

# How Do Masstige Marketing and Country of Origin Impact Consumers in an Emerging Market ? An Investigation

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## Abstract

**Purpose :** The rise of middle-income people in emerging markets such as India makes it an appealing market for luxury companies. Although there are signs that Indian consumers show a growing interest in masstige products, there seems to be a lack of research on the role of masstige marketing and the influence of the country of origin (COO). The study investigated the significance of the masstige value and COO of the smartphone brands in the Indian market.

**Design :** The study employed a quantitative approach to evaluate how consumers perceive the prestige value of various smartphone brands and the country of origin influence. The primary data were collected using a survey questionnaire design. Data were collected from 425 Delhi respondents and evaluated using ANOVA, chi-square test, Pearson correlation, and t-tests. The MMSS, created by Paul (2015), was used to obtain masstige values.

**Findings :** The findings highlighted the gap in masstige value between American and Asian brands among Indian customers. In addition, the results demonstrated that price, quality, and social popularity influenced the COO effect, and brand perceptions of Indian consumers were highly influenced by their searches for information about the brands' COO.

**Practical Implications :** The study provided tactics and suggestions for increasing smartphone sales in India based on how shoppers understand mass prestige. It provided marketing information for smartphone makers trying to enter the emerging Indian market.

**Originality :** Masstige luxury diverged greatly from conventional luxury. Country-of-origin analysis could provide unique insights on masstige trends, especially in a price-conscious and growing market like India.

**Keywords :** masstige, mass prestige, country of origin, country image, price, quality, and brand name

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Luxury goods are no longer limited to the elite class; middle-class consumers are becoming increasingly influential in the luxury industry (Kumar et al., 2020). From 2000 to 2020, the global middle class, which includes those with assets ranging from \$10,000 to \$100,000, increased by more than three times (Versace et al., 2021). According to Das, Saha, Jebarajakirthy et al. (2022) and Kharas (2017), this cohort is predicted to spend \$64 trillion in total by 2030. The increase in disposable money and the need for social recognition and personal growth will result in an increased demand for prestige items (Eckhardt et al., 2015). The significance of masstige products is becoming more apparent as a result of manufacturers' efforts to meet the demand for mass-produced prestige items (Chaudhary & Sharma, 2022; Singh & Dagur, 2022). The prestigious brands made available for consumers in the wider market, focusing on middle-income people, are called *masstige brands*

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(Kumar et al., 2020). This new breed of luxury is distinguished by the fact that its things are less expensive than their traditional equivalents (Paul, 2015). The country of origin (COO) also has a significant impact on consumers' perceptions and actions toward a brand (Hong et al., 2023). The COO has a significant impact on the brand's originality, awareness, and consumer loyalty in emerging countries (Sharma, 2011). It is more of a question of familiarity now that the COO has become a branding technique (Zbib et al., 2021). Examining the potential causative relationship between a brand's COO and its mass prestige value is of tremendous significance since it can bring valuable and fascinating insights into the field of masstige (Baber et al., 2020).

This study digs at a different viewpoint on consumer behavior by looking at how the COO affects the brand's mass reputation. COO, while a popular area of research for luxury products, is a relatively new notion when applied to the masstige market. It is important to understand the impact of various elements such as price, quality, promotional offers, country image, brand name, features and design, after-sales service, and social popularity on the perception of COO. Masstige is a growing subject of study that holds great importance in the current situation (Singh & Dagur, 2022; Verma et al., 2023). Recent research on the masstige customer behavior shows the necessity of analyzing the COO when considering the masstige consumers' purchase choices (Boisvert et al., 2023; Kumar & Paul, 2018). Emerging economies with growing middle classes are excellent for masstige studies (Kumar & Paul, 2018), and because multinational firms are prevalent in emerging markets, examining the COO of products and services is critical (Sharma, 2011).

This paper aims to address the lack of research on the factors affecting consumers' decision to purchase masstige products (Kumar et al., 2020) and emphasize the significance of investigating the COO effect among masstige consumers (Boisvert et al., 2023). With the aim of addressing this knowledge gap and providing a significant contribution to masstige theory, our research will concentrate on the subsequent questions:

➤ **RQ1 :** What do smartphone brands from different countries do in terms of masstige value, and which top smartphone brands have the highest masstige value?

➤ **RQ2 :** If age and gender have an impact on the masstige value of smartphone brands?

➤ **RQ3 :** Does information about the COO have an impact on consumers' perceptions of smartphone brands?

➤ **RQ4 :** How do price, quality, promotional offers, country image, brand name, features and design, after-sale service, and social popularity impact smartphone users' perceptions of the brand's COO?

This study provides significant contributions to the existing body of knowledge. First, the study examines the influence of the COO on the purchase intention of masstige brands among consumers in growing markets. Second, we employ a demographic categorization system that takes into account age and gender. Third, our study takes into account additional variables such as price in order to assess their influence on the perception of the COO for the products from three different countries. This study developed a fresh conceptual model that expands on existing masstige brand theory by bringing the COO into the masstige setting. The findings offer brand managers useful information on how to build masstige strategies and cultivate greater consumer relationships.

## Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

The current analysis is based on Paul's "masstige theory" (Paul, 2015, 2018). According to this hypothesis, luxury brands can extend their market share by appealing to consumers in the middle-income range (Paul, 2018). Mass premium brands are popular among budget-conscious consumers because they offer great quality at reasonable prices (Singh & Dagur, 2022). It is up to the discretion of the purchaser to decide which country's items to consume, and how consumers evaluate or generate views on a product from a certain country might be influenced

by their general impressions of the country (De Nisco & Oduro, 2022). Considering the importance of the COO, the study investigates the market worth of smartphone brands in India. Furthermore, the hypothesized pathways will be examined in detail below.

✍ **H1 :** Best-selling smartphone brands have a high masstige value in that particular market.

### ***Masstige Value of Best-Selling Brands***

Luxury has been fundamentally reimagined because of masstige, which has made the product available to a vast number of customers (Chaudhary & Sharma, 2022). Paul (2015) used Louis Vuitton in Japan to explain how a top-moving brand would have a more fantastic prestige value. Steenkamp et al. (2002) predicted high-prestige values for foreign products with a well-established COO and brands with a considerable market share. It is possible to connect and comprehend the concepts of best-selling brands and prestige as an author whose novel is at the pinnacle of the bestseller charts may become a prestigious writer due to higher sales (Kumar & Paul, 2018). A top-grossing film director, a bestseller book author, and, in the case of products, a best-selling brand can all aspire to the rank of a prominent brand. It means that a brand may be considered as prestige due to its extensive level of consumption. This aspect requires significant attention in the literature on emerging markets. Therefore, we examine the link between a brand's sales and its prestige level. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

✍ **H2 :** There is a significant difference in the masstige value associated with smartphone brands of different COOs.

### ***Country of Origin***

Different countries can leave different impressions on different people in different ways. Customers frequently hold stereotypical beliefs about other countries, which appear to influence how they view products from that country (Zbib et al., 2021). A good image of the country will result in a positive impact, whereas a bad image of the country will lead to a negative impact. Foreign brands exhibit substantial consumer preferences and favorable views in emerging countries (Samu et al., 2024). Kumar and Paul (2018) investigated the masstige score of laptop brands in the Indian context. They found that American brands have a higher masstige score than Asian ones. Halkias et al. (2016) found that US soft drink brands had a greater brand value and international acceptance. According to a study conducted in America, Paul (2018) discovered that Japanese brands had higher masstige value than American brands. The masstige value of smartphone brands from different nations differs and should be investigated. We operationalized the construct of COO to understand better the masstige score associated with products coming from different countries. Hence, it is hypothesized that :

✍ **H3a :** There is a significant difference in the masstige value of the Apple (H3a1), Samsung (H3a2), and Xiaomi (H3a3) brands across different genders.

### ***Gender and Age***

Iaia et al. (2022), Kumar and Paul (2018), and Paul (2018) examined the varying significance that various genders attribute to different brands. Singh and Dagur (2022) stated that compared to young men, young women are more likely to be interested in shopping and style. Female customers determine modern definitions and meanings of luxury items since their purchasing power and income allow them to influence most consumer purchases (Granot et al., 2013). According to Iaia et al. (2022), the association between gender and customers' opinions of high-masstige products is positive. Kumar and Paul (2018) conducted a study in India on customers' masstige

perceptions of laptops and found that male and female participants had similar judgments of the masstige score. Ajitha and Sivakumar (2019) stated that men are more likely than women to show an interest in masstige brands as a means of self-improvement. As a result, we expect to see the following hypothesis:

☞ **H3b** : There is a significant difference in the masstige value of the Apple (H3b1), Samsung (H3b2), and Xiaomi (H3b3) brands across various ages.

Since people's interests, attitudes, and behaviors are influenced by their age, marketers always divide markets into distinct age groups (Thach et al., 2021). There is a considerable correlation between a person's age and the importance of his/her brand perception (Sikkel, 2013). Kumar and Paul (2018) found that the age of customers had an impact on the prestige value of laptop brands. Young customers are more likely to buy and follow fashion trends than older consumers (Singh & Dagur, 2022). Ajitha and Sivakumar (2019) also stated that masstige held by customers is influenced by age. It indicates that there would be a variation in opinion among consumers of varying ages about purchasing masstige brands. As a result, we expect to see the following hypothesis :

☞ **H4** : The change in Indian consumers' perceptions of American (H4a), South Korean (H4b), and Chinese smartphone brands (H4c) significantly depends on their COO information search.

### ***Country of Origin Information Search***

Consumers have utilized the COO as the most essential and fundamental factor in evaluating different products in various situations, depending on their level of expertise (De Nisco & Oduro, 2022). Before purchasing a product, customers will investigate the COO based on how important they consider the COO to be (Zbib et al., 2021). When a customer acknowledges their want, the consumer processes the intention to seek information and begins exploring relevant details. As a result, when buyers buy a product, their intention to search for information plays a significant role (Lin & Chen, 2006). Consumers frequently have strong connections with a specific country when thinking about it, such as design for Italy, highly trained labor for Germany, cheaper for China, and fashion for France (Liu et al., 2005). As a result, when customers learn about the COO, they can instinctively trigger such intense country associations (Samu et al., 2024). Buyers commonly make quality assumptions about a product based on its COO when they lack sufficient understanding of it; hence, the COO greatly influences product evaluations and consumer perceptions (De Nisco & Oduro, 2022). The consumer's perception of the country is critical in determining their buying decision.

### ***Factors Affecting COO***

According to the literature, consumers' perceptions of the COO are impacted by other factors while searching for information about the relevant country to purchase (Zbib et al., 2021). A product may be viewed as an “array of cues,” as found when creating a model of the customer evaluation process (Munjal, 2014). Before connecting with premium brands, buyers examine whether the premium pricing is justified by the degree of product quality they obtain (Das, Saha, & Roy, 2022). Using standard promotional methods to target a large market without sacrificing the product's reputation will majorly affect consumers (Das, Saha, Jebarajakirthy et al., 2022). Consumers commonly purchase socially popular masstige products in order to achieve and maintain a desired social standing (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012). Product quality and promotion are essential factors in masstige and significantly impact customers (Roper et al., 2013). Kumar and Kanchan (2019) stated that “style” and “design” were the primary and secondary priorities of Indian consumers when choosing a product. Brun and Castelli (2013) found that design and after-sales services, when combined with mass prestige, exerted significant influence over

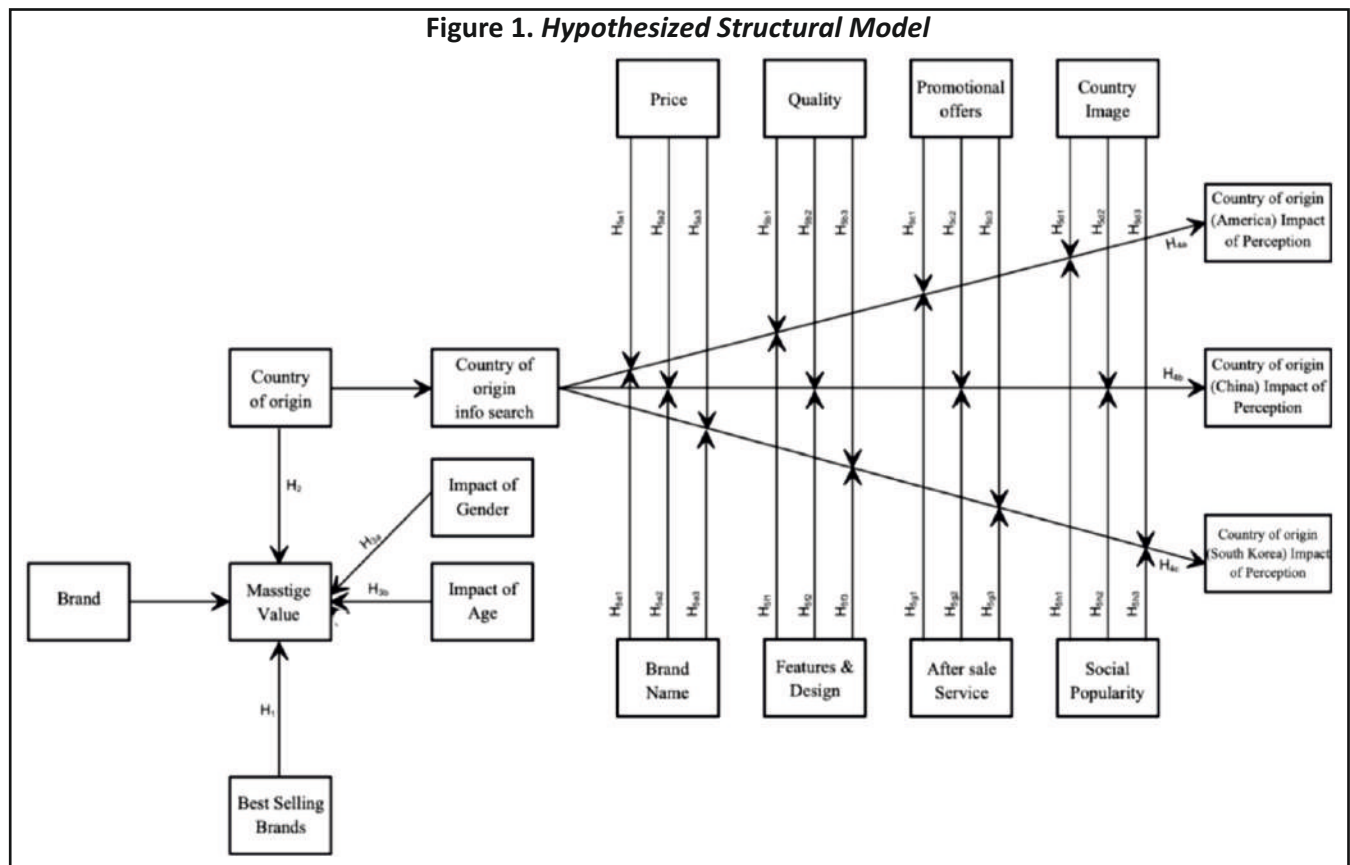
customers. In the American, French, Indian, and Japanese marketplaces, the prestige of pictures representing foreign countries has surpassed the reputation of domestic enterprises (Paul, 2019). Brand names significantly impact consumers' decisions to purchase a product; hence, they are crucial to both established masstige and premium brands (Robertson et al., 2022). Considering the empirical findings from past studies, the influence of COO is reduced in studies that evaluate COO along with other cues than in studies that evaluate COO as the only cue (Zbib et al., 2021). Thus, the research proposes the following hypothesis:

✎ **H5 :** There is a statistically significant relationship between price (H5a), quality (H5b), promotional offers (H5c), country image (H5d), brand name (H5e), features and design (H5f), after-sale service (H4g), and social popularity (H5h) with consumer perception of COO in the case of America (1), China (2), and South Korea (3).

## Research Methodology

### Overview of the Study

Figure 1 depicts the proposed structural model and research hypothesis. This work proposes a quantitative research approach for investigating the masstige value and COO effect. The study focused primarily on two topics: the masstige value of smartphone brands and the effect of a brand's COO. We investigate the first three hypotheses (H1, H2, and H3) to establish the masstige value of leading smartphone brands, the country-based masstige value, and the masstige value by age and gender. In addition, we assess the impact of COO on smartphone brands based on information search and other variables (H4 and H5).





### ***Selection of Smartphone Brands***

The Indian market is vast, boasting a population of over 1.2 billion individuals (Paul & Mas, 2016), and has the potential to generate over 200 million smartphone sales (Agarwal et al., 2019). The following procedure is used to choose smartphone brands: (a) The Statista smartphone market review report has identified three best-selling brands in India ; (b) The COO of these smartphone brands has been determined. According to this, Samsung, Apple, and Xiaomi brands were selected. The South Korean brand Samsung holds 17.4% of the market share, the American brand Apple holds 14.3% of the market, followed by the Chinese brand Xiaomi at 12.9% (Laricchia, 2024). Together, these three brands control a whopping 44.6% of the industry.

### ***Data Collection and Analysis***

The initial questionnaire was prepared after thoroughly evaluating the literature and discussions (Kumar & Kaushal, 2019), and the final version was prepared after the initial questionnaire was tested through a pilot survey and examined with smartphone retailers and users. The MMSS created by Paul (2015) is used for obtaining masstige value. MMSS is a baseline metric for determining the effectiveness of premium products and standard brands (Gupta et al., 2023). Using the statistical analysis software SPSS 23.0, we conducted multiple hypotheses tests using ANOVA, chi-square test, Pearson correlation, and *t*-test.

### ***Sampling***

The study was focused on smartphone users in Delhi NCR, India. Irrespective of demographics such as age, gender, occupation, or socioeconomic status, the participants could be anyone who regularly used a smartphone from one of the chosen brands. A non-probability convenience sampling method was utilized for this study. Data were gathered through an online survey conducted from June to October 2022. Google Forms were used to create the questionnaire, and it was circulated via email and social media platforms. The questionnaire consisted of three parts: the primary component gathered data on age, gender, income, and the chosen smartphone brand. The second section of the study was dedicated to examining the perception of masstige. Section 3 focused on the COO and

**Table 1. Sample Respondents**

Demographics	Category	Frequency (N = 425)	Percent
Gender	Male	213	50.12%
	Female	212	49.88%
Age	Below 25 years	127	29.9%
	26 – 35 years	125	29.4%
	36 – 45 years	97	22.82%
	Above 45 years	76	17.88%
Income	Below 200,000	130	30.59%
	200,000 – 400,000	105	24.71%
	400,000 – 600,000	93	21.88%
	Above 600,000	97	22.82%
Brand	Apple	138	32.47%
	Samsung	139	32.71%
	Xiaomi	148	34.82%

other relevant factors. In order to improve the quality of the responses, we made sure to maintain their confidentiality and anonymity in accordance with the scientific objectives of the study. Power analysis with the G\*Power program was used to calculate the study's sample size (Faul et al., 2009). A power of 0.95 and a level of significance of 0.05 demanded a minimum of 262 samples. A total of 425 full responses were analyzed for the study, exceeding the minimal threshold and considered sufficient for running the model (Panigrahi et al., 2021). Among the 460 smartphone users who completed the poll, 425 provided complete responses. The rejection rate was determined to be 7.6%. The sample demographics are shown in Table 1.

Based on the questionnaire responses from 425 participants, 138, 139, and 148 individuals owned Apple, Samsung, and Xiaomi devices, respectively. There were 213 female and 212 male respondents, a difference of one person. A total of 29.9% of smartphone users were under 25 years old, followed by 29.4% of users between the ages of 26 and 35. Those above the age of 45 had the lowest percentage of smartphone users (17.88%). The study found that 22.82% of smartphone users were between the ages of 36 and 45, with 30% earning less than 2 lakhs per year and 24.71% earning between 2 and 4 lakhs per year. The lowest proportion of smartphone users (21.88%) earned between 4 and 6 lakh rupees annually. Each year, 22.82% of the respondents earned more than six lakhs.

### ***Reliability of the Instrument***

The validity and reliability of the scale should be examined before adopting the results. Cronbach's alpha coefficient is utilized in this study to evaluate the reliability. Nunnally and Bernstein (2010) stated that a cut-off of 0.7 is acceptable and that the data obtained from the scale can be used for further study. The value of  $\alpha = 0.892$ , which is higher than 0.7. This confirms the adequate reliability of the scale.

### ***Validity of the Instrument***

The validity of the questionnaire is determined using factor analysis. We divided the factor loadings by the overall number of statements after squaring the factor loadings in order to evaluate the validity of the scale that was used to collect data from the factors that were obtained. If the value exceeds 0.5, the research tool is considered to have construct validity. In this case, the study instrument demonstrated construct validity (Table 2) as the obtained value of 0.526 surpasses the 0.5 threshold.

**Table 2. Construct Validity**

Statements	Factor Loading	(Factor Loading) <sup>2</sup>	(Factor Loading) <sup>2</sup> / <i>n</i>
I like my smartphone brand.	0.813	0.660	0.526
I prefer to purchase this smartphone brand because of masstige.	0.706	0.498	
To retain my social status, I prefer to pay a premium price for my smartphone brand.	0.864	0.746	
In my country/state/district, my smartphone brand is a top-of-mind brand.	0.625	0.390	
I'd like to suggest my smartphone brand to relatives and friends.	0.794	0.630	
My smartphone's brand is the most exciting thing ever.	0.659	0.434	
I feel my smartphone brand has a reputation for high quality.	0.767	0.585	
I trust that my smartphone brand is of international standards.	0.716	0.512	
I prefer to purchase my smartphone brand regardless of its price.	0.606	0.367	
I believe that my smartphone brand is associated with prestige in my country, state, or district.	0.666	0.443	

**Note.** *n* = Number of statements.

## Analysis and Results

### *Masstige Value of Smartphone Brands*

The masstige mean score result of selected smartphone brands is shown in Table 3. Apple has the highest score (53.46) on the Masstige Mean Index (MMI) of the three brands under study. Samsung came in second to Apple regarding MMI scores (43.33). Xiaomi is last, with an MMI score of 40.43. Apple's concentration on masstige marketing allowed it to establish a strong identity in the Indian market to a greater degree than the other brands. In the foreseeable future, Samsung and Xiaomi may do so. A brand is considered well-known in the market if it has a masstige value of at least 40 (Paul, 2015). Apple, Samsung, and Xiaomi are the best-selling brands in India, and all three have high masstige values (above 40 masstige score). To be considered prestigious, a brand needs to have a masstige score of at least 50 out of a possible 70 and to be considered a top-of-mind brand, a masstige score of at least 60. While Samsung and Xiaomi are both well-known brands with masstige scores above 40, they have yet to achieve true mass prestige in the minds of the public. The results of MMI are in line with the first hypothesis that the masstige values of the most popular smartphone brands are high.

The results corroborate the second hypothesis, revealing a considerable difference in the masstige value of smartphone brands based on their COO. The MMI scores for smartphone brands from various COOs are shown in Table 4.

All three smartphone companies have a masstige score below 60, indicating that they are not top-of-mind brands. Apple is the only prestige-level smartphone analyzed (above 50 masstige score). This conclusively verifies the second hypothesis that the COO of a brand affects the perception of its prestige. American brands are more prestigious than their South Korean and Asian rivals. The results of Table 5 show that there is a statistically significant difference in the masstige mean score between at least two countries ( $F(2,422) = [53.012], p < 0.001$ ).

**Table 3. MMI Score**

Statement	Brand	Apple	Samsung	Xiaomi
I like my smartphone brand.	Mean	6.24	5.38	5.53
I prefer to purchase this smartphone brand because of masstige.		4.78	4.38	4.02
To retain my social status, I prefer to pay a premium price for my smartphone brand.		3.73	3.01	2.85
In my country/state/district, my smartphone brand is a top-of-mind brand.		5.58	4.19	3.86
I'd like to suggest my smartphone brand to relatives and friends.		5.62	4.89	4.89
My smartphone's brand is the most exciting thing ever.		4.52	3.53	3.37
I feel my smartphone brand has a reputation for high quality.		6.45	5.03	4.48
I trust that the smartphone brand I use is of international standards.		6.48	5.16	4.48
I prefer to purchase my smartphone brand regardless of its price.		4.65	3.65	3.35
I feel that my smartphone brand is associated with prestige in my country, state, or district.		5.41	4.11	3.60
<b>MMI Score</b>		<b>53.46</b>	<b>43.33</b>	<b>40.43</b>

**Table 4. Masstige Score Based on Country**

Country of Origin	Smartphone Brands	MMI Score
America	Apple	53.46
South Korea	Samsung	43.33
China	Xiaomi	40.43



**Table 5. ANOVA Results**

		ANOVA				
		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Masstige Mean Score	Between Groups	13370.617	2	6685.308	53.012	0.000
	Within Groups	53217.981	422	126.109		
	Total	66588.598	424			

**Table 6. T-test Results for Gender**

Brand	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Apple	Male	52.86	10.8	<b>0.487</b>
	Female	54.01	8.4	
Samsung	Male	43.60	13.5	<b>0.786</b>
	Female	43.04	10.7	
Xiaomi	Male	39.50	12.18	<b>0.437</b>
	Female	41.02	11.52	

Tukey's HSD test reveals that the masstige mean score is significantly different between American and South Korean smartphone brands ( $p < 0.001$ , 95% CI = [6.9804, 13.3284]) and American and Chinese smartphone brands ( $p < 0.001$ , 95% CI = [10.0067, 16.2577]). The difference in masstige mean score between South Korean and Chinese smartphone brands is not statistically significant ( $p = 0.065$ ).

The results were segmented by age and gender to provide a more detailed understanding of how various demographic groups in India perceive the masstige of the three most popular smartphone brands. One-way ANOVA is used to compare the masstige mean score of various smartphone brands across ages, and an independent sample  $t$ -test is used to compare the masstige mean score of the gender. The masstige mean score for the Apple smartphone brand is 52.86 for males and 54.01 for females. Samsung has a masstige mean score of 43.6 for males and 43.04 for females, whereas Xiaomi has a masstige mean score of 39.5 for males and 41.02 for females. Table 6 provides the gender  $t$ -test result. There is no statistically significant difference between male and female respondents' perceptions of the masstige value of any of the three brands in this study (all three  $p$ -values for the  $t$ -test are greater than (0.05)) ; Apple:  $t(136) = -0.697$ ,  $p = 0.487$  ; Samsung:  $t(137) = 0.272$ ,  $p = 0.786$  ; Xiaomi:  $t(146) = -0.784$ ,  $p = 0.437$ , indicating that male and female respondents do not perceive the masstige value of the three selected brands differently.

No significant differences in Apple's masstige mean score are found among the four age groups [ $F(3,134) = 0.468$ ,  $p = 0.705$ ]. The results show a non-significant difference in the masstige scores of the four age groups in the case of Samsung [ $F(3,135) = 0.092$ ,  $p = 0.964$ ]. Xiaomi's result also shows a non-statistically significant difference among the four age groups on masstige mean score [ $F(3,144) = 0.425$ ,  $p = 0.735$ ]. Table 7 shows the results for different age groups. The ANOVA test demonstrates that there is no significant difference in masstige value across age groups for all three brands. Each of the three brands has a  $p$ -value greater than 0.05, resulting in no discernible variation in how respondents of different ages evaluate the masstige value of the three brands.

**Table 7. ANOVA Results of Different Age Groups**

Brand	Age	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Apple	Below 25 years	54.12	9.97	<b>0.705</b>
	26 – 35 years	51.92	10.49	

	36 – 45 years	54.11	8.44	
	Above 45 years	53.95	9.14	
Samsung	Below 25 years	43.24	11.13	<b>0.964</b>
	26 – 35 years	43.15	12.55	
	36 – 45 years	44.11	13.56	
	Above 45 years	42.45	11.1	
Xiaomi	Below 25 years	38.88	11.36	<b>0.735</b>
	26 – 35 years	39.89	12.64	
	36 – 45 years	38.97	13.08	
	Above 45 years	42.03	12.32	

**Table 8. Chi-Square Test Results**

Hypotheses	Country	<i>p</i> -value
H <sub>4a</sub>	America	0.001
H <sub>4b</sub>	South Korea	< 0.001
H <sub>4c</sub>	China	0.044

### **Country of Origin Effect and Consumer Perception**

We then investigate the relationship between consumer perception and COO information for selected smartphone brands. The dependent variable “Change in perception” is operationalized in this context through the following options: “more favorable, no change in perception, less favorable but will continue using the product, or less favorable and will consider changing the brand.” An independent chi-square test is employed to determine the association in this context. Table 8 shows the independent chi-square test result of consumer perception and COO information of different smartphone brands. The *p*-value for all three countries shows a less than significance level of 0.05, indicating that change in Indian consumers' perceptions of American, Chinese, and South Korean smartphone brands is significantly dependent on their COO information search.

### **Factors Affecting Consumer Perception of Country of Origin**

We then seek to investigate the relationship between different criteria (price, quality, promotional offers, country image, brand name, features and design, after-sales support, and social popularity) and customer perceptions of the COO for smartphones. The relationship in this situation is ascertained using the Pearson correlation test. The consumer perception of COO for countries: America, South Korea, and China is tested.

The Pearson correlation test results for the factors affecting consumer perception of COO in the case of America are shown in Table 9. In the case of America, only quality and country image demonstrate a significant relationship with consumers' perceptions of the COO. Quality shows a strong relationship as  $r = 0.106$  and country image shows the highest relationship as  $r = 0.135$ . In the case of China, price, country image, and social popularity all have a significant influence on consumer perceptions of the COO. Price shows a strong relationship as  $r = 0.108$ , and country image and social popularity show a negatively correlated relationship as  $r = -0.197$  and  $r = -0.132$ . Factors affecting consumer perception of COO in the case of China and South Korea are shown in Tables 10 and 11. In the case of South Korea, among the eight factors, only quality shows a significant relationship. Quality shows a strong relationship as  $r = 0.118$ .

**Table 9. Factors Affecting Consumer Perception in the Case of America**

Hypotheses	Factors	R	p-value	Inference
H <sub>5a1</sub>	Price	-0.025	0.605	No significant relationship
H <sub>5b1</sub>	Quality	0.106	0.029	Significant relationship
H <sub>5c1</sub>	Promotional Offers	0.013	0.794	No significant relationship
H <sub>5d1</sub>	Country Image	0.135	0.005	Significant relationship
H <sub>5e1</sub>	Brand Name	0.032	0.514	No significant relationship
H <sub>5f1</sub>	Features & Design	-0.003	0.952	No significant relationship
H <sub>5i1</sub>	After-sales Service	-0.034	0.486	No significant relationship
H <sub>5h1</sub>	Social Popularity	0.004	0.927	No significant relationship

**Table 10. Factors Affecting Consumer Perception in the Case of China**

Hypotheses	Factors	R	p-value	Inference
H <sub>5a2</sub>	Price	0.108	0.026	Significant relationship
H <sub>5b2</sub>	Quality	-0.028	0.571	No significant relationship
H <sub>5c2</sub>	Promotional Offers	-0.002	0.975	No significant relationship
H <sub>5d2</sub>	Country Image	-0.197	<0.001	Significant relationship
H <sub>5e2</sub>	Brand Name	-0.083	0.088	No significant relationship
H <sub>5f2</sub>	Features and Design	0.023	0.639	No significant relationship
H <sub>5g2</sub>	After-sale Service	0.045	0.356	No significant relationship
H <sub>5h2</sub>	Social Popularity	-0.132	0.006	Significant relationship

**Table 11. Factors Affecting Consumer Perception in the Case of South Korea**

Hypotheses	Factors	R	p-value	Inference
H <sub>5a3</sub>	Price	-0.086	0.075	No significant relationship
H <sub>5b3</sub>	Quality	0.118	0.015	Significant relationship
H <sub>5c3</sub>	Promotional Offers	0.008	0.873	No significant relationship
H <sub>5d3</sub>	Country Image	0.089	0.067	No significant relationship
H <sub>5e3</sub>	Brand Name	-0.031	0.527	No significant relationship
H <sub>5f3</sub>	Features and Design	0.018	0.707	No significant relationship
H <sub>5g3</sub>	After-sale Service	0.056	0.245	No significant relationship
H <sub>5h3</sub>	Social Popularity	-0.076	0.119	No significant relationship

## Discussion

Based on the masstige theory, we discover evidence that the American brand Apple has made a significant effect through the masstige marketing strategy. Apple consumers highly believe that the Apple iPhone has high quality and international standards. Compared to Asian brands, American brands have a larger masstige value. This study verifies the findings of Kumar and Paul (2018), who discovered that American laptop brands have a higher masstige value than Asian brands. Interestingly, the three best-selling brands have an excellent masstige value of more than 40. The study shows that the masstige value of chosen smartphone brands is not significantly influenced by age and gender. This finding is consistent with the earlier research conducted by Kumar and Paul (2018).

The impact of the COO on Indian customers is clearly evident in the findings. Consumers in growing markets believe that brands and products from developed countries are of higher quality. They generally think these brands are superior to domestic products (Kinra, 2006; Wang & Yang, 2008). This study finds that Indian consumers of smartphone brands show a favorable impact toward the developed country America as the American brand has a higher masstige value (53.46) compared to other brands. Among the Asian brands, Samsung shows the highest masstige value of 43.33, but it is still a 10 score below the American brand. The results are consistent with previous studies (Kumar & Paul, 2018). The study also reveals that the COO information search has a substantial impact on Indian customers' image of American, Chinese, and South Korean smartphone brands.

The study also reveals that some other factors affect the consumer perception of the COO of smartphone brands. This study examines eight possible factors: price, quality, promotional offers, country image, brand name, features and design, after-sale service, and social popularity. After examining the effect of these eight factors for all three countries, the study reveals that in the case of America, quality and country image show a significant impact. Indian consumers' preference toward American products is visible in the result that the Pearson correlation states a significant positive impact on the country's image. Quality also makes a positive impact on American COO brands. Consumers prefer Chinese products because of the price. "China is associated with cheaper products" is the connection that forms in the consumer's mind (Hamzaoui & Merunka, 2006). This study also reveals that price is the only positive factor that leads to Chinese COO brands. COO China finds that, unlike American firms, the country's image has a negative impact on Indian consumers. In the case of South Korea, quality is the only aspect that influences customer perception.

## **Theoretical Implications**

The results we obtained have made significant theoretical contributions. Initially, we made valuable contributions to the field of masstige marketing. Our study indicates that in India, the iPhone is considered a masstige brand when compared to the other two smartphone companies, Samsung and Xiaomi. This finding aligns with the recent study conducted by Kumar et al. (2021), which examined the perceptions of brand prestige among smartphone brands in Serbia. It also aligns with Paul's (2018) study, which classified the iPhone as a mainstream prestige brand for the first time. Second, we have examined the link between masstige brands and the COO effect. Our findings clearly demonstrate that the perception of masstige is influenced by the country from which the brand originates. This finding extends the masstige theory by incorporating another external variable for analysis: The country of origin. Third, we provide an academic contribution to the field of COO research by confirming the impact of consumers' searches for COO information and exploring eight potential elements that may influence the COO effect.

## **Managerial Implications**

This research provides marketers with a number of practical recommendations. Overall, the results could be beneficial for gaining more knowledge of consumers' attitudes toward masstige brands, ensuring their satisfaction and presenting empirical evidence of mass prestige marketing strategies utilized by smartphone brands. This information is valuable for future researchers in this field. Additionally, the paper offers marketing insights for American, Chinese, and South Korean smartphone manufacturers, as well as companies aiming to expand and focus on the Indian market. Because American, Chinese, and South Korean smartphones are already well-established and have a positive reputation in India, the implications of this paper can be more helpful to Indian companies. As the brand's COO influences consumer evaluations, managers should design and implement initiatives that highlight the social popularity and country image of their products as a technique of exerting

influence over customers. Marketers should take into account additional elements such as pricing, quality, features, and so on in order to influence consumers and eliminate any adverse country image.

## **Conclusion**

This research aims to investigate the link between mass prestige, COO, and the brand preferences of Indian smartphone consumers. Using the MMSS developed by Paul (2015), an analysis of the masstige level is performed. The conceptual model under consideration postulates the existence of a relationship between the masstige and the COO. According to the study's results, Indian consumers perceive a difference in masstige value between Asian and American brands. In addition, the results suggest that factors including price, quality, and social acceptance impact the COO effect.

## **Limitations of the Study and Scope for Future Research**

This section will focus on the few issues that continue to impede present research, which must be addressed and contribute to recommendations for future study. This study used a convenience sample method to obtain data from people residing in Delhi, India. This methodology may possess certain limitations in terms of the generalizability of the findings to the full population. As for the timebound, it would have been more appropriate to include other brands suitable for the masstige concept. However, this methodology is comparable with reputable research conducted in the past and is similar to the majority of current research. The findings of this study have laid the groundwork for additional research in the areas of masstige marketing impact and COO effects. The findings from this research need to be validated by future research, either within the same Indian context or in the context of other countries. Future studies should look into the impact of other brand-related elements on masstige and COO. Gaining awareness of the variables related to the differential in masstige value between American and Asian brands would be an essential contribution to the masstige and COO studies. There are opportunities to conduct masstige and COO research on various other products, such as personal computers, televisions, cosmetics, luxury clothing, and jewelry. In this perspective, the impact of patriotism is also worth investigating. More demographic disparities should be examined in future work, given that an individual's response to a masstige value and the effect of a COO on a brand can vary over time and depending on the conditions in which they are experiencing it.

## **Authors' Contribution**

Infas Malik C. conceived the research idea and collected research papers of high reputation for the literature review. Prof. Hem Chand Jain developed the research design to undertake the empirical study. Infas Malik C. managed the data collection and did the numerical computations. Both authors collaborated on the manuscript's writing.

## **Conflict of Interest**

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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