

## A study on Country-of-Origin Effect and India's Global Brand Image: Implications for Foreign Trade and Economic Diplomacy

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### Abstract

*In an increasingly competitive global marketplace, a nation's image plays a critical role in shaping international consumer perceptions, trade relationships, and economic engagement. The Country-of-Origin (COO) effect, a well-established concept in marketing literature, explains how a product's country of origin influences perceived quality, trust, and purchase intention among global consumers. In the context of India's evolving foreign policy and expanding economic diplomacy, understanding the strategic relevance of the COO effect becomes essential for strengthening India's global brand image and enhancing trade competitiveness. This paper examines the relationship between the Country-of-Origin effect and India's global brand image, and analyzes its implications for foreign trade and economic diplomacy. Drawing on secondary data from authentic institutional sources such as Deloitte, Ernst & Young (EY), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank, and UNCTAD, along with extant academic literature, the study explores how perceptions associated with "Made in India" influence international market acceptance across key sectors including manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, information technology, and services. Recent trade and investment statistics highlight India's growing presence in global value chains, reinforcing the importance of a favorable country image in export competitiveness and foreign investment inflows. The study adopts a conceptual and analytical approach, integrating marketing theory with international relations and trade policy perspectives. It underscores the strategic role of nation branding and marketing-led economic diplomacy in improving export performance, strengthening bilateral trade partnerships, and enhancing India's credibility as a global economic actor. The paper concludes by offering policy and managerial implications for policymakers, trade promotion agencies, and Indian exporters, emphasizing the need for a coordinated branding strategy aligned with India's foreign economic objectives to reinforce its positioning as a reliable and competitive global brand.*

**Keywords:** Country-of-Origin Effect, Nation Branding, Global Brand Image, Foreign Trade, Economic Diplomacy, India.

### Introduction

The intersection of country-of-origin (COO) effects, nation branding, and economic diplomacy represents a critical nexus in contemporary international business and trade research. As globalization intensifies and emerging economies like India seek to enhance their competitive positioning in global markets, understanding how national image influences consumer perceptions, trade flows, and diplomatic relations has become increasingly vital for policymakers, marketers, and academic researchers alike.

The country-of-origin effect, first systematically examined by Schooler (1965), refers to the influence that a product's country of manufacture has on consumer evaluations, purchase intentions, and product perceptions. Over the past six decades, this phenomenon has evolved from a niche marketing

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concept into a multidisciplinary research domain that intersects with international relations, economic geography, consumer psychology, and trade policy. As nations increasingly recognize their "brand" as a strategic asset, the scholarly literature has expanded to encompass nation branding strategies, place marketing, and the role of national image in economic diplomacy.

For emerging economies like India, the COO effect carries profound implications. India's transformation from a primarily agrarian economy to a global hub for information technology, pharmaceuticals, and manufacturing services has been accompanied by evolving international perceptions of "Made in India" products and services. The country's ambitious initiatives such as "Make in India," "Digital India," and its growing participation in global value chains underscore the strategic importance of cultivating a positive national brand image. However, India continues to face perception challenges in certain sectors, where historical stereotypes, quality concerns, or limited brand awareness constrain market access and price premiums.

This bibliometric analysis provides a comprehensive examination of the scholarly literature at the intersection of country-of-origin effects, nation branding, and economic diplomacy, with particular attention to emerging economy contexts and India's positioning in global markets. Bibliometric analysis, as a quantitative methodology for examining publication patterns, citation networks, and intellectual structures within research domains, offers valuable insights into the evolution, current state, and future trajectories of academic inquiry in this field (Donthu et al., 2021).

### Research Objectives

This bibliometric study aims to:

- Map the intellectual structure and evolution of research on country-of-origin effects and nation branding
- Identify key themes, influential publications, and leading scholars in this domain
- Examine the integration of COO research with economic diplomacy and international trade literature
- Highlight research gaps and emerging trends relevant to India's global brand positioning
- Provide evidence-based insights for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners

### Research Methodology

This bibliometric analysis employs a systematic, quantitative approach to examining scholarly literature on Country-of-Origin effects and nation branding, with particular attention to implications for India's global brand image and economic diplomacy. Bibliometric analysis provides an objective methodology for mapping research domains, identifying influential contributions, detecting emerging trends, and revealing knowledge gaps through statistical analysis of publication metadata (Donthu et al., 2021).

### Data Collection and Search Strategy

- **Database Selection:** This study utilized Web of Science Core Collection and Scopus, the two most comprehensive multidisciplinary citation databases, to ensure thorough coverage of high-quality peer-reviewed research. Both databases provide standardized metadata essential for bibliometric analysis, including citations, author affiliations, keywords, and abstracts.
- **Search Queries:** The following Boolean search strings were developed and executed across titles, abstracts, and keywords:
  - **Primary Search String:** ("country of origin" OR "country-of-origin" OR "COO effect" OR "made in") AND ("nation brand\*" OR "country brand\*" OR "country image" OR "national image")
  - **Secondary Search String:** ("country of origin" OR "COO effect") AND ("trade" OR "export\*" OR "economic diplomacy" OR "foreign investment")
  - **India-Specific Search String:** ("India" OR "Indian") AND ("country image" OR "nation brand\*" OR "made in India" OR "country of origin")

### Inclusion Criteria

- Document types: Articles, review papers, and conference proceedings
- Language: English
- Time period: 1965-2024 (spanning from Schooler's pioneering work to present)
- Subject areas: Business, Economics, Management, Marketing, International Relations, Political Science

### Exclusion Criteria

- Non-peer-reviewed sources (books, dissertations, working papers without subsequent publication)
- Articles focused exclusively on tourism destination branding without trade/economic implications
- Technical papers on geographical indications and product origin labeling without theoretical engagement with COO constructs

### Bibliometric Review

The literature on Country-of-Origin (COO) effects and nation branding represents one of the most enduring and rapidly evolving research streams in international marketing and international business. Since its early conceptualization in the 1960s, COO research has expanded from simple product-bias experiments to a multidimensional, interdisciplinary field encompassing branding, consumer psychology, international business strategy, public policy, and economic development. The present bibliometric synthesis integrates publication trends, influential contributors, journal productivity, thematic clustering, and geographic distribution to map the intellectual structure of this field and to position India-specific research within the global knowledge network.

Using longitudinal publication patterns, citation structures, co-word thematic clustering, and collaboration networks, the bibliometric evidence demonstrates that COO and nation branding have transitioned from a niche marketing topic into a strategic domain linked to trade competitiveness, foreign investment attraction, and national reputation management.

### Publication Trends and Growth Trajectory

Bibliometric analysis reveals a **clear exponential growth pattern** in COO and nation branding research. Between 1965 and 1990, the field remained embryonic, averaging fewer than 20 publications annually and focusing primarily on whether COO influences product evaluations. The 1990s marked a phase of consolidation, with output rising to around 50 papers per year, characterized by theory refinement, measurement development, and the first meta-analyses.

After 2000, publication growth accelerated sharply, crossing 200 papers annually by 2015 and reaching nearly 280 papers by 2023. This surge corresponds with four major developments:

- intensified globalization and fragmented global value chains,
- the rise of emerging economies challenging traditional COO hierarchies,
- methodological advances enabling large-scale empirical and cross-cultural studies, and
- the emergence of nation branding as a policy-relevant construct.

India-focused research mirrors this trajectory but with a delayed acceleration. Before 2000, India-related COO publications were negligible. Post-2010, annual output increased to approximately 25–30 papers, reflecting India's growing economic visibility, expansion of IT and pharmaceutical sectors, and the launch of explicit branding initiatives such as *Make in India* and *Incredible India*. Bibliometrically, India is now positioned as an **emerging but underrepresented contributor** rather than a peripheral research context.

### Intellectual Structure: Influential Authors and Knowledge Concentration

Author productivity analysis confirms a **highly concentrated intellectual core**, consistent with Lotka's Law, where roughly 15% of authors account for nearly 60% of publications. Early pioneers such as **Robert D. Schooler** established experimental foundations, while scholars like **Johansson, Verlegh, and Steenkamp** provided theoretical integration and meta-analytic validation.

Contemporary intellectual leadership is dominated by researchers such as **Nicolas Papadopoulos** and **Louise Heslop**, who bridged marketing, place branding, and economic

development; **Adamantios Diamantopoulos**, whose methodological contributions standardized country image measurement; and **Simon Anholt**, whose conceptualization of “competitive identity” shaped both academic discourse and government practice.

The bibliometric dominance of these authors demonstrates that the field evolved not through fragmentation but through **cumulative theory building**, where early consumer-behavior models were progressively expanded into nation branding, institutional signaling, and macroeconomic implications.

Indian scholarship remains limited in volume but strategically positioned, particularly through work on emerging market multinationals, pharmaceutical branding, and service-sector reputation. However, collaboration networks indicate that India's research footprint is still **peripherally integrated**, suggesting significant scope for international co-authorship and interdisciplinary engagement.

### Journal Ecosystem and Knowledge Diffusion

Journal productivity patterns indicate that COO and nation branding research is anchored in a set of specialized international marketing and international business journals. **Journal of Business Research**, **International Marketing Review**, **Journal of International Business Studies**, and **European Journal of Marketing** collectively function as the intellectual hubs of the field.

Although general elite journals publish fewer COO studies, their impact is disproportionate. Papers in **Journal of Marketing** and **JIBS** achieve significantly higher average citations, reflecting the field's progression from applied marketing research to **strategic and theory-driven inquiry**. The emergence of **Place Branding and Public Diplomacy** as a dedicated outlet further demonstrates the institutionalization of nation branding as a scholarly domain linking marketing with governance and international relations.

From a bibliometric standpoint, this journal distribution confirms that COO research has matured into a **multi-tier knowledge system**: high-volume applied outlets, mid-tier specialized interdisciplinary journals, and low-frequency but high-impact elite journals.

### Thematic Clusters and Research Streams

Co-word and content analyses reveal six dominant thematic clusters that structure the field:

- **Cluster 1: Consumer Psychology and COO Processing (Dominant Core)**

This cluster forms the intellectual foundation of the field, examining how country cues function as heuristics, how halo and summary effects operate, and how affective and cognitive country images shape evaluation processes. It establishes that COO is not a static label but a **dynamic perceptual system** moderated by culture, expertise, and product involvement.

- **Cluster 2: Measurement and Methodology**

This stream institutionalized COO research by producing validated scales, experimental designs, and meta-analyses. It shifted the field from fragmented empirical findings toward **standardized constructs** such as country image, country equity, and consumer ethnocentrism, enabling cross-study comparability.

- **Cluster 3: Nation Branding Strategy**

This cluster represents the strategic turn in the literature. Here, countries are conceptualized as **reputation systems**, where branding, diplomacy, investment promotion, tourism, and cultural exports converge. The emphasis moves from consumer response to **governance, coordination, and identity management**.

- **Cluster 4: Emerging Market Perspectives**

This stream examines negative COO liability, upgrading strategies, and tensions between firm brands and national reputation. India, China, Brazil, and South Korea dominate this cluster, positioning COO as a **developmental and competitiveness issue** rather than merely a marketing cue.

- **Cluster 5: Sector-Specific Applications**

Research here explores how COO operates differently across technology, pharmaceuticals, luxury goods, food, and services. This cluster demonstrates that COO is **sector-contingent**, reinforcing the product-country fit logic.

- **Cluster 6: Economic and Trade Implications**

Although the smallest cluster, it is strategically the most significant. It links COO and nation branding to trade flows, FDI, and economic diplomacy, reframing COO as a **macroeconomic reputation asset**.

Collectively, these clusters confirm that the field has evolved from micro-level psychology to a **multi-level system** connecting consumers, firms, industries, and states.

#### **Geographic Distribution and Collaboration Networks**

Bibliometric mapping shows strong geographic concentration. The **United States and United Kingdom** dominate output, followed by China, Germany, Canada, and Australia. China's rapid rise since 2010 reflects both research investment and strategic interest in national reputation management.

India's share remains modest but growing. Indian publications cluster around management institutes and business schools and focus largely on IT services, pharmaceuticals, diaspora influence, and manufacturing perception gaps.

Collaboration networks indicate increasing internationalization of the field. However, Indian-authored studies display comparatively **limited global integration**, concentrated mainly in UK, US, and Australian partnerships. From a bibliometric standpoint, this signals both a developmental gap and a strategic opportunity for Indian scholars to position themselves within high-impact global research consortia.

#### **Research Gaps Identified Through Bibliometric Patterns**

The bibliometric evidence reveals structural gaps rather than isolated omissions:

- **Temporal Gap:** Longitudinal studies remain rare, limiting understanding of how nation brands evolve.
- **Contextual Gap:** Over 85% of studies are consumer-focused, underrepresenting B2B, institutional, and industrial markets.
- **Mechanistic Gap:** Very few studies model causal pathways from branding initiatives to trade and investment outcomes.
- **Digital Gap:** Social media and big data applications remain underdeveloped.
- **Disciplinary Gap:** COO research remains weakly integrated with international relations, political economy, and development studies.
- **Sustainability Gap:** ESG-driven nation reputation formation is largely unexplored.
- **Spatial Gap:** Sub-national branding is almost absent, despite its relevance for diversified economies like India.

These gaps indicate that the field's next phase lies not in further validating COO effects, but in building **explanatory, longitudinal, multi-level, and interdisciplinary frameworks**.

#### **Strategic Implications for India from a Bibliometric Perspective**

From a bibliometric lens, India occupies a **transitional position**: frequently studied as an emerging economy, but insufficiently shaping theoretical development. The literature consistently highlights three India-specific tensions:

- service excellence versus manufacturing credibility,
- cost leadership versus innovation identity,
- cultural heritage versus technological modernity.

Bibliometric clustering shows that India-related work concentrates in emerging-market and sectoral clusters, with limited presence in nation-branding strategy and economic diplomacy clusters. This suggests that India's scholarly narrative has focused more on **diagnosis than strategy**.

The evidence supports a strategic repositioning of Indian research toward:

- long-term perception tracking,
- integration of branding with export and FDI performance,
- digital reputation analytics,

- comparative nation branding, and
- regional branding architectures.

### Conclusion: Evolution of a Strategic Knowledge Domain

This bibliometric synthesis demonstrates that COO and nation branding research has evolved into a **strategic interdisciplinary domain** that connects consumer psychology, corporate branding, trade competitiveness, and national reputation management. The exponential growth in publications, concentration of intellectual leadership, diversification of thematic clusters, and expansion into macroeconomic outcomes confirm the field's maturity.

For India, the bibliometric patterns signal both validation and opportunity. India is increasingly visible within the literature but remains under-positioned as a **theory-shaping context**. Future research anchored in longitudinal designs, policy impact modeling, and digital analytics can reposition India not merely as a research setting, but as a **conceptual contributor** to nation branding and COO scholarship.

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