The role of country-of-origin effect on pre-purchase value expectations of Pakistani consumers

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Abstract: Being one of the important factors of customer's decision making process while buying a product, the present study intends to contribute the literature towards country of origin and investigated its impact on 'customer's value expectations' and 'willingness to pay'. The 407 customers pertaining to American food retail franchises in Pakistan were investigated and data was collected from them via online survey. With the utilization of cue and signaling theory, the study concluded that country of origin impacts the customer value expectations in general and social value, service quality, emotional value, behavioral price, monetary price and reputation in specific. Furthermore, social value seemed to have a mediation effect between country of origin and willingness to pay. Thus, an indirect impact of country of origin on willingness to pay was more significant instead of the direct one. The study also inferred that among the purchasers knowledgeable about the nation's brands, country of origin would significantly impact the price expectation than the ones who are not. The current study extends the knowledge about pre-purchase decisions and the influence of country of origin on them. Additionally, it also demonstrated an open door of international emerging markets to retailers interested to expand their footprints.

INTRODUCTION

The COO effect is commonly considered as a phenomenon that happens when customers assume that the traits of a nation transfer onto a product (Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999; Bilkey and Nes, 1982; Pharr, 2005), a brand (Holt et al., 2004; Keller, 1993), or even a service (Thelen et al., 2010; Javalgi et al., 2001). Putting it in another way, if a given nation is linked with a particular trait, the customer will be likely to believe that the products, brands, or services from that nation will at the very least be influenced by the trait, if not completely shared by it. It is generally accepted that scientific research on this phenomenon began in the 1960s, with either Robert D or Ernst Dichter (1962). Schooler (1965) however, often given credit for having initiated

the systematic examination of the impact in the literature. It is not difficult to understand the practical significance of this event since it suggests that marketers may utilize the place of origin as an indicator of quality.

The country-of-origin effect's attractiveness is relatively diminished in a world where distinction has grown more challenging to attain (Ballington and Baker, 2002) and where the subsequent costs of brand creation have raised significantly (Bluemelhuber et al., 2007). Despite the fact that country of origin has been studied the most in international marketing due to its practical relevance (Tan and Farley, 1987), with several scholars attesting to its crucial role in international marketing efforts (Johansson, 1993; Peterson and Jolibert, 1995; Batra et al., 2000; Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2002; Magnusson et al., 2011) the said variable is still considered the less researched (Nebenzahl et al., 1997) and some scholars have also questioned its practical applicability (Samiee, 1994; O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2000; Samiee et al., 2005; Samiee 2011; Usunier, 2006; 2011).

Due to the discrepant placement in customers' perceptions, country-of-origin effects often result in unsatisfactory connections between product and country images. Studies have shown that country-of-origin impacts are multifaceted, as explained by variations in country-related economic, political, sociocultural, and technical aspects (Chryssochoidis et al., 2007). Customers often have a favorable attitude towards goods made in developed nations and a negative prejudice towards goods made in developing nations. However, these impressions might alter over time as a result of technical advancements, individual lifestyle choices, or more advanced marketing strategies (Chuin & Mohamad, 2012).

In order to have a better glimpse of how the country of origin effect can be defined more accurately, we will examine several relationships which would then be verified by the findings of current study. The purpose of this study is to look into the impacts of country of origin on food retailing industries with respect to American franchises expanding in Pakistan. As the American market is getting congested, the franchise owners are looking for new strategies to secure both systematic and strategic development in order to ensure their worldwide expansion (Jell-Ojobor, Alon, & Windsperger, 2022). International marketers consider franchising as the easiest way to penetrate in an ever-growing hospitality market like Pakistan. America is the pioneer who launched its food retail brands (like KFC & McDonald's) in Pakistan and ultimately dominated 70% of the market (ITA, 2022). Since, Pakistani market functions as one of the most appealing international market for the all type of franchising concepts; therefore, the global firms are continuously expanding their businesses here in the form of food outlets, consumer brands, and electronic stores etc.

America has recently launched two new food brands here (Dicky's BBQ and iHOP) in the presence of other 200 global brands. The global firms are recorded to invest $2.5 USD in Pakistan which is earning them a return revenue of $4 billion(IFA, 2022a). Pakistani retail market currently worth $155 USD

collectively and is 7th largest food market in Asia-Pacific region (comprising on 24 countries) where consumers' spending is increasing with a rate of 83.4% when compared to last five years' Asian-Pacific records(Data, 2022). This market still has to wait for a long time in order to witness its saturation point in food sector. As declared by Pakistan Food Association, an average Pakistani willingly spends 42% of his annual income on food and overall Pakistanis spend minimum $6 billion USD and maximum $9 billion USD just on eating out (IFA, 2022b). As it is clear that not only American but other global food brands under the retail industry are now looking to develop their business through foreign franchising. Pakistan has emerged as a key target area in such circumstances for these brands.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Country of Origin (COO):

In the worldwide marketing literature, the topic of COO's impacts has gotten a lot of attention (Hoang, Ho, Tran, & Le, 2022; Islam & Hussain, 2022) gave the first description of COO, which he defined as how customers relate a country's national features, political and economic history with the appearance, stereotype and repute of services or brands originated from that country. "The place, region, or country to which the brand is perceived to belong by its customers" is another way of defining brand origin (Tavoletti, Stephens, Taras, & Dong, 2022; Thakor, 1996). A company's foreign development is aided by the COO's ability to influence consumer attitudes and perceptions in the specific market. This is recognized as not only theoretic but critically empirical issue in terms of defining success of international firms' ventures (Hoang et al., 2022; Islam & Hussain, 2022; Jell-Ojobor, Hajdini, & Windsperger, 2022).

Signaling theory

During circumstances of information asymmetry, signaling theory explains how customers acquire sentiments toward a service or a product (Friske, Hoelscher, & Nikolov, 2022). In comparison to sellers, customers have fewer information, thus they must draw judgments about a service's or a product's unobservable quality based on information they already know. This can also be regarded a cue or a signal (Arzubiaga, De Massis, Maseda, & Iturralde, 2022; Friske et al., 2022)

The pre-purchase assessment of services, goods or sellers like restaurants and hotels, in particular, may be a difficult phenomenon and consumers frequently count on insights for their buying choices (Guo et al., 2022) (Liu, Wang, Gao, & Gallivan, 2021). Intrinsic and extrinsic cues have been already been classified in previous studies which cover these insights of customer's pre-purchase assessment and mind positioning in detail. Extrinsic cues are aspects connected to a service or a product, just like the country's origin, whereas intrinsic cues are the product or service's underlying traits and attributes. It is

impossible to procure a service or a product based on intrinsic indications in the prior to buy stage of experience products. Moreover, a buyer may find it difficult to assess the service of an international corporation that has recently stepped into the market since they lack enough knowledge about the newcomer. (Le, 2022; Murphy, Huckins, Rhodes, & Castel, 2022).

Buyers tend to utilize the image of country of origin to analyze the unfamiliar or less popular companies in the international market since it is a reasonably straightforward and easy-to-obtain cue (Hong, Zhang, Zhang, & Hu, 2022). COO is frequently connected to safety, dependability and endurance; and all of these concepts could lessen the perceived risk of buying. Comprehension of the impact of country of origin on international franchises is critical since country of origin can operate as a positioning trait, especially for brands that aren't immediately recognizable in a foreign market (Zeugner-Roth & Bartsch, 2020).

Value expectations of customers
Pre-purchase value expectations of customers

Anticipation plays a significant part in the selection and assessment of services and goods by consumers. Consumer service anticipation is well defined as pre-purchase attitudes or beliefs regarding the service experience, as well as a benchmark or reference point for the after purchase assessment (Quach, 2022). The emphasis of current study is on customers' anticipation of the value they will obtain by experiencing a service before they make a purchase. This is consistent with earlier survey, such as of (Rico-González, Pino-Ortega, Praça, & Clemente, 2022), who suggested that surveys that operationalize value in regards to an upcoming buying choice should concentrate on value projections or anticipation of value rather than perceived value.

Customers' general estimation of a service or product based on their perception of what is being acquired and granted during the trade-off is referred as "value" (Reyes-Menendez, Palos-Sanchez, Saura, & Santos, 2022). This study concentrates on six aspects of value anticipation in the frame of reference of retail food industry. As described by (Petrick, 2002) these aspects are named as social value expectation, service quality expectation, emotional value expectation, expectation of reputation, behavioral price expectation, and value for money expectation. The notion of service quality anticipations pertain to what customers actually expect from potential purchases with respect to the service quality. We suggest that customers' expectations that are related to the service quality are driven by five separate dimensions i.e. tangibles, reliability, empathy, responsiveness, and assurance - in conjunction with SERVQUAL scale defined in other studies (Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithaml, 2002). Equipment, physical accommodations, staff attendance and communication materials fall under tangibles.

The ability to provide the guaranteed services in exact and persistent way is considered as reliability. The eagerness to deal with the customers and provide them with quick services is characterized as responsiveness. Assurance

is dependent on the staff's knowledge and respectfulness, as well as their ability to develop trust and confidence amongst the customers for their brands. Empathy however, refers to a company's ability to comprehend, care for, and provide individualized service to its clients. Individuals' social value expectations refer to their belief that by using a service, they will be accepted and connected to others (Le, 2022; Parasuraman et al., 2002; Reyes-Menendez et al., 2022). This component is especially important in the domain of food retail industry, such as restaurants, where sociability is fostered and people converge to socialize (Boyarchenko, Kovner, & Shachar, 2022; Kamalanon, Chen, & Le, 2022). Additionally, anticipation of emotional value is an evaluation of a service's ability to offer purchasers the gratitude. Customers who shop for food expect emotional benefits such as pleasant sentiments during the purchasing and while utilizing the products (Souter and Sweeney, 2001).

The (financial) cost of a service in relation to quality expected as assessed by the end user is characterized as monetary price expectation(Ikonnikova, del Carpio Neyra, & Berdysheva, 2022). Behavioral pricing expectation, contrary to this, relates to the amount of effort and time that clients should put in while looking for and acquiring a service (Reyes-Menendez et al., 2022; Srivastava, Pandey, & Saini, 2022). Finally, customers' conceptions of perceived status or prestige pertaining to a service based on the firm's image are referred to reputation expectation (Khan, Salamzadeh, Iqbal, & Yang, 2022).

As suggested by previous studies, foreign services or goods are likely to be viewed as status symbols by consumers in developing countries (Cheah et al., 2020; Lai, Hsieh, & Ku, 2022). In a collectivistic country like China, eating "on-site" in any western restaurant with friends, coworkers or neighbors has a remarkable value illustrating the significance of anticipation of reputation (Wang, 2022).

The association amongst COO and customer's value expectations

In the context of global consumer behavior and marketing, the notion of COO has gotten a lot of attention (Diamantopoulos et al., 2020; Polfuß & Sönmez, 2020). Customers regard COO to be a steady and dependable predictor of quality and value, particularly when intrinsic indicators are absent, such as when dealing with unknown product categories and brands, or when dealing with a service or product for the first time (Pegan, Reardon, & Vianelli, 2022). Because services are characterized by variability, intangibility and heterogeneity, they are difficult to appraise without real experience, COO seems to have a greater impact in the context of services than it does in the product environment (Damanik & Yusuf, 2022).

Global marketers, on the contrary, have been using country of origin cues (like "made in" tags, international linguistic phrases) to boost their products in order to distinguish themselves from competition. It is widely acknowledged that a favorable country-of-origin effect can be regarded as a bonus to customers while lowering purchase risks (Xiao & Myers, 2022), hence raising anticipation of clients in regard to value in future purchases. COO impacts,

specifically, can influence customers' opinions towards a service or product, as well as give inferential reasoning against their decisions (Aprile & Punzo, 2022). Also, according to a modern research, customers' opinions of country image have a beneficial impact on value perceived by customer by creating sentiments of confidence and ease when making brand decisions (Tavoletti et al., 2022).

As a result, we propose:

H1: anticipation of consumers, including a) social value expectations b) service quality expectations, c) emotional value expectations, d) reputation expectations e) behavioral price expectations f) monetary price expectations, are positively influenced by their country of origin.

Customers' readiness to pay

The customer's readiness to pay and the country of origin

Intention to purchase, like readiness to spend, are the states of minds that represent the possibility of an individual engaging in a certain conduct, as illustrated by the theory of reasoned action (TRA) (Jang & Cho, 2022). According to signaling theory, the COO image has a major impact on consumers' opinions about companies and products from a particular region (Arzubiaga et al., 2022; Friske et al., 2022).

Customers are found more inclined to buy a product and/or service if they believe it came from a country with a positive reputation (Ahmad, 2022). Following is a hypothesis based on the preceding discussion:

H2: Consumer's willingness to pay is influenced by the country of origin.

Customers' readiness to pay and value expectations

There is a common understanding that if a buyer perceives a service or a product is of relatively high value; the chances of their purchase incline (Reyes-Menendez et al., 2022). The customers' anticipation of the value they would gain from a specific service or product might also influence their choice to buy that service or product (Damanik & Yusuf, 2022). Likewise it was discovered that the buyers who anticipate premium value from organic food are more inclined to buy natural food and are even ready to pay the higher prices(Raghava R. Gundala, 2021). Moreover, (Wang, 2022) assert that anticipation of customers' value create a pivotal influence in determining Chinese consumers' behavior in fast food chains. When consumers' perceptions of service quality rise, they usually purchase the items as narrated by (Kim, 2022).

Other research backs up the link between purchase intent and expectations of customers like (Ikonnikova et al., 2022; Qu et al., 2021). As a result, we bring forward the below hypothesis to study Pakistani consumer market:

H3: Value anticipations of customers, which include a) service quality expectations, b) emotional value expectations c) social value expectations, d) reputation expectations e) monetary price expectations, f) behavioral price expectations, have a positive impact on willingness of customers to pay.

Analysis of Moderation between COO's brands and Customers' awareness

Though prior research has shown that country of origin creates beliefs which customers use to assess a service or a product during the decision-making process of purchasing that service/product. However the importance of COO varies depending on the situation and other elements of any market(Zeugner-Roth & Bartsch, 2020) The customers' unawareness from the product category and brand arises more susceptible behavior regarding the consequences of a dependable extrinsic cue like country of origin (Pegan et al., 2022). This is due to the fact that these customers are usually unable to understand and assess intrinsic cues effectively. Besides that, customer's trust in the cue, which is characterized as their belief in evaluation or awareness of a country of origin's brands, affects the intensity of the COO effect (Cheah et al., 2020). Customer knowledge of the county of origin's brands in present study pertains if the customers are familiar with current COO brands or items in the market that originate from a specific international country. Knowledge of the customers regarding COO's branding can deliver valuable insights about the service's country of origin, strengthening the COO's impact on buying behavior by improving confidence of customers (Brand & Baier, 2022).

On the other hand, customers not having appropriate knowledge about the country shows lack of awareness. In such cases the origin of the brand, according to signaling theory, is no more a trusted message between these customers; which in return lessens the country of origin's impact on their beliefs and behaviors (Arzubiaga et al., 2022). On the basis of foregoing debate, this study suggests that knowledge of the customer regarding country of origin's brands can influence the relationship between customer expectations and COO as well as willingness to spend. As a result, we assert the following hypotheses:
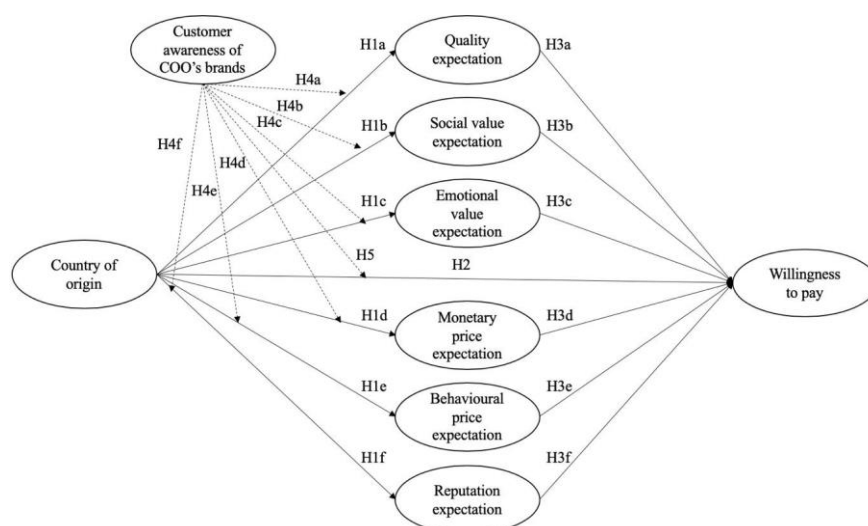

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

H4: The relationship between the Country of Origin and their value expectations which include a) service quality expectations, b) emotional value expectations c) social value expectations, d) reputation expectations e) monetary price expectations, f) behavioral price expectations, is moderated by awareness of the customer regarding COO's brands.

H5: The association between country of origin and readiness to pay is moderated by awareness of the customer regarding country of origin's brands.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design

An online survey was conducted in Pakistan to gather the data. Limited audience of the country was targeted which included all crucial demographics that helped to conduct a reliable research.

As Pakistani food market is saturated enough with American food brands, hence this factor was considered to have a different impact on the customers' pre-purchase expectations. In this market, the customers already have a huge number of local food restaurants to choose between and sidewise they have international food brands as well; especially the American food brands which have intense brand positioning amongst Pakistani consumers. Henceforth, results from this study can become the guidelines for the new comers who want to enter in an international market on the basis of COO only since they will be aware of the customers' perception about the foreign food brands especially when customers know the COO of these brands.

The survey was written in English which was accompanied with convenience sampling and snowballing approach to select the sample size. Snowball sampling is a popular and effective recruiting tool (Sarah Raifman, 2022). The survey was distributed online using Survey Monkey to the personal circle of the researcher. These people were requested to share the survey with their friends and family on social media. There were 407 finalized replies in total.

The table 1 shows the demographic profiles of the research participants. According to the statistics, 80.59 percent of respondents in Pakistan were familiar with American food retail brands, out of which 35.63% were graduates, 57% were masters and 4.18% were having PhD degrees. Moreover 69.09% of the respondents were working in private sector. All of these results prove that our targeted sample was well aware of the COO when it comes to their food consumption habits.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographics	N = 407	
	N	**%**
Gender		
Male	178	43.73%
Female	229	56.27%
Annual Income (PKR)		
<600000	77	18.92%
600001 – 1200000	126	30.96%
1200001 – 1800000	189	46.44%
>1800001	15	3.69%
No. of Children		
No Child	205	50.37%
1 Child	55	13.51%
2 Children	107	26.29%
3 Children	29	7.13%
4 Children	11	2.70%
Education		
Middle School	2	0.49%
Matriculation	3	0.74%
Intermediate	8	1.97%
Graduate	145	35.63%
Masters	232	57.00%
PhD	17	4.18%
Employment status		
Unemployed	15	3.69%
Student	50	12.29%
Government employee	56	13.76%
Private company employee	269	69.09%
Self-employed	17	4.18%
Ever heard of American food retail brands in Pakistan?		
Yes	328	80.59%
No	79	19.41%
Do you eat American food?		

Yes	288	70.76%
No	119	29.24%

Measurement Items

All the items included in the questionnaire were measured on a 6 points Likert scale representing 1 (highly disagree) to 6 (highly agree). The respondents of the study were provided with set of statements which represented the level of expectation of buyers regarding the purchase of American food products; and they were then asked to show their level of agreement/disagreement by scaling those statements.

Scale presented by (Sweeney, Soutar, & Johnson) was used to get the items relevant to social value expectation measurement as shown in table 02. For emotional value, behavior price, monetary price, and reputation expectations, (Petrick, 2002) scale was used.

Using 16 items from study of a fast food restaurant (Yelkur & Chakrabarty, 2006), the service quality expectation construct was assessed which included five characteristics of service quality: reliability, tangibility, assurance, empathy and responsiveness. In addition, (Dodds, Monroe, & Grewal, 1991) measurement scales was used to measure the 3 items of WTP. COO was measured using (Sanyal & Datta, 2011) scale. Lastly, the question "have you ever heard of American food retail brands in Pakistan?" was used to assess customers' familiarity with the COO of the food brands which was extracted from previous study (Chen & Lobo, 2012).

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Common Method Variance

Harman's single factor test and realigning for the impact of an unmeasured latent techniques factor were among the statistical techniques used to test common method bias (Aguirre-Urreta & Hu, 2019). All of our metrics were exposed to un-rotated exploratory factor analysis in the Harman single-factor test (EFA). The EFA found that numerous factors were supported, but a single controlled factor only accounted for 36 percent of the variance. This was less than the 50% threshold (Kock, Berbekova, & Assaf, 2021; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). We also associated an unmeasured latent component to all observed items in the proposed model to incorporate the common volatility. The common variance was 23.5 percent, which is less than the 50 percent requirement, according to the path coefficients (Baumgartner, Weijters, & Pieters, 2021; Eichhorn, 2014). On the basis of these findings, it can be inferred that common technique bias is not a problem and, as a result, is improbable to impede the findings' interpretation.

Reliability Analysis

The CFA (Confirmatory Factor Analysis) of this structured model was performed using the framework of (Griffiths, Terluin, Trigg, Schuller, &

Bjorner, 2022; Rico-González et al., 2022). 1 factor CFA on the median grades of the five first-order constructs was used to investigate the second-order factor structure. The x2 (2) = 27.511, p < .001, CFI = .975, IFI = .977, GFI = .975 are the model fit values. At the .05 level, all of the path coefficients were significant. The consolidated scales comprising of the mean score of the 5 elements of the anticipation of service quality were utilized for further evaluations, as per regular method (e.g., Kumar and Pansari, 2016). CFA was used to quantify validity, dimensionality, and reliability for each component because the study used verified scales from earlier studies. Cross-loaded or those with low factor loadings items were deleted. The final model fit indices are satisfactory i.e.: x2 (355) = 521.270, GFI =.915, p < .001, TLI =.967, IFI =.965, CFI =.977, RMSEA =.041.

Table 2 shows composite reliabilities, average variance extracted (AVEs) and standardized factor loadings. The loadings on all items are acceptable and lie between .655 and .915 (Hair et al., 2010). Each variable's mean variance was more than .50, indicating sufficient convergence (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The reliability values for the composite were higher than the .60 criterion (Fu, Wen, & Wang, 2022). Statistically significant and positive factor loadings were found. All of the questions exhibit significant loadings against their related constructs, indicating the valid convergent.

Table 2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Factors	Items	Factor Loadings	CR	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE
Service quality expectation (Yelkur and Chakrabarty, 2006)			.873	.875	.603
	Tangibles	.711			
	Reliability	.827			
	Responsiveness	.877			
	Assurance	.791			
	Empathy	.655			
Social value expectation (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001)			.871	.859	.673
	Would improve the way I am perceived	.845			
	Would make a good impression on other people	.831			
	Would give me social approval	.757			
Emotional value expectation (Petrick, 2002)			.906	.903	.723
	Gives me pleasure	.915			
	Gives me a sense of joy	.873			
	Makes me feel delighted	.871			
	Gives me happiness	.781			
Monetary value expectation (Petrick, 2002)			.841	.832	.637
	Is worth the money	.769			
	Is fairly priced	.827			
	Is reasonably priced	.820			
Behavioural price expectation (Petrick, 2002)			.869	.862	.685
	Required little energy to purchase	.838			
	Is easy to shop for	.867			
	Required little effort to buy	.777			
Reputation value expectation (Petrick, 2002)			.865	.863	.677
	Has a good reputation	.823			

	Is well respected	.870		
	Is well thought of	.756		
Country of Origin (Sanyal and Datta, 2011)		.873	.899	.687
	I prefer brands that originate from a country that has a reputation for the quality of food	.781		
	I prefer brands that originate from a country which maintains a high level of quality	.855		
	I prefer brands that originate from a country which promotes sustainability (e.g. green products)	.775		
	I prefer brands that originate from a country which promotes the sale of healthy food	.860		
Willingness to pay (Dodds et al., 1991)		.891	0.889	.727
	The likelihood of purchasing in an Australian food retail store is…	.868		
	The probability that I would consider purchasing in an Australian food retail store is…	.863		
	If I were going to eat outside, the possibility that I would consider purchasing in an Australian food retail store is…	.832		

The discriminant validity is eminent from the square root of mean variance of every construct which is greater than the causal correlation between them. The Table 3 shows standard deviations, mean and correlation amongst the research variables.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics and correlations

	Mean	Std.	COO Effect	Service quality expectation	Social value expectation	Emotion value expectation	Money price expectation	Behavioral price expectation	Reputation value expectation	Willingness to pay
COO Effect	5.017	.772	**.829**							
Service quality expectation	5.163	.598	.665**	**.775**						
Social value expectation	4.607	.895	.421**	.375**	**.822**					
Emotion value expectation	5.140	.761	.374**	.475**	.337**	**.858**				
Money price expectation	5.190	.670	.421**	.537**	.304**	.527**	**.807**			
Behavioral price expectation	5.027	.789	.425	.572**	.405**	.582**	.527**	**.829**		
Reputation value expectation	5.040	.761	.517**	.605**	.501**	.510**	.512**	.575**	**.825**	
Willingness to pay	4.671	.816	.275**	.271**	.335**	.117*	.189**	.241**	.265**	**.859**

Note: Bivariate correlation for the constructs is shown below the diagonal and AVEs is shown as bold diagonal values

*   p < .05

** p < .01

Testing the Hypotheses

The goal of this study is to determine the links between value expectations, country of origin and willingness to pay. Structural equation modelling in IBM AMOS 26 was used to test the causal linkages of all the variables in the developed model. The model's fit indices are $x2$ (385) = 795.215; IFI = .935; p < .001; CFI = .927; RMSEA = .067 and TLI = .927; showing that the model fit the data well (Blunch, 2012)

Service Quality, Country of Origin, Willingness to Pay and Value Expectation

We tested the hypotheses by inspecting the structural model's estimated path coefficients, which showed that the developed conceptual framework was a good fit. COO has a positive impact on social value anticipation, service quality anticipation, emotional value, behavioral price, monetary pricing, and reputation anticipations as indicated in Table 4. H1a, H1b, H1c, H1d, H1e, and H1f are all supported by evidence.

However, the direct influence of COO on customers' readiness to pay, on the other hand, was not substantial. Furthermore, it was discovered that only social value expectation had a substantial impact on WTP. As a result, H3b is accepted. H2 and H3a are not accepted, so as the H3c, H3d, H3e, and H3f.

Table 4: Hypotheses Testing Results for the proposed Structural Model

Hypothesis	Path	Standardized coefficients	S.E.	C.R.	*p*-value	Result
H_{1a}	COO Service quality expectations	.743	.055	10.862	***	Supported
H_{1b}	COO Social value expectation	.495	.069	8.667	***	Supported
H_{1c}	COO Emotional value expectation	.497	.055	9.221	***	Supported
H_{1d}	COO Money price expectation	.535	.04	8.997	***	Supported
H_{1e}	COO Behavioral price expectation	.561	.061	9.89	***	Supported
H_{1f}	COO Reputation expectation	.631	.054	11.121	***	Supported
H_2	COO Willingness to pay	.111	.151	.806	.421	Not supported
H_{3a}	Service quality expectations Willingness to Pay	.067	.131	.745	.465	Not supported
H_{3b}	Social value expectation Willingness to Pay	.228	.058	3.489	***	Supported
H_{3c}	Emotional value expectation Willingness to Pay	-.121	.061	-1.939	.055	Not supported
H_{3d}	Money price expectation Willingness to Pay	.017	.085	.275	.787	Not supported
H_{3e}	Behavioral price expectation Willingness to Pay	.087	.075	1.215	.225	Not supported
H_{3f}	Reputation expectations Willingness to Pay	.055	.080	.668	0.479	Not supported

Note: *** p < .001

The bootstrapping indirect effects method was used to investigate the impact of mediation of customer anticipations on the connection between WTP

and COO as shown in Table 5. The bias-corrected confidence level of 95 percent along with 10,000 bootstrap samples was used to compute the bootstrap confidence ranges of indirect effects for the hypothesized mediated interactions. The impact on WTP via social value expectation (=.135, p<.01) was significant by the indirect effect of COO only, according to the findings. More specifically, in the link between COO and WTP, service value anticipation was a key mediator.

Moderating effect of customer's awareness regarding COO brands

Country of origin is observed to have the greatest impact on anticipation of service quality and then reputation. Only one model investigating the path from Country of origin to anticipation of monetary price produced a notable difference in the Chi-square test across all models (Table 5).

This finding demonstrates that the influence of country of origin on anticipation of monetary price differed depending on whether customers were knowledgeable of the country of origin's brands or not. H4d was supported based on these data, but H4a, H4b, H4c, H4e, H4f, and H5 were rejected. We also used the bootstrapping method to examine the influence of Country of origin to the anticipation of monetary price in both groups. Customers who are familiar with the COO's brands have a higher effect on monetary price expectation (ß =.705, p<.01) unlike the ones were unaware (ß =.497, p<.01). The difference is statistically significant (lower CI95 percent =.031, upper CI95 percent =.855, p<.05).

Table 5: Chi-square Test Results

	Path	Δλ2	p
COO	Service quality expectation	4.509	.105
COO	Social value expectation	.035	.861
COO	Emotional value expectation	.017	.895
COO	Monetary price expectation	7.379	**
COO	Behavioral price expectation	.275	.605
COO	Reputation expectation	.519	.470
COO	Service quality expectation	.030	.861
COO	Willingness to pay	.329	.561

Note: ** p < .0

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

This study investigated the impact of signaling theory and cue utilization on Pakistani customers' value expectations and their readiness to pay for the American food brands in Pakistan especially when they knew the COO of these food brands.

Customers' pre-purchase expectations in relation to other potential global market entrants, especially the international food merchants, were also studied in the context of their international expansion in a growing international market like Pakistan.

Theoretical implications

This research adds to the existing literature about the impact of country of origin in the course of prior to purchase phenomenon. It provides a deeper understanding of the links between COO, WTP and a wide range of customer value expectations. To begin with, despite the fact that COO has been extensively studied, prior research has mostly focused on the relationship between country of origin and assessments of products and services by customers, as well as their value perception (Woo, 2019). In line with the recommendations of prior studies (Babin & James, 2010; Karimah, 2022), this study sought to bridge this gap by looking into value expectations or value anticipation rather than value perception only. The results of the study indicated positive influence of COO on Customers' expectations, especially in terms of the social value, service quality, emotional value, reputation aspect, behavioral price, and monetary price.

The expectation of service quality was found to be the most significantly and directly affected by COO, and reputation afterwards. This proved the already existing results elaborated by past studies that country of origin is a powerful indicator of quality (Damanik & Yusuf, 2022)

and reputation (Wang, 2022). The Country of origin evaluations are interpreted into the estimates of the attributes of service offerings and the brands originated from that region, resulting in consumer perceptions regarding quality of service and business reputation (Diamantopoulos et al., 2020). Following that, the next research examines the impact of customer anticipations and country of origin on their readiness to pay. According to previous research, consumer's viewpoints of COO, service quality, and value are drivers of purchase intention (De Nisco, Mainolfi, Marino, & Napolitano, 2016; Raghava R. Gundala, 2021). Nonetheless, the only notable determinant of readiness to pay according to this study was social value anticipation. Furthermore, COO is also found to have an indirect impact on readiness to pay via social value. This is in accordance with latest studies, which suggest that the country of origin effect is dependent on a multitude of mediating and moderating aspects and might also be of little significance in certain situations (Brand & Baier, 2022; Hong et al., 2022; Islam & Hussain, 2022; Pegan et al., 2022).

This research was carried out in Pakistan's food retailing sector, where unity and social harmony are amongst the essential cultural elements and are found being depicted in the food choices of Pakistani people (Majeed, Ahmed, & Rasheed, 2022).

Good food spots play an important role in this society because they allow customers to socialize with friends, coworkers and family (Mohamed, Kim, Lehto, & Behnke, 2022). As a result, the urge to visit food outlets is not merely about quality but it is highly escorted with connecting to other people, building social relationships, and keeping the feeling of connectedness alive (Enriquez & Archila-Godinez, 2022). On the third stage, the current study demonstrates that awareness of customer regarding the country of origin's brands plays a

moderating function. The customers who had knowledge of the COO's brands had a higher effect on monetary pricing anticipation than those who were unaware. This indicates when the customers are surer about the cue and country brands, then they anticipate greater value against their purchase. Awareness of the country of origin's brand is a key determinant that can strengthen or weaken the impact of COO according to prior literature (Ali et al., 2020; Kashif, Awang, Walsh, & Altaf, 2015; Tseng et al., 2021) on the role of client conviction in the strength of country of origin effect.

Practical implications

The results of this study have the significant contribution for global retailers especially in the international food industry. The pre-purchase decision making process of those consumers was studied here who were well aware of the COO of their food brands and they already had a strong image of the country branding which aided their buying process

The study of this kind of market is quite helpful for new entrants who want to go for global expansions. The Pakistani market, specifically the modern supermarket chains (which used to be the simple supermarkets) is worth PKR 205.9 billion and is observing 20% expansion per year (Euromonitor, 2021). Pakistan is hub of cultural values and good taste for food. The Pakistani ancient cuisine from all around Pakistan has no match in the world. Yet Pakistanis, including the middle class, are now found showing interest in different food brands and are welcoming foreign food brands because they are exploring the world more for the sake of their education, business, and tourism. Their appetite for international food brands has trigged the rise of retail malls which have grabbed attention of international food key players to open their food franchises in Pakistan. The good examples of such franchises are McDonald's, Dunkin' Donuts, Burger King, KFC, and Pizza Hut (Austrade, 2022).

Thus, the COO effect can be used by a service supplier who does not have a well-known brand name and wish to enter a new overseas market. Specifically, Country of origin can raise expectations of customers regarding several sorts of value from service suppliers, social value expectation has been discovered to be a key determinant of readiness to pay. To attract more clientele, new food shops entering Pakistan and perhaps other locations with comparable cultures can work on increasing the projected social value of their offering. COO, for example, can be included into marketing communication such as slogans, logos and commercials, emphasizing unity and togetherness while also encouraging socializing and engagement with others (Enriquez & Archila-Godinez, 2022). Practically this has been observed in Pakistan in terms of retails malls where different countries are partnering with such malls to launch their products and strategies in this country. For example Carrefour from France, Alphas store catering Tesco from UK, and Galaxy internal is sheltering SPAR chains have already been setting the good examples of how to enter into such market on mega level(Euromonitor, 2021).

This research is a sound base to provide multinational companies with a competitive edge in the Pakistani market over local and other foreign brands. In international market, new entrants, particularly early adopters, confront numerous hurdles, including poor brand awareness and little information (Chacko, Sumathi, Narayanan, & Narayanan, 2022). For instance the new food brands are required to be aware of trade agreements, tariffs, and custom duties imposed on food stuff in Pakistan. The language on labels (Urdu & English), shelf life of products, and especially the "Halal" certification obtained via the Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic countries or International Halal Accreditation Forum can cause international players to revise their rules and regulations(Austrade, 2022; Masood & Rahim).

Knowing customer's expectations and their attributes like brand awareness of the country of origin is critical to a company's performance in foreign markets. New American enterprises might profit from the success of their opponents, emphasizing the benefit of the late adopters as the country of origin's impact on monetary price expectation was greater among customers with a good knowledge of the COO's brands. Additionally, service suppliers can use this information to construct consumer segmentation and targeting tactics.

Buyers could be classified depending on their familiarity with COO brands, for instance. Those with a deep understanding are more likely to perceive a greater monetary value depending on COO, therefore a premium pricing approach could target them. In essence, design of service method can be customized to increase customer happiness and to affect prior to purchase and repeat buying behavior (Ikonnikova et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In the domain of American based food retail outlets in Pakistan, this study adds to the current research by giving statistical proof on the correlations between COO, WTP and customers' anticipation of value. As a whole, it demonstrates the importance of the COO impact in the creation of consumer expectations, which influences readiness to pay in the prior to purchase decision-making process. As a result, the Country of origin of a service/brand can act as an indicator of value that affects pre-buy assessment and buying behavior, giving marketers a major competitive edge (Karim & Hue, 2022). This study has a few limitations, according to the authors. First of all, the metrics for this study were mostly created in a Western environment, based on earlier research.

Future studies could benefit from combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies to build tools that measure expectations of customers in the domain of Pakistani consumers. Additionally, more research can be done to evaluate the suggested model with a bigger sample size to ensure that the findings are generalizable. Eventually, a longitudinal study can be carried out to investigate the COO effects in both the prior to buy and repeat buying decision-making process in order to catch the mechanisms of the

connections between customers' behavior & beliefs and country of origin under various circumstances like those of varying behavior of customer and the technology.

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Conceptualization, K.B.D, W.A.W.M.I, M.A,Methodology, K.B.D, W.A.W.,H.A,M.I; Formal analysis,K.B.D, W.A.W.,M.A, Investigation, K.B.D, W.A.W.,H.A,M.I Writing—original draft preparation, K.B.D, W.A.W.,H.A,M.I :Writing—review and editing K.B.D, W.A.W.,H.A,M.I:., All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript

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