

Factors Influencing Consumer Preferences in a Globalized Market

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Abstract: This research presents the findings of a study aimed at understanding consumer preferences between imported and local brands in a market with a wide range of product options. It aimed to understand the effect of product prices, country of origin, service quality, website factors, perceived risk, product variety, subjective norms, and behavioral control on the purchasing preferences of individuals. The study focused on university students, who were approached on campus to participate in a survey, along with social contacts who were encouraged to share it further to reach the desired sample size. To gather the data, a convenience sampling technique was used. The size of the sample was determined using a 20:1 ratio. The insights gained from this study provide valuable understanding into the consumer behavior of younger demographics, particularly in relation to brand origin and preference in a diverse marketplace.

Keywords: Purchasing Behavior, Personal Preference, Price, Country of Origin (COO), Service Quality, Website Factors, Perceived Risk, Product Variety, Subjective Norms, Behavioral Control.

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Introduction

With globalization, Pakistan has seen increase in the wide variety of product available for consumers to buy. Products are imported from all around the world, as well as made locally, making various options and qualities available in the market (Bhatti, 2018; Ramish et al., 2019). With this increase in choice, we could observe various buying behaviors of consumers along with their preferences of buying imported brands versus local brands (Bashir, 2016). In markets where there is higher animosity and less consumer ethnocentrism, feelings of animosity could be more influential in deciding between a domestic product and an imported one (Klein, 2002). Customer segments vary in their needs and perceptions of benefits (Needs, 1976). This variation also extends to their sensitivity towards the brand, quality, and design of products. Different groups of customers place different levels of importance on these attributes (Cross & Dixit, 2005). Whilst imported products could be more expensive than local products, they offer much better quality and longevity. Consumers also tend to buy imported products as a status symbol (Kaynak & Kara, 2002). Experts in the field have highlighted that consumers often lean towards imported products due to the perception that these products carry a higher level of prestige (Schuiling & Kapferer, 2004).

This has been complemented by multiple other advances in Pakistan. Online shopping has made it even easier to gain information about both local and imported products (Ansari et al., 2023; Ramish et al., 2016). Multiple modes of transportation have also improved shipping

efficiencies and made it very convenient to acquire imported products (Balci & Cetin, 2020). Global competition has intensified, and foreign brands are expanding into new markets (Kumburu & Kessy, 2021). Local brands that never considered foreign brands as competitors had to suddenly deal with this competition (Bandara Wanninayake & Chovancová, 2011).

The main purpose of carrying out this research is to identify the effect of personal preference, prices, country of origin, service quality, website factors, perceived risk, product variety, subjective norms, and behavioral control on consumer purchasing behaviors (Aruldoss et al., 2014).

Research Questions

Through this research the answers to the following questions will be identified:

- What are the factors that motivate a buyer to choose imported brand over Local brand?
- Does Price have an effect on the choice of individuals to buy imported products?
- Does Country of Origin have an effect on the choice of individuals to buy imported products?
- Does Service Quality have an effect on the choice of individuals to buy imported products?
- Do Website Factors have an effect on the choice of individuals to buy imported products?
- Does Perceived Risk have an effect on the choice of individuals to buy imported products?
- Does Product Variety have an effect on the choice of individuals to buy imported products?
- Do Subjective Norms have an effect on the choice of individuals to buy imported products?

Literature Review

Consumers may have preferences for items depending on the significance they attribute to them. Some experts have observed that consumers assign varying values to products based on specific tangible characteristics that influence the products' usefulness (Kumburu & Kessy, 2021). Consumer willingness to accept products from other countries involves cognitive aspects, like how they evaluate the product, and affective elements, like their attitude towards the product (Bashir, 2016; Yaseen et al., 2020). Both these factors play a significant role in shaping their decisions for future purchases of these products (Esmaeilpour & Bahmiary, 2017). Particularly in less developed countries, there is a certain mindset that imported products are supposedly elite and are a better alternative to locally produced products (Twitchell, 2004). Consumers hold imported products in high regard, primarily due to their perceived superior quality and prestigious image. This has turned imported products into more of a status symbol.

Moreover, variances in prices may also play a role in affecting consumer attitude toward local and imported products. Consumers' product preferences can often be linked to their views on pricing (Esmaeilpour & Bahmiary, 2017) as well as their satisfaction with and perception of fairness in pricing (Xia et al., 2004). Prices of locally manufactured products would be lower, due to which some consumers may resort to buying local products, however, some may believe that with a comparatively higher price comes better quality and a more effective and long-lasting product (Caves & Greene, 1996). Researchers discovered that when consumers notice a difference in prices between local and imported products, these price disparities start influencing their preference for locally made products (Quartey & Abor, 2011).

In another study, it was identified that the origin of the product's country holds greater importance than both its price and other attributes (Quarthey & Abor, 2011). Consumers tend to give higher evaluations to products originating from developed countries compared to those coming from less developed ones. In a Pakistani market, if a consumer sees a price tag of 'Made in Pakistan', most will immediately perceive the quality to be poorer (Bashir, 2016; Maqsood, 2014). Products manufactured in China would elicit the same reaction from consumers. Products made in the US or UK are considered much better in quality and more trustworthy in a common consumer mindset, especially the social classes that can afford to buy imported products despite their high prices (Bashir, 2016).

The product's quality captures more of the consumer's attention and shapes their perception when they are deciding which product to choose (Dutta et al., 2019). The influence of friends and peers is important in how consumers make decisions. People often ask for advice from others when they want to buy a new product or try a new brand. People tend to trust a product that a peer or family member has tried and tested (Bashir, 2016). They may get biased against local products if they hear about the superior qualities of a certain imported product (Caves & Greene, 1996). Customer preferences may include brand image, quality of service, and perceived quality of a product. Buying behavior also changes based on a consumer's lifestyle. Lifestyle may determine what a consumer prefers and what is more favorable for what they want to achieve (Molarius & Persson, 2022). The lower social class of the country may not pay much heed to the elite lifestyle that imported products could bring, considering their very high prices, and therefore would tend to prefer local brands over imported brands.

Theoretical Background

The Engel Kollat Blackwell Model is a framework for understanding consumer decision-making processes. It outlines a series of five stages: the first stage is the recognition of a need or problem (Osei & Abenyin, 2016). This is the stage where an individual recognizes a gap between their current state and a desired state. This could be triggered by internal or external stimuli. The second stage is the Information Search stage. In this stage, an individual actively searches for information regarding the options available to solve the problem identified in the first stage. The third stage is the Evaluation of alternatives stage. The individual assesses the various alternatives identified through the information search based on various criteria (Esmaeilpour & Bahmiary, 2017; Ramish, 2020). TRA has widely been used to analyze consumer attitude (Ansari, Saraih, et al., 2022; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Ramish et al., 2019).

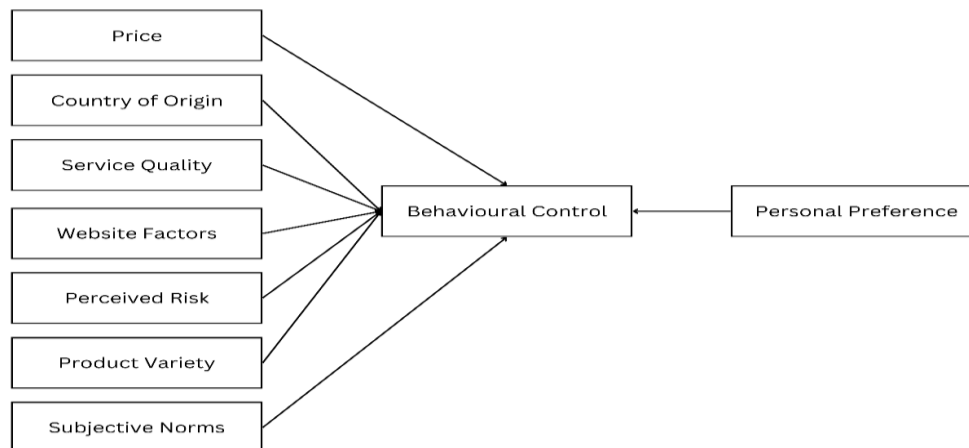


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Research Hypotheses

Behavioral Control and Personal Preferences

Past experiences and behavioral control may influence consumer preferences towards both local and imported products. When consumers have positive experiences with local products such as receiving a good quality or value for money, they are more likely to develop a preference for these products (Vaziri et al., 2023). This loyalty may be reinforced by the comfort of the brand being local and familiar to the individual. On the other hand, if consumers have had good experiences with imported products due to better quality, innovation, or the prestige associated with foreign brands, they might prefer these options. Negative experiences, like receiving poor product quality or customer service, may steer consumers away from certain products, whether local or imported (Bashir, 2016).

H1: Individual's behavioral control has a mediating effect on their personal preferences.

Price and Behavioral Control

Local products are usually cheaper as they do not have high transportation and import costs. This makes them appealing to consumers who are budget-conscious with their spending. (Glaeser, n.d.). On the other hand, imported products are often seen as elite and of higher quality, hence having higher prices. This attracts a segment of consumers who are interested in buying things that seem valuable or prestigious (Ramish et al., 2022). The difference in prices between local and imported products greatly influences what consumers decide to buy (Esmailpour & Bahmiary, 2017). Some individuals choose local items because they are more affordable, while others prefer buying imported products because they seem to be offering more value.

H2: The prices of local and imported products have a direct effect on an individuals' purchasing behaviors.

Country of Origin and Behavioral Control

In economically underdeveloped countries, there tends to be a lesser preference for domestic products (Quartey & Abor, 2011). The country of origin of products significantly influences consumer purchasing behavior. Products from certain countries often carry a reputation for quality, innovation, or value, which can sway consumer preferences. The country of origin is processed in two ways, the halo effect or a summary construct. The concept of the halo effect refers to a situation where an individual's pre-existing opinions about a country influence their perception of products from that country. On the other hand, the summary construct is when a consumer's perception of a country's products is shaped by their knowledge and assessment of those specific products. This means that they use their direct experience with the products to form a general view of the country's products (Ahmed et al., 2004).

H3: The country of origin of a product has a direct effect on an individuals' purchasing behaviors.

Service Quality and Behavioral Control

Service quality plays an important role in shaping consumer purchasing behavior, which is a trend evident in today's market (Nofrizal et al., 2023). Consumers often give as much importance to the quality of service as the product itself (Ramish et al., 2019). Good service can significantly enhance customer satisfaction leading to brand loyalty and repeat purchases.

Similarly, poor service can push away potential buyers regardless of the product's value (AlBostanji, 2013). The emphasis given to service quality shows a huge shift in consumer expectations where timely, efficient, and personalized service is not only appreciated but also expected. Brands that recognize this shift and prioritize high service standards are more likely to succeed in attracting and retaining customers. If imported brands are quicker to respond to customer queries, providing frequent updates about their orders, and staying active with individuals through email, text messages, and social media, individuals are more likely to enjoy that purchasing experience more and purchase from those brands again.

H4: The quality of service provided by a brand has a direct effect on an individuals' future purchasing behaviors.

Website Factors and Behavioral Control

Website factors have become very influential in determining consumer purchasing behavior in the digital age. The design, ease of navigation, loading speed, and overall user experience of a website can have a huge impact on a consumer's decision to make a purchase. A well-designed, user-friendly, and informative website attracts and retains more customers, encouraging them to explore more products and make more purchases. On the other hand, a website that is difficult to navigate, slow to load, or poorly organized can quickly make the brand lose potential buyers. Moreover, factors like the security of payment gateways and the clarity of product information also play important roles. In today's online shopping environment where consumers have uncountable options at their fingertips, the effectiveness of a website in providing a smooth and enjoyable shopping experience is very important for business success and customer satisfaction.

H5: The quality of a brand's web page has a direct effect on an individuals' purchasing behaviors.

Perceived Risk and Behavioral Control

When consumers consider making a purchase, they may assess the potential risks involved such as not receiving value for the price paid for a product, facing product performance issues, or security concerns. This perceived risk can highly influence their buying decisions. When it comes to local products, some consumers might worry about the quality, especially if the local industry isn't well-known for that product category. On the other hand, imported products have their own perceived risks, such as higher prices, customs and import issues, and concerns about after-sales service and warranty validity in a different country.

H6: The perceived risk or trustworthiness of local and imported brands has a direct effect on an individuals' purchasing behaviors.

Product Variety and Behavioral Control

Product variety influences consumer preferences when it comes to choosing between local and imported products. A diverse range of imported products often gives consumers multiple choices that might not be available locally, and may be offering unique designs, advanced features, or superior quality. This variety can be appealing in markets where local products are perceived as more generic or limited in options.

H7: The variety of products available from a brand has a direct effect on an individuals' purchasing behaviors.

Subjective Norms and Behavioral Control

Subjective norms or the influence of social and cultural factors also play an important role in shaping consumer preferences towards local and imported products. In many countries, there is a growing trend of ethically conscious consumerism, where buying local products is seen as being supportive of the community. On the other hand, in some countries, imported products are associated with higher status and quality. This perception can make individuals have a preference for imported products. The effect of these subjective norms on individual's purchasing behaviors shows the complicated interaction between what society values and what individuals prefer.

H8: Subjective norms and references have a direct effect on an individuals' purchasing behaviors.

Research Methodology

In this quantitative study, a deductive research approach was implemented, where a set of clear hypotheses are derived from existing theories. In quantitative research, the emphasis is on being objective. Data is gathered mainly through methods like surveys and questionnaires, which are then analyzed statistically. Quantitative research relies on statistical analysis to understand and explain social phenomena (Babbie, Earl R., 2010). This research method aims to gather data in numerical form and uses this data to make general conclusions about a specific event or situation. The hypotheses formed were based on well-known principles in the area of study. A non-probability sampling design has been used in this research, which means that non-randomized methods are used to gather the sample. The non-probability sampling method relies on the researcher's judgment. Rather than using random selection, participants are chosen based on their availability and ease of access (Showkat, Parveen, 2017).

Purposive sampling is a method where researchers choose participants based on their own judgment. Researchers use this method believing that their knowledge helps them pick a sample that represents the group well, saving time and money (Black, 2010). The research philosophy of positivism, as described by Taguchi, N. (2018), was applied. Convenience sampling strategy is recommended for studies like this (Etikan, 2016; Ramish et al., 2019). Several studies in Pakistan have used this sampling technique (S. Ahmed & Ansari, 2020; Qureshi et al., 2021). For testing the hypotheses PLS SEM and SPSS were used to test reliability (Cronbach Alpha), validity (convergent and discriminant), exploratory factor analysis, and correlation and regression analyses (Ansari, 2020; Ansari et al., 2022).

Results

Respondent Profiles

Out of 220 respondents, 120 (55%) were males and 100 (45%) were females. The respondents were mostly between the ages of 20-30 (68%) and the remaining belonged to older age groups. As far as marital status is concerned, 165 (75%) respondents were single and the remaining 55 (25%) were married.

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics were obtained through SPSS. These statistics are essential tools for understanding a dataset. They use simple measures to give a clear picture of the data. The mean tells the average value and the median shows the middle point (Hair, Sarstedt, et al., 2014; Kline, 2011; Qureshi et al., 2022). A skewness value between -2 and +2 depicts normal distribution (S. Ahmed, Ansari, Waqas Khan, et al., 2019; Nooruddin et al., 2022). On the other hand, kurtosis

tells us about the tailedness of the data, or how heavy or light the tails are compared to a normal distribution. Kurtosis values also range from -3 to +3 depicts normal distribution (George & Mallery, 2003).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Cronbach's Alpha

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness	Kurtosis	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
PP	2.613	0.602	0.363	0.099	0.383	6	0.632
Pr	2.690	0.689	0.475	-0.170	0.454	5	0.711
CO	3.338	1.183	1.401	0.132	-0.118	5	0.801
SQ	2.764	0.759	0.577	-0.274	0.429	4	0.627
WF	2.475	0.830	0.690	0.116	-0.475	4	0.714
PR	2.789	0.825	0.681	-0.103	0.062	6	0.821
PV	2.518	0.839	0.705	0.109	-0.002	4	0.811
SN	2.850	0.938	0.880	0.151	-0.229	3	0.765
BC	2.528	0.914	0.837	0.202	-0.287	4	0.784

Table 1 shows the results of skewness and kurtosis. The highest skewness value is possessed by Behavioral Control i.e., 0.202, Behavioral Control (Mean=2.53, SD=0.91), and the lowest Skewness value is possessed by Service Quality i.e., -0.27, Service Quality (Mean=2.76, SD=0.76). The highest value of Kurtosis is possessed by Price i.e., 0.45, Price (Mean=2.69, SD=0.69), and the lowest Kurtosis value is possessed by Website Factors i.e., -0.48, Website Factors (Mean=2.48, SD=0.83). Hence, all of the constructs fulfill the univariate normality requirement by lying within the -2 and +2 range.

The internal consistency of the data is measured through the calculation of Cronbach Alpha. Reliability analysis is done to remove any inaccuracies in the data and to remove any biases of the researchers. A Cronbach Alpha of more than 0.6 indicates that the data is reliable (J. Ansari et al., 2017; Cronbach & Meehl, 1955).

Correlation

Table 2: Correlation Values

	PP	Pr	CO	SQ	WF	PR	PV	SN	BC
PP	1								
Pr	.402**	1							
CO	.328**	.312**	1						
SQ	.382**	.422**	.423**	1					
WF	.345**	.365**	.271**	.449**	1				
PR	.371**	.376**	.305**	.466**	.580**	1			
PV	.394**	.387**	.288**	.375**	.581**	.598**	1		
SN	.239**	.181**	.211**	.285**	.381**	.428**	.462**	1	
BC	.372**	.313**	.287**	.335**	.510**	.548**	.644**	.489**	1

The Pearson Correlation Coefficient states that there is a positive and significant relationship between Country of Origin and Behavioral Control i.e., our mediating construct, (r=0.29, P<0.001), this indicates a very weak or no relationship between Country of Origin and Behavioral Control (Ansari & Hyder, 2023; Bryman, 2012; Yasir et al., 2021).

The relationship between Service Quality and Behavioral Control was also found positive and significant (r=0.34, P<0.001) indicating a positive but weak relationship between Service Quality and Behavioral Control.

The relationship between Website Factors and Behavioral Control was also found positive and significant ($r=0.51, P<0.001$). This indicates a strong positive relationship between Website Factors and Behavioral Control.

Moreover, the relationship between Perceived Risk and Behavioral Control was also found positive and significant ($r=0.55, P<0.001$) indicating a strong positive relationship between Perceived Risk and Behavioral Control.

Furthermore, the relationship between Product Variety and Behavioral Control was also found positive and significant ($r=0.64, P<0.001$) indicating a strong positive relationship between Product Variety and Behavioral Control.

Furthermore, the relationship between Standard Norms and Behavioral Control was also found positive and significant ($r=0.49, P<0.001$) indicating a positive but weak relationship between Standard Norms and Behavioral Control.

Taking into account the indirect relationship between our independent and dependent variable, the Pearson Correlation Coefficient for those relationships state that there is a positive relationship between Country of Origin and Personal Preference ($r=0.33, P<0.001$), this indicates that there is very weak or no linear relationship between Country of Origin and Personal Preference.

The relationship between Service Quality and Personal Preference was also found positive ($r=0.38, P<0.001$) indicating that Service Quality has a positive but weak relationship with Personal Preference.

The relationship between Website Factors and Personal Preference was also positive ($r=0.35, P<0.001$) indicating a positive but weak relationship between Website Factors and Personal Preference.

Similarly, the relationship between Perceived Risk and Personal Preference was also positive ($r=0.37, P<0.001$), indicating a positive but weak relationship between Perceived Risk and Website Factors.

Moreover, the relationship between Product Variety and Personal Preference was also positive ($r=0.0.39, P<0.001$) indicating a positive but weak relationship between Product Variety and Personal Preference.

Furthermore, the relationship between Standard Norms and Personal Preference was also found positive ($r=0.24, P<0.001$). This however indicates a strong but very weak or no relationship between Standard Norms and Personal Preference.

Lastly, the relationship between Behavioral Control and Personal Preference was also found positive ($r=0.37, P<0.001$) indicating a positive but weak relationship between Behavioral Control and Personal Preference.

Table 3: Path Coefficients

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ($ O/STDEV $)	P values
BC -> PP	0.470	0.478	0.059	7.953	0.000
CO -> BC	0.082	0.090	0.048	1.693	0.091
PR -> BC	0.169	0.168	0.087	1.937	0.053
PV -> BC	0.351	0.356	0.085	4.125	0.000
SN -> BC	0.181	0.177	0.086	2.095	0.036
WF -> BC	0.141	0.148	0.070	2.000	0.046

The P values of the hypotheses CO -> BC and PR -> BC show that the path is not statistically significant. The typical threshold to determine statistical significance is 0.05 (S. Ahmed, Ansari, Khan, et al., 2019; Hair, Black, et al., 2014), and any value greater than or equal

to 0.05 is not considered statistically significant. Therefore, these two hypotheses i.e., Country of Origin has a direct effect on Behavioral Control and Perceived Risk has a direct effect on Behavioral Control would be rejected.

Table 4: Indirect Effects

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
CO -> PP	0.038	0.043	0.024	1.580	0.114
PR -> PP	0.079	0.080	0.043	1.846	0.065
PV -> PP	0.165	0.171	0.050	3.329	0.001
SN -> PP	0.085	0.084	0.041	2.056	0.040
WF -> PP	0.066	0.070	0.035	1.903	0.057

The P values of the hypotheses CO -> PP, PR -> PP, and WF -> PP show that the indirect path is not statistically significant. The typical threshold to determine statistical significance is 0.05, and any value greater than or equal to 0.05 is not considered statistically significant. Therefore, our three hypotheses i.e., Country of Origin has an indirect effect on Personal Preference, Price has an indirect effect on Personal Preference, and Website Factors have an indirect effect on Personal Preference have been rejected.

Conclusions

This study was primarily conducted to analyze the personal preferences of individuals with regards to imported products and local products along with the factors affecting these preferences and behavior. The research objectives were developed and achieved in this study. On the basis of the research objectives, the research questions and hypotheses were also developed. The literature review discussed findings from previous researches and the models and theories used in this research, which included the theory of reasoned action along with the Engel Kollat Blackwell model. The conceptual framework and the research hypotheses were then discussed followed by the research methodology adopted in this research and the results.

According to the results, two of our direct hypotheses were rejected and four were accepted i.e., Behavioral Control has a direct effect on Personal Preference, Product Variety has a direct effect on Behavioral Control, Standard Norms have a direct effect on Behavioral Control, and Website Factors have a direct effect on Behavioral Control. However, three of our indirect hypotheses were rejected and only two were accepted i.e., Product Variety has an indirect impact on Personal Preference, and Standard Norms have an indirect impact on Personal Preference.

Limitations

The scope of this study was limited to almost the same age group and more demographic factors could be incorporated into future studies. The constructs adopted in this report were mainly adopted from studies measuring consumer behavior towards product purchasing and only a few were studies measuring preferences for purchasing imported products.

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