of all the items of the questionnaire are depicted in Table 2.

Variable	Item	Loading	t-value	p-value
		0.867	0.794	0.623
Country of origin	COO1	0.775		
	COO2	0.856		
	COO3	0.859		
	COO4	0.648		
		0.861	0.800	0.553
Price	PR4	0.728		
	PR5	0.722		
	PR6	0.775		
	PR7	0.752		
	PR8	0.741		
		0.907	0.885	0.524
Perceived product quality	PQ1	0.712		
	PQ2	0.743		
	PQ3	0.726		
	PQ4	0.720		
	PQ5	0.785		
	PQ6	0.777		

Table 2: Factor Loading

Variable	Item	Loading	t-value	p-value
	PQ7	0.758		
	PQ8	0.724		
	PQ9	0.537		

4.5 Discriminant Validity

According to Hair et al. (2013), discriminant validity is termed as the extent to which construct measures what it is intended to measure. The correlation among the items as well and the overlapping constructs is being assessed through discriminant validity. Hair et al. (2013) suggests two criteria for checking out the discriminant validity. The prior one is Fornell and Larcker's criteria which is the square root of AVE of each construct. The discriminant validity as per Fornell-Larcker criteria is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Fornell- Larcker Criteria

	COO	PR	PQ
COO	0.789		
PR	0.513	0.724	
PQ	0.358	0.487	0.744

The cross loading values of all the items of the instrument are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Cross Loadings

	COO	PQ	PR
COO1	0.775	0.316	0.256
COO2	0.856	0.312	0.344
COO3	0.859	0.358	0.344
COO4	0.648	0.233	0.240
PQ1	0.339	0.712	0.343
PQ2	0.344	0.743	0.373
PQ3	0.361	0.726	0.282
PQ4	0.280	0.722	0.289
PQ5	0.276	0.785	0.368

Table 4: Cross Loadings

	COO	PQ	PR
PQ6	0.261	0.777	0.390
PQ7	0.289	0.758	0.389
PQ8	0.236	0.724	0.285
PQ9	0.097	0.537	0.133
PR4	0.322	0.412	0.728
PR5	0.242	0.244	0.722
PR6	0.237	0.301	0.775
PR7	0.263	0.307	0.752
PR8	0.315	0.353	0.741

4.6 Hypotheses Testing (Direct Paths)

Primarily, the function of algorithm was applied to produce the path coefficients. Furthermore, as a next step bootstrapping is carried out with 500 sample size. The sample size selected while running Smart PLS must be greater than the actual sample size which a condition is recommended by (Hair et al., 2013). The path coefficient values which are nearer to +1 depict positive nexus however, the values closer to -1 represent negative relationship. If the path values are insignificant or opposite to the hypothesized relationship the hypothesis is supposed to be rejected. Bootstrapping is run in this research to get the t-values and standard error for each path coefficient. Table 5 shows the results of the hypotheses under consideration.

Table 5: Hypotheses Results

Hypotheses	Relationship	B-values	T-values	P-values	Decision
H1	COO-->PQ	0.027	0.646	0.519	Rejected
H2	PR-->PQ	0.082	2.056	0.040	Accepted

H₁: The results ($\beta=0.027$, $t=0.646$, $p=0.519$) indicate that no significant relationship exists between country of origin perceived product quality.

H₂: The results ($\beta=0.082$, $t=2.056$, $p=0.040$) indicate that price has a positively significant impact on perceived product quality.

5. Discussion of Results

The first hypothesis of the study H_1 , which was defined as a positive and significant relation exists between country of origin was not accepted as shown by the results. The absence of the significant relationship between the variables can be attributed to the fact that country of origin cue is subjugated in the presence of other marketing cues. The results can be otherwise explained that Pakistani consumers are less aware of the country of origin labelling as most of researches were being carried out in European markets. The results corroborate with the findings of Kalicharan (2014) who unveiled that significant relationship does not exist between the cue of country of origin and perceived product quality.

The second hypothesis H_2 of the study proposed that price impacts the perceived product quality significantly. The hypothesis was accepted. The positively significant relationship possibly emerges from the fact that Pakistani packaged food consumer is becoming health conscious, they expect the value from the product in exchange of money as well as they believe in the genuineness of the product. The results of the study agree with the findings of Miyazaki et al. (2005) who claimed that the price of the product is a sheer indicator of quality for the consumers prior to its actual usage.

6. Implications and Future Recommendations

The prior consumer behaviour studies focused mainly on the heuristic perspective, however few studies focused specifically on the explicit food packaging cues. It has been proposed by Argo and White (2012) that the consumer behaviour studies focusing on the food packaging cues and their impact on quality perceptions is still to catch up. Based on the research upshots, it is confirmed that Pakistani consumers are expressively influenced by price and country of origin consider them as the quality indicating cues. Moving on further, the perceptions of the consumers regarding food packaging cues has not been addressed taking a comprehensive set of cues in a holistic view which is a theoretical gap this study fills up.

The empirical analysis of the study confirms the relationship among the constructs together with the moderating effects. These relationships have been confirmed or disconfirmed statistically. From the standpoint of practitioners, this study provides a significant contribution in the form of understanding the mind set of consumers in a shopping situation. It may also assist the marketers to devise the marketing strategies to create favourable product perceptions and long term relations with the consumers. Marketing is a stream which has advanced from commercials to every single aspect of the product including the packaging of the product. The target of the cues embedded in the form of labelling on food packages is linked to the minds and perceptions of consumers. This study confirms that the Pakistani consumers are significantly been influenced by packaging cues. The results of the study entail that marketing managers should embed the cues intelligently keeping clearly in mind that they are considered as the quality signals of the enclosed product by the consumer. Another theoretical contribution of this study is that it contributes to prevailing

literature in terms of signalling theory by authenticating distinct extrinsic cues (brand name, country of origin, price, nutritional label, precautionary label and Halal logo) as signals of quality. Taking into consideration the intricate challenges of the product packaging, food packaging cues need to be enhanced more in order to achieve higher quality perceptions.

Further studies in future related to extrinsic cues and perceived product quality can broaden their scope to other product categories for instance cosmetics, technology products etc. Making cross product comparisons for determining the consumer behaviour could also be a major step. The scope of the study could be broadened in future by including more cities as well as rural and semi urban areas of Pakistan. Furthermore, it is proposed that future studies should take into consideration more demographic aspects of respondents like ethnicity, religion and employment status in order to comprehend that how different groups of consumer perceived quality in response to various extrinsic cues.

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