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WORLD ECONOMIC GIANTS IN THE EYES OF AFRICA: PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICAN CONSUMERS TOWARDS FOREIGN ELECTRONIC PRODUCTS ORIGINATING FROM CHINA, JAPAN AND UNITED STATES

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of an exploratory survey of African Consumers' Perception Regarding consumer electronics products originating from its three major trading partners-China, Japan and United States of America (U.S.A). The focus of the study is investigating the source of information in evaluating foreign products, The evaluation of the specific product cues used by African consumer in their assessment of electronic products and the ranking of the three countries-China, Japan and USA in terms of the various product attributes. The product category selected for the study includes television sets, Refrigerators, Computers, Electric irons, and digital cameras. The products cues (Dimensions) used for the study comprised of Country of origin image (COI), Brand Familiarity (B.F), Perceived product quality (PPQ), Firms' trust (F.T), Country reputation (C.R), Economic Animosity (E.A), Perceived product price (PPP), And Product Availability (P.A). Data was collected from two hundred and seventy (270) African consumers in the city of Wuhan Hubei province; Peoples Republic of China. With the aid of statistical packages for social sciences (IBM SPSS 20 VERSION), Paired-sample T test was used to compare the mean ratings of all the eight (8) product dimensions for all the pairs of the three (3) countries. The findings showed that internet advertisement and television are the most important information sources used by African consumers in evaluating foreign electronic products, this was followed by friends' opinion and the least patronage was radio. The result also disclosed that African consumers don't consider the country of origin aspect to be their priority in the course of making foreign electronic product purchase, rather other product attributes such as quality and product brand take the precedence. Also revealed from the studies is the ranking of the three countries in terms of the eight product dimensions. It was found that, Japan having highest brand recognition (Brand familiarity), United states would boast of two things, which include high perceived product quality and country reputation. China is leading ahead in terms of cheap product price and availability of their products in almost (if not all) the nooks and crannies of African countries as perceived by African consumers. Finally, in discussing managerial implications, prescriptions were made to marketers from different countries for improving their competitiveness in the emerging African market given the present perceptions of the African consumers.

1. Introduction

With its substantial population, abundant natural resources and fast-growing economy, Africa has become one of the emerging, fascinating and promising consumer markets to both western and eastern companies of the global world. These could be justified from the recent economic development in which the continent's GDP rose by 4.9 percent every year from 2000 through 2008, more than twice its pace in the 1980s and '90s. Africa's collective GDP reached $1.6 trillion in 2008. Africa was one of just two economic regions (the other was Asia) where GDP rose during the global recession of 2009. (Norbert et al 2010). When Africa proved resilient to the 2009 global downturn, companies without a presence in Africa started taking another look, and those already selling there realized it was time to boost their presence and increase their foot prints (Forbes, 2012). Africa is already one of the world's fastest-growing consumer markets, expanding two to three times faster than those in Organization for Economic Co-operation and ' Development (OECD) countries. And African households spent $860 billion in 2008, more than households in India or Russia. Rising incomes will propel spending further. Indeed, if the continent's combined GDP continues to grow by 5 percent a year, African households will spend $1.4 trillion in 2020. (Dorr, Norbert et al 2010).

Unfortunately, academic research has indicated that there few (if any) research work conducted on African consumer perceptions and purchase of foreign products. Although there was very little research which looks at this area, such research includes the work conducted in Nigeria (Agbomifoh and elimimian, 1999) and Ghana (Festervand and Sokoya, 1994). However, such research was only on country basis in which the respondents are from one country. Infact, to the best of our knowledge, there was no single study (ever conducted) directly investigating African consumers' perceptions of foreign electronic products and specifically putting emphasis on the three economically giant countries of the world, using multiple product cues such as Country of origin image (COI), Perceived Product Quality (PPQ), Brand Familiarity (B.F), Firms' Trust (F.T), Country Reputation (C.R), Perceived Product Price (PPP) and Perceived Product Availability (PPA).

In contrast to the previous research, current study encompasses the whole continent including both the North Africa and the Sub-Saharan Africa in enriching the pool of literature by investigating the following research questions: Empirically investigate the sources of information used by African consumers in evaluating foreign electronics products. Examining African consumers' preference towards the three most widely used product dimensions (Quality, Brand name and Country of origin.) and how do these vary with consumer demographics and finally, examine the

African consumer's perception towards foreign products originating from China, Japan and United states using the eight afore-mentioned product cues.

2. Review of Related Literature and Definition of Antecedents

2.1. Country of Origin Effects (COO)

One of the earliest studies of country of origin concepts would be traced back to the work of schooler (1965) who concluded that the country of origin of a product can have an effect on a consumer's opinion of the product. This was then followed by the work of Reierson (1966) whose findings indicated the consideration of the nature of national stereotypes in country of origin research. Further research on country of origin revealed that country of origin is not static but rather a dynamic in nature, and thus it can change overtime (Nagashima, 1977). This was confirmed a decade later by Papadopoulos et al. (1987) whose study of foreign goods' perception revealed that 'made in' stereotype can change, at least in the long term.

Since then, the study has been heavily researched especially in the areas of marketing, international business as well as consumer behavior (Peterson and Jobler, 1995). Empirical evidence in the areas of marketing, suggest that country of origin of a product affect consumers product evaluation (Erikson et al 1984; Hong et al 1989).

Consumers use country of origin cue for foreign product evaluation when the intrinsic qualities of the products are not known (Han, 1989). Although several studies indicated the influence of country of origin on foreign product evaluation and purchase intentions, little is known about its effect in the presence of other product dimensions. This is because the COO was the only cue supplied to the respondents on which to base their evaluations (Johansson et al, 1985). This2 leads to a bias in favour of finding a significant country of origin effect and hence multi-attribute effects are highly encouraged(Bilkey and Nes, 1992)

2.2. Brand Familiarity (B.F)

Direct or indirect experiences consumers have with a product or brand is termed as familiarity (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987), while the amount of time spent on processing information about a brand, irrespective of the time and content of the process that was involved is known as brand familiarity (Baker et at, 1986). Thus, brand familiarity is the most rudimentary form of consumers brand knowledge. It has been established that the probability of choice is increased by brand knowledge, which is the strength of the brand trace memory that is reflected by the consumers' ability to identify the brand under different conditions (Keller, 1993). Brand knowledge or awareness can provide the familiarity to a brand and the signal of substantiality and promise if the consumer knows the brand; while it will influence the consideration of consumer to brand and further influence the selection of consumer on brand when the brand is memorized (pi-chuan sun et al).

Although it doesn't necessarily influence brand perceptions, however familiarity with brand of different national origin affects product choice and evaluation (Johansson et al, 1985). This is because being familiarized with a brand leads to its recognition which helps in building both

consumers preference and confidence in buying branded goods. It is a well-known fact that consumers often prefer a famous brand rather than an unknown brand because of its prestige or as a way of reducing risk in a purchase decision. (Ettenson, 1993). With an unknown brand name, good will attached to the brand is absent and the consumer cannot identify with the actual manufacturer (Cordell et al, 1993). A positive effect of brand familiarity on quality perceptions has been empirically supported by the work of Dodd et al. (1991).

2.3. Perceived Product Quality (PPQ)

Perceived quality is defined as a subjective judgement made by the consumer regarding the excellence or superiority of a product (Zeithaml,1988). Perception of product quality apart from playing a significant role in consumer product evaluation (Kraft et al,1992), it also influences the purchase decision and brand loyalty directly, especially when the consumer can't make detailed analysis(Aaker, 1991).

Rogers et al. (1994) suggested that the perception of quality by consumers towards a product will increase consumer's confidence in the product evaluations before arriving at a final choice. In partitioned country of origin (coo) in to country of design (COD), country of assembly (COA), and country of parts (COP), product quality perception plays a significant role (Kohinoor et al, 2011). Biswass (2011) found that quality perceptions of high-priced products produced completely domestically are higher than similar products whose COD, COA or COP are industrialized countries. Another research work clarifying the roles of COD, COA, COP and brand image in perceived product quality evaluation is found in the work of (Chowdhury et al, 2009). In comparison of perceived product quality and country of origin, the former was significantly rated as more important as a choice determinant than the later (Gregory et al, 1994).

2.4. Firms' Trust (F.T)

Willingness to be vulnerable and to believe that the exchange partner chosen(firm) will act in the best interest of the trustor (consumer) and will behave responsibly and with integrity, is termed "Consumer trust" (Anderson and weitz (1989), Gaonessar (1984) & Rousseau et al (1998). A reliance on the integrity, honesty, willingness to cooperate, reliability and competence of a firm by a consumer is also regarded as consumer trust (Moorman et al 1993).

Several studies have pointed out that trust is a variable that plays a very important role in virtually all the spheres of life (Harris and Good 2004; Sirdshmukh et al 2002). Achievement of competitive advantage, high consumer satisfaction and loyalty would be realised when there is a strong relationship and trustworthiness between firms (Kalwani and Narayandas 1995; Sirdeshmukh et al 2002). Trust also has advantage of generating benefits and decreasing uncertainties between consumers and firms (Crosby et al 1990).

2.5. Economic Animosity (E.A)

Animosity towards a product country of origin had an adverse effect on it, only if the product was not one on which the country's reputation was based (Sung-TaiHong et al 2006). Animosity was recently viewed in different perspectives. While Klein et al (1988) viewed animosity as the

remnants of antipathy related to previous or ongoing military, political or economic episodes that affect consumers' purchase behaviour in the international market arena, some authors described animosity as the hostility stemming from specific historic or ongoing event (Riefler and Diamantopoulos 2007). Animosity may also result from strong build-up tensions between nations for different reasons such as divergence in foreign policy, economic disagreements, loggerheads in international business and disparity emanating from religious conflicts (Wang 2005).The first study relating animosity to foreign product purchase behaviour of consumers was validated by Klein et al (1988) in which animosity was partitioned in to economic animosity, war animosity and global animosity.

A good example of economic animosity was found in the research work of witkowski (2000) in which it described the economic animosity harboured by United States towards china due to unfair trading practices. Economic animosity was also assessed in the work of Nijssen and Douglas (2004) in which economic animosity towards Germany by the citizens of Netherlands was analysed. The concept of economic-based animosity also extended the literature by assessing the economic animosities of five Asian countries (Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand) towards two countries (United States and Japan) (Jung et al 2002; Ang et al 2004).The findings indicated how consumers experience animosity towards the United States and Japan. The findings also revealed that animosity may vary across nations (Angel et al 2004) Due to completely lack of war-related events between the continent of Africa and the countries of USA, Japan and China; coupled with the economically devalued African countries' currencies in the international market which eventually results in a higher prices for foreign products; this study, apart from other dimensions, has taken cognisance of the economic animosity of African consumers towards the products of United States, Japan and China.

2.6. Country Reputation (C.R)

Reputation is defined as an estimation of consistency over time of an attribute of an entity (Herbig and Milewicz 1995), while country of reputation has been defined as a perception of a country, shared by domestic and international policies on the basis of personal experience and information received (Kleppe et al 2002). Nowadays nations are increasingly concerned with their reputations relative to other nations and turn to actively measuring and managing that reputation (Tanja.P et al 2005). Country reputation has been suggested to be as one of the key macro-economic variables in influencing international consumers' attitudes towards a country's products and thus, consumers' purchase intentions. Repeated behavioural interactions such as personal experiences and media information play a good role towards forming country of origin reputation. (Martin and Erdgu,1993). Numerous numbers of research works have acknowledged the importance of firm's country of origin reputations when marketing to its customers. (Al. Najjal,2001; Andria nova,2001, Graham and Bensal 2007; winn et al 2008). Sung-tai Hong et al (1989) suggested that when a products country of origin has a reputation for manufacturing high-quality products, there may be positive impacts on products judgement. This could be justified by oodles amount of money being injected by firms towards influencing the consumers' purchase behaviour. The credibility and integrity of the firms' reputation also influences consumers' opinion in product evaluation. The type of goods a country specialises as well as the perceived quality of the country's export is determined by the firms' country of origin reputations (Chisik, 2003).

2.7. Price Perception (PP)

Price perception has long been widely researched and the findings injected in to the pricing literature. One of the earliest of this research could be found in the work Kanem and Toman (1970) in which they suggested that consumers have pre-conceived ideas about what a fair price is for a given item, and are willing to pay not more than that amount for the particular item. Price has been found to be in direct proportion with quality of a product, and therefore price is perceived to be an indirect scale standard of product quality by the consumer (Lichtenstein et al 1993). Because of its profound impact in influencing consumers' willingness to purchase, price is perceived to be a multi-dimensional stimulus to consumers (Dodds, monre and Grewal 1991). Some research findings viewed high price as economically detrimental to consumers' willingness to purchase because higher price leads to higher perceived economic sacrifice. A good example is found in the work of Williams, odds and Monre (1985) which pointed out that although price positively influences quality perception, but it inversely influences value perception and willingness. However, some other research findings like Zeithamle (1988) suggested that high price may lead to higher perceived quality and thereby increase consumers willing to purchase.

2.8. Product Availability/Distribution (PA/D)

Product availability or distribution is the process of making product available for use or consumption by consumer or business user, using direct means or using indirect means with intermediaries. Product availability is becoming an increasingly more important issue for consumers seeking out convenient electronic product solutions. Although it has been established that availability of local alternatives has influence on foreign product purchase (Nijssen et al,2004), However lack of domestic products due to small nature of the economies or inadequate local electronics industry, also plays a role in influencing foreign product evaluation. This could be found in a situation where consumers in countries with no local consumer electronics production are left with no choice than to buy foreign electronics goods(Hammoud R.A,2007) .Lack of domestic product availability or a situation where there is no perceived domestic alternatives ,consumers appear more likely to evaluate foreign products favourably (Nijssen et al ,1999).This study is based on the assumption that no local consumer electronics products are available in the African markets. This is because the researcher wanted to find out which of the three countries' products are perceived by the African consumers to be more available and rampant in African markets.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Product Category and Selection

The products selected for the study were household consumer electronics such as T.V, Refrigerator, computers, digital camera and other electrical appliances. These product categories were selected because, at Africans' current level of economic development, they are at the top of every African consumer's wish list. Another reason is because these products are widely diffused and thus, should be quite familiar to African consumers from virtually all the African countries. The third reason for selecting household electronics products is because, apart from being manufactured by multinational companies in different countries, they are also high-tech products

and hence provide a good chance that the country of origin will be an important evaluative attribute (quotation).

3.2. Sample Design and Selection

The research investigates African consumers' perception towards foreign electronics products emanating from three economically giants countries of the world. Its fitting to assess African consumers' perception towards foreign electronic goods because Africans are not only becoming more exposed and familiar with imported foreign products, but also Africa as a continent is currently viewed as a suitable market for both western and eastern countries of the world. The country selected for the study included Japan, United States of America (U.S.A) and China. These particular foreign countries were selected for some certain reasons, viz: Japan was selected not only because of its long history of trade with African countries but, it was also considered as one of the major three players in international trade (Ohmae 1999). China and USA were chosen because both the two countries have current economic ties with Africa, and they are also active exporters of electronics products to virtually all African countries. The three countries are world economic giants because they were ranked the first three countries with the largest nominal GDP in the world. USA, China and Japan were ranked 1st, 2nd and 3rd respectively as the countries with largest nominal GDP (I.M.F, World Bank and world fact book 2011).

4. Questionnaire Design and Administration

4.1. Pre-Testing of Questionnaire

The questionnaire was subjected to pre-testing with relatively small sample of 30 African consumers that vary in key demographic variables such as age, gender, regional countries and level of education. The reason for conducting the pre-test was to identify problems related to questions format and layout as well as problems of readability and comprehension. Based on the outcome of the pre-test, minor modifications regarding issues arising from the questions, were fully addressed before embarking on to the main study for data collection.

4.2. Data Collection

During data collection, self-completion questionnaires were administered to respondents using the method of "Drop off and collect" as suggested by (brown 1987) most of the previous researches on country of origin investigations have also used the method of ''drop off and collect "during questionnaire administration. (see- Papadopoulos, Helsop and Bamossy 1994, d'Astous and Ahmed 1999). A random sample of 270 African students studying in five (5) different universities in Wuhan city of Hubei province people's republic of china, was selected. questionnaires were hand delivered to the 270 randomly selected potential respondents. A seven point likert scales ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree were provided adjacent to each country listing for subjects to report their perception towards the country with regard to the questioned asked. Of the 270 questionnaires administered, 234 were returned (retrieved) for a total response rate of 86.7%. Out of the 234 returned questionnaires, 20 were removed and discarded. Only 204 were useable for the study, yielding a useable response rate of 75.6%. The gap created between the numbers of questionnaires collected and the number of useable ones was due to the problem of incomplete

responses and statements by some subjects that they were too busy or not interested in participating. The content of the questionnaire was divided in to four (4) sections. The first section asked about the demographic profile of the respondents, the second section examined four different information sources used by the respondents in evaluating foreign products. The third section investigates African consumers' perception to three specific product dimensions in their assessment of electrical appliances. The last segment of the questionnaire looked at the comparison between three countries (USA, Japan and China) based on eight (8) different product cues. The fourth section was specifically asking African consumers to profile the three countries through a series of eight (8) product attribute dimensions

4.3. Construct Measures

The variables of interest in this paper were measured using established scales from previous research studies. There are nine (9) primary construct that were subjected under investigation. These include Willingness to buy (WBP), country of origin image (COI), perceived product quality (PPQ), brand familiarity (B.F), Firms' trust (F.T), country reputation (C.R), Perceived product price (PPP), Perceived product distribution (PPD) and economic Animosity (E.A).

Some variables were measured with a 7-point likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7), while other variables were measured with 7-point bipolar likert scale.

Country of origin image scale was adopted from previous research work of laroche et al (2005) but only three item scale was used in the present study due to the volume of the research variables. Perceived product quality (PPQ) was measured by a four-item of 7-point bipolar scale adapted from chao et al (1993). The four-item scale are poor workmanship (1)/good workmanship (7), unreliable (1)/reliable (7), not-durable (1)/durable (7) and low quality (1)/high quality (7).

Brand familiarity was measured by asking the respondents "are you familiar with the brand" "IBM", "Sony"," Hair" with a seven point semantic differential scale weighted from not familiar (1) to very familiar (7).

Firm's Trust was measured by a six items scale extracted from the works of Crosby et al (1990), Ganesan (1994) and Harris et al (2004).

The country of origin reputation was measured by items validated by kaynak and Kara (2002), yasin et al (2007), Bennett and Gabriel (2001) and Doney and Cannon (1997).

Economic Animosity was assessed and measured by a 3-item scale drawn from Klein et al (1998) and witkowski (2000).

Perceived product price was measured with a three-item scale extracted from previous research work of (Peterson and Wilson 1985), Lichtenstein et al (1993) and zheng Zhou& Kent nakemoto (2001).

Perceived product distribution was measured by a customised 7-point scale.

5. Result and Discussion

5.1. Demographic Profile

This section constitutes Gender, Age, Regional division And Educational level.

More than 70% (2/3) of the respondents composed of male while 25 % (1/3) of the respondents are females. Although the age of the respondents ranges from 18-45 years, however for easy scale structure, it was measured with a scale range of 10TH unit (i.e. 10-20, 21-30 …41-50). From table 1 below, it would be observed that about 90% of the respondents lies along the range of 21-30 years of age meaning that majority of them are in their youthful age. 38.2 % of the respondents are from West African region, while the least (13.7%) came from the southern region of the continent. About 70.6% of the respondents are post-graduate students, while undergraduate students constituted 26.0% and 3.4 % of them are non-students (others).

Table 1

Demographic variables.	Range	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Gender	Male	152	74.5
	Female	52	25.5
Age	10-20	15	7.4
	21-30	118	57.8
	31-40	68	33.3
	41-50	3	1.5
African Regions	North Africa	33	16.2
	West Africa	78	38.2
	East Africa	36	17.6
	Central Africa	29	14.2
	South Africa	28	13.7
Educational level.	Postgraduate st	144	70.6
	Bachelor std	53	26.0
	Others.	7	3.4

Information Sources
The major sources of information for the respondents about foreign household electronic products are internet Advertisement, friends' opinion, and television.

An investigation on the relationships between demographic variables and information sources indicated that Internet Advertisement (p=.008) and television (p=.004) are preferred by both post-graduate and undergraduate students. Also going by regional division, all the regions of Africa patronized both internet advertisement (p=.018) and television (p=.013) with North African region having higher mean number while the region with the least mean is central Africa.

Information from friends' opinion (p=.080) have also been highly rated by all the age groups with older (41-45 years) people having the highest mean under this category. Although its not statistically significant, but With the high mean number ranked by the respondent under friends

opinion, its an indication that most of them are receiving information about foreign products through friends

The least rank information source is radio. That is either not the most reliable information source for foreign products or thus is rated low by the respondents.

Overall rating of the sources of information studied indicated that respondent rated Television and internet advertisement higher than other sources. The ranking ranged from most preferred (1) to least preferred (4). Friends' opinion ranked third followed by radio which has the least rank.

Table 2:

Variables	Television (TV)	Radio(R)	Internet Advertisement	Friends' opinion.
Gender				
Male	4.76	3.57	5.76	4.99
Female	4.37	3.38	5.60	5.17
P value	**.188**	**.501**	**.507**	**.530**
Age-group				
10-20	4.20	2.90	5.91	5.93
21-30	4.71	3.73	5.64	4.81
31-40	4.64	3.32	5.78	5.19
41-50	5.23	2.83	6.57	6.00
P value	**.725**	**.180**	**.647**	**.080**
Region				
North Africa.	5.12	3.77	5.91	4.88
West Africa.	4.75	3.53	5.90	5.03
East Africa.	5.04	3.79	5.93	5.25
Central Africa.	3.69	3.16	4.89	4.72
South Africa.	4.38	3.20	5.60	5.29
P value	**.013**	**.447**	**.018**	**.726**
Education				
Post-graduate	4.93	3.69	5.93	4.93
Bachelor std.	3.96	3.06	5.22	5.28
Other.	4.43	3.36	5.29	5.29
P value	**.004**	**.076**	**.008**	**.462**
Overall Ranking	1	4	2	3

Table three (3) presented the findings revealed by the respondents in evaluating foreign products, using three different product cues (Dimensions). The product dimensions used are Quality, Brand Name and Country of origin.

The relationship between the demographic variables and the three dimensions of product evaluation studied showed that all the five different African regions relied heavily on quality (p=0.001) when evaluating foreign product purchase.

Investigation on the relationship between level of education and product evaluation dimensions revealed that both post graduate and undergraduate students are more interested in product quality (p=0.01) and brand name (0.002) but place little emphasis on country of origin as a product cue when evaluating foreign household electronics product.

Table 3:

Variables	Quality	Brand Name	Country of origin.
Gender			
Male	6.15	5.61	4.95
Female	6.21	5.81	4.83
P value	.722	.262	.601
Age-Group			
10-20	6.17	5.24	4.33
21-30	6.06	5.57	4.82
31-40	6.36	5.91	5.23
41-50	6.15	5.96	4.28
P value	.626	.068	.069
Region			
North Africa	6.34	5.93	5.45
West Africa	6.40	5.66	4.70
East Africa	6.09	5.75	5.06
Central Africa	5.52	5.20	4.71
South Africa	6.07	5.69	4.93
P value	.001	.100	.099
Education			
Post-graduate std.	6.29	5.83	5.06
Bachelor std.	5.94	5.30	4.56
Others.	5.43	4.94	4.72
P value.	.010	.002	.068
Overall ranking.	1	2	3

Another finding is that Country of origin as a product dimension played a good role in which age group (31-40) considered country of origin while the respondents range between 41-50 are of the opinion that brand name(p=0.068) are considered first than country of origin in the course of foreign product evaluation.

Overall ranking forwarded by the respondents on all the three product dimensions indicated that quality is the most preferred, followed by brand name while the least preferred is the country of origin. That means African consumers depend on quality of a product, followed by the brand name of that product before putting emphasis on place of origin where the products were manufactured.

Respondents were given questionnaires composed of scales to measure their perceptions regarding perceived product quality (PPQ), country of origin image (COI) Brand Familiarity (B.F) Firm's trust (F.T) Firms' Reputation (F.R), Economic Animosity (E.A), Product Price (PR), and product Distribution (P.D) of household electronic products made from three different countries viz: China, Japan and United States.

The scales of measurement were extracted from previous research works.

The respondents were asked on a seven-point (7-point) likert scale (ranging from strongly disagree=1 to strongly Agree=7) and their agreement with different statements on PPQ, COI, B.F, F.T, F.R, E.A, P.R and P.D of the products associated with the three different countries were measured.

A respondent score on each measure was obtained by computing the means across the items in the relevant scale and the findings are reported as displayed below.

The mean ratings of perceived product quality (PPQ) for the three countries were compared by means of paired t-test between all pairs of the three countries using statistical packages for social sciences (SPSS) software. Investigation revealed that products from United States were ranked and rated the best in terms of product quality; Japanese product came second whereas Chinese products quality was rated last among the three countries as shown in the table.

Perceived product quality

Country	China	Japan	USA
Mean rating	3.38	4.95	5.12
S. D	1.30	1.70	1.91
Rank*	3	2	1

Respondents were also asked to rank the three countries in order of having good country of origin image. The ranking was done in a decreasing order of COI by choosing the country they perceived to be having good COI first. The result revealed that, although U.S was ranked first followed by Japan and then china, however, there was no statistically significant difference between in the mean ranking between US and Japan. Thus, we can confidently say U.S and Japan were ranked first while china tied for the second position as shown in the table below.

Country of origin Image

Country	China	Japan	USA
Mean rating	4.44	5.24	5.30
S.D	1.08	.81	.89
Rank*	2	1	1

The mean ratings for the brand familiarity for the three countries were compared by means of paired t-test between all pairs of countries. African consumers rated Japanese brand highest with a mean rating of 6.05, while U.S and china were rated second and third ranks with mean ratings of 4.61 and 4.27 respectively as shown in the table below.

Brand Familiarity

Country	China	Japan	USA
Mean rating	4.27	6.05	4.61
S.D	1.90	1.28	1.80
Rank*	3	1	2

Firms Trust

African consumers also rated Japan and US with a mean ratings of 5.12 and 5.05 respectively in terms of trustworthy firms, while china was rated with a mean of 4.38. However, there is no statistically significant between the mean ratings of Japan and US. Thus the two countries are termed the same while china comes the second.

Firms' Trust

Country	China	Japan	USA
Mean rating	4.38	5.12	5.05
S.D	1.51	1.13	1.20
Rank*	3	1	2
	2	1	1

African perceptions towards the three countries in terms of Country Reputation have positioned both Japan and US at the apex of the ladder, while china tied for the second position. This is because the mean difference between that of Japan and US are statistically not significant (i.e. the two means are statistically the same.) as shown below.

Country Reputation

Country	China	Japan	USA
Mean rating	4.13	5.61	5.75
S.D	1.56	1.27	1.25
Rank*	3	2	1

A different result was observed with regards to Economic Animosity. The respondents indicated presence of economic animosity between towards both china and US, while Japan was comparatively placed on a lower scale. However, both china and U.S have statistically the same mean ranking because the mean between the two countries are statistically not significant as indicated in the table below.

Economic Animosity

Country	China	Japan	USA
Mean rating	4.62	3.79	4.59
S.D	1.10	1.11	1.15
Rank*	1	2	1

African consumers perceived that both china and US not only want to gain more economic powers over Africa, but also believed that the two countries have high economic influence in African countries.

The measurement of product price was done in terms of cheap price or less expensive products. The table below shows the ranking of the three countries on the product price perception. The ranking was obtained by means of paired t- test between the pairs of the three countries. The result indicated that china was ranked at the top while Japan and U.S were ranked second and third positions respectively. That signifies that African consumers perceive Chinese electronics

products so cheap while US goods was perceived to be very expensive and that of Japan was reasonably priced as shown below.

Perceived Product Price

Country	China	Japan	USA
Mean rating	6.202	3.89	3.11
S.D	1.30	1.53	1.80
Rank*	1	2	3

Product distribution was operationalised in terms of availability of foreign electronics products in African countries. Again, a paired t-test between the three countries was conducted to compare the mean ratings. The result presented in the table indicated that Chinese products was rated to be the most available and abundant in African countries. United states and Japanese house hold electronics are not so rampant in African countries, unlike Chinese products which are widely distributed to virtually all the nooks and crannies of African countries as shown in the table below.

Product Availability (Distribution)

Country	China	Japan	USA
Mean rating	6.23	4.61	4.17
S.D	1.11	1.21	1.65
Rank*	1	2	3

Summary of Competitive Positions of Countries along Various Product-Related Cues

Country	Rank along dimensions:							
	PPQ	COI	B.F	TR	RP	E.A	PRC	P.D
Japan	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	2
United States	1	1	2	1	1	1	3	3
China	3	2	3	2	3	1	1	1

6. Conclusion, Recommendations and Managerial Implications

The primary aim of this study is the evaluation of African consumers' perceptions of electronics products originating from USA, Japan and China.

In achieving the aim, a number of general approaches were adopted for the study. Such approaches included:

- Various sources of information via which African consumers receive information about foreign electronics products.
- African consumers' preference towards three most widely used product cues (dimensions).
- The ranking of the three countries by African consumers in terms of the various products attributes.

The afore-mentioned approaches are thus discussed below.

Sources of information used by African consumers in receiving information about foreign electronic products: The most important information sources used by Africans in evaluating

foreign electronic products are internet advertisement, television and friends' opinion while radio is the least patronized information source .All the five(5) African regions patronized both internet advertisement and television as the two most important sources of information about foreign electronic products, with north African region having highest patronage while the region with least patronage is the central Africa.

Friends' opinion also contributed significantly in disseminating information about foreign electronic products to African consumers particularly to elderly people of 41-45 age group. Thus the top ranking of friends' opinion by African consumers, it's an indication that most of them receive information about foreign products through friends.

Radio, being the least patronized information source by almost all the respondents, is regarded as not only the slowest but also the most unreliable information source for foreign electronics products.

Having found that most African consumers receive information about foreign electronic products via internet advertisement, followed by television, friends' opinion and radio; it is therefore recommended that marketers should ensure that the advertisement of their products should not only take a large part in internet advertisement but should also be frequently displayed in African television media houses.

With regard to evaluation of the three most widely used product dimensions, the most preferred product dimension by African consumers is quality. This is followed by brand name and country of origin. The overall ranking forwarded by the respondents indicated that quality of the products is the most preferred, while the least preferred is the country of origin of the product.

The implication of this to marketing managers is that product quality and brand name should not be compromised. More strategies should be employed to improve the perceived product quality and brand image of their products as this helps not only to attract customers but also helps to retain them.

Concerning the ranking of the three countries(China ,Japan and USA), by African consumers in terms of the various dimensions such as COI ,PPQ, B.F, F.T, CR, E.A ,PP, &P.D, It would be observed that Japanese electronics products have best perceptions among African consumers with regards to COI,B.F and FT. American products was top- ranked in terms of PPQ,COI,FT,RP and EA; while Chinese products top the list in terms of EA,PP and PD.

According to these research findings, Japan would boast of having the highest brand recognition (familiarity) while USA will boast of two things which include possession of good perceived product quality and having good country reputation. China will be smiling home with two things first by having their products being widely distributed to almost (if not all) the nooks and crannies of African countries. Secondly china will boast of having their products affordable by African consumers because of its cheapness, unlike Japan and especially USA which has very expensive products as perceived by the respondents.

In relation to Economic Animosity, African consumers perceived both USA and China not only want to gain more economic power over Africa, but also believed that the two countries have high economic influence in the black African continent. The implication of the afore mentioned findings are:

Chinese should improve their perceived product quality and brand image. Although Chinese products have high penetration in to African markets, perhaps because of cheap prices, both their quality are substandard and thus needs to be improved as this helps to retain the customers.

American products are perceived to be very expensive by the African consumers, therefore they need to cut down the prices to gain more market patronage, and otherwise less of their products would be sold in African market.

Japan needs to put more emphasis on perceived product quality and country reputation. They should not compromise their brand image, country of origin image and firms trust. United States needs not only reduce the prices of their electronics products, but also need to play a very good role in improving the image of their brands since development of strong brand equity should be a high priority for all marketers (Hulland et al 1996).

7. Limitations and Suggestion for Future Research

The study has a number of limitations which may impede the generalizability of the findings. The study involved selected foreign electronic products in Africa, without product by product, regional by regional or country by country analysis, and consumers' perception of products from different African regions may not be the same let alone states or provinces in Different Africa countries.

The study was conducted in Wuhan, a commercial, educational, industrial and economic centre of Hubei province P.R of China with a population of more than 6 million of urban residence (Wuhan statistical year book 2010).Thus the characteristics and pattern of purchase of African consumers in wuhan may be different as if the respondents were residing in their respective individual African countries. This is because in the study of this nature, there is often a discrepancy between what people say and how they actually behave (Chike Okechuku 1994).

Most importantly, the sample size was relatively small when compared to the actual population of the whole African countries, even that of a single African country. Therefore, the results and findings from this study require further research investigations not only in terms of coverage, but also region by region as well as country by country investigation.

The future research encompassing other or wider range of product categories is also required to disclose what other product cues can effectively determine the extent to which the three economically giant countries would have strong access and high market penetrations in to African countries, since country of origin effects may differ for other products (kaynak and cavuagil 1983).Wall, liefeld and heslop(1989) suggested that product category is a salient factor in product country of origin, therefore, caution should be exercised while generalizing the results across all the product categories.

Furthermore, future research should also include countries apart from the ones featured in the present study, as the potential African consumer in the emerging African market is able to attract product marketers from many different competing countries of the world.

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