

TO TELL OR NOT TO TELL: COUNTRY-OF-ORIGIN COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES
AND THEIR IMPACT ON ORGANIZATION-PUBLIC RELATIONSHIPS

by

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(Under the Direction of Bryan H. Reber)

ABSTRACT

With increasing globalization, more organizations are operating outside their home country, and even organizations that do not expand globally often compete with foreign organizations that have entered their home turf. In this global environment, the country of origin (COO) of organizations has become a cue in how they are evaluated by publics. While the disciplines of marketing and advertising have long researched the impact of COO on consumer choices, public relations scholars are only beginning to develop an interest in the topic.

Using the example of American and foreign car manufacturers, three studies were conducted to explore the importance of COO for PR strategy and relationship building. The main theories under analysis were the country-of-origin effect and organization-public relationship theory, but also research on representation and interactivity was taken into account. A textual analysis of the U.S. websites of car brands found few mentions of the respective home countries and strong appeals to American patriotism employed by foreign manufacturers. In-depth interviews with 11 high-ranking PR practitioners of 19 brands revealed a lack of clearly defined strategy for the communication of heritage, potentially due to different conceptualizations of origin. A pre-test-post-test experiment ($N = 489$, with control group) showed that consumers

preferred appeals to American patriotism from foreign brands, but not from domestic brands. Appeals had a stronger impact on the COO effect than on organization-public relationships (OPR). However, a relationship between COO and OPR was found that warrants further investigation.

All studies confirmed that COO is a highly relevant topic for public relations. Practitioners need to actively engage in COO communication and scholars will find many opportunities for future research. Integrating COO research will be one way to make PR theory more international and applicable to today's global business environment.

INDEX WORDS: Public relations, Communication strategy, Country-of-origin effect, Organization-public relationship theory, Interactivity, Ethnocentrism, Patriotism, Representation, Blogs, Car manufacturers

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FORB, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn, Germany, 2004

M.Sc., The University of Kansas, 2006

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2013

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August 2013

DEDICATION

Dedicated to a truly amazing woman: my grandmother, Maria Billgen.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I wrote the acknowledgements for my master's thesis at the University of Kansas, I thanked the career counselor at the job center in Germany who had told 17-year-old me that I would never succeed at studying at an American university. She, in fact, didn't recommend I go to college at all. I thanked her for having so little faith in my abilities that I could not help but prove her wrong. I am happy to say that I just proved her wrong once again.

While defiance can be a strong motivation, I am glad it was not my only incentive because I am not sure it would have carried me through the many hours of work on this dissertation. In the end, I have thoroughly enjoyed the intellectual challenge, the chance to learn so much about this field that I love, and the company of so many brilliant people – professors and fellow students alike.

I am grateful to my dissertation committee for supporting me throughout. I thank my advisor, Dr. Bryan Reber, for patiently putting up with my long list of questions every week. I could always come to him for advice and guidance, even for more unconventional questions, such as the color choices for academic regalia. I am grateful to Dr. Carolina Acosta-Alzuru, Dr. Tina Harris, Dr. Lynne Sallot, and Dr. Kaye Sweetser for serving on my dissertation committee and for each contributing their knowledge and insight. They all opened my eyes to theory, methods, and topics that were new to me, while at the same time supporting my job search and giving me useful advice on all things academic. Their encouragement was invaluable. I am also grateful to Dr. Jooyoung Kim for helping me with statistics questions.

Of course I would like to thank my family for their support throughout. They put up with my decision to go back to school when they thought they finally had me out in the “real world” working, and accepted that I once again moved thousands of miles away to do so. I could not have done this without their emotional support, sympathy when I was broke, and excitement about our visits. I would like to thank Nils, my fiancé, for accepting that I moved to a different continent to pursue my dream, for all those Skype calls and transatlantic flights, and for lecturing me when I watched reality TV instead of writing my dissertation. I always appreciated our mutual ignorance about the details of each other’s dissertations – giving both of us a chance to take a break from academia.

While there is not enough space to name every single friend who supported me throughout this process, I would like to give special thanks to my classmates at Grady College, who provided emotional support and an outlet when needed, and who sometimes were the only ones who truly understood. I am grateful to Justin and Loren for our “writing parties” and to Joon for sharing his impressive knowledge of statistics. I am also grateful to Susan and Don for being my Athens family and for cheering me on every step of the way.

Last but not least, I would like to thank all my professors at the University of Georgia, the University of Kansas, and Bonn University, who taught me so much and helped me get to this point, my former employers, who inspired many of my research questions, my students for making me realize how much I love teaching, and everybody who participated in my research or helped me along the way.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the late 1800s, the steel manufacturers of Sheffield, England, had a problem. Their knives, scissors, saws, and razors, labeled *Sheffield made* and known for superior quality, suddenly had to compete with cheap imitations of poor quality. Many of these imitations entered the British market from Germany, a country that at the time was known for poor product quality. Even the British brand names and the *Sheffield made* label were copied. British manufacturers not only lost business, but they were also afraid that the poor quality of the imitations would taint their good name. Not wanting to inhibit trade by raising protective tariffs, the British government found another solution: In 1887, it amended its Merchandise Marks Act and required producers of foreign import goods to mark their products with the now common “made in...” label. The label was supposed to increase transparency and to warn British consumers of cheap foreign goods (Holst & Bräunlein, 2008).

Soon after, “made in” labels were a common sight and consumers paid attention to them. However, the new law did not benefit British manufacturers like they had hoped it would. Over the next few years, German manufacturers worked hard to improve product quality, and they were successful. Suddenly, British consumers noticed how many goods that they used regularly had come from Germany, and how many of them, while still often cheaper than British products, were indeed of good quality. Over time, this led to a change in perception and consumers began to seek out foreign products at least in specific product categories (Holst & Bräunlein, 2008). Country of origin had become a cue in decision making.

Today, more than a century later, “made in” labels are ubiquitous. In a world characterized by globalization, many organizations’ business strategies have become international. Because products can now be distributed across great distances in very little time, new markets have opened and many goods are traded globally. In 2005, for example, the value of manufactured products traded across borders was 100 times higher than in 1955 (Schifferes, 2007).

For consumers, this change has led to a greater variety of products available, many of which come from another country. This has not only resulted in more options, but has also made the country of origin of a product or an organization even more relevant (Spillan & Harcar, 2012). Organizations have had to rethink as well. They now have to build relationships with publics who may be farther away from them than ever and they must also consider what their organizational origin communicates to these foreign publics (Huang, 2001; Jo, 2003).

In my own experience working as an international communications manager for a global company headquartered in Germany, this leads to a very complex situation for public relations. An organization’s country of origin may be regarded positively in one country, negatively in another and may be completely unknown to publics in a third. Oftentimes it is also misconstrued. An organization’s German origin, for example, may conjure up images of medieval knights and castles, modern technology and fast highways, or Adolf Hitler and concentration camps. But how do practitioners know when the country of origin of their organization may be an asset and when a liability? How can they leverage it to their advantage? And how important is it to their communication strategy?

The purpose of this dissertation was to analyze how the country of origin of an organization influences its communication and PR strategy, how American consumers respond to

communication by American and foreign organizations, and whether the country of origin of a company impacts their relationships with it. The organizations under analysis were car manufacturers from the United States and abroad. The main theory that was tested was organization-public relationship (OPR) theory (Ferguson, 1984), but also the country-of-origin (COO) effect (Schooler, 1965), and research on interactivity, ethnocentrism, and theories of representation were taken into account. Taking a multiple method approach, this dissertation triangulated textual analysis, qualitative interviews, and an experiment.

Each phase of research contributed insights into the rather complex relationship between country of origin and public relations. Findings suggest that foreign and domestic car manufacturers differ in how they address COO in their communication outputs for American publics. Foreign manufacturers were more likely to appeal to American patriotism while domestic manufacturers were hesitant about taking advantage of their heritage for PR purposes. Overall, precise strategies and tactics for the communication of COO were missing, yet consumers responded positively to the current communication patterns. The experiment revealed a relationship between OPR and COO that needs to be further explored. Practitioners found COO to be very relevant to their work and in fact more relevant to public relations than to advertising.

The insights from this dissertation will add to the body of knowledge of international PR. According to Molleda and Laskin (2005), truly international studies that further theory development are still rare in the field of public relations. Furthermore, the COO effect could have great explanatory potential in public relations, yet up to this point it has hardly been considered in PR research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organization-public relationships (OPR)

Just as the term itself indicates, relationships with publics are key to the practice of public relations. One of the first scholars to point out the importance of relationships in the field was Mary Ann Ferguson (1984). In a content analysis of articles published in *Public Relations Review* from 1975 to 1984, she found that public relationships were one of the most crucial areas in PR research, and she suggested more theoretical work on them. Ferguson (1984) predicted that a focus on organization-public relationships would prove to be heuristic and would allow for the integration of findings and methods from other disciplines, which would further legitimize public relations research and give a boost to the entire field. She went as far as to predict that while public relations did not have any dominant paradigms yet at the time, theory on organization-public relationships had the potential of taking on this role (Ferguson, 1984).

Since then, the importance of relationships has even influenced the definition of PR itself. Cutlip, Center, and Broom (1985) defined it as “the management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends” (p. 4). In 2012, the Public Relations Society of America announced its new definition of PR that had been voted on by 1,447 public relations professionals and that still emphasizes the importance of relationships: “Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics” (Public Relations Society of America, 2012).

Since Ferguson's (1984) call for research on the topic, many scholars have studied the importance of relationships between organizations and their publics. They have uncovered many parallels to interpersonal relationships in their nature and in the qualities that consumers expect from them, such as openness and assurances (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Bruning, 2000; Bruning, 2001), as well as characteristics that negatively impact the relationship, such as deception (Sweetser, 2010). Early research on organization-public relationships did in fact draw from theory in interpersonal communication, for instance by Canary and Stafford (1992; 1993; 1994).

But because public relations typically employs mass media and still includes the transmission of information, not all axioms from interpersonal communication apply, and others had to be added (Bruning, 2001). Bruning (2001) argued that just like interpersonal communication, communication in relationship management is transactional, inevitable, irreversible, influenced by cultural variables, is a process of adjustment, has both a content and a relationship dimension, and can be complementary (one party possesses a talent/skill that the other needs to reach its goals) or symmetrical (both parties see their success as intertwined). However, Bruning (2001) also identified axioms that apply exclusively to organization-public relationships, namely interdependence between organizations and key publics, the goal to reach a mutual benefit, and interaction expectations that apply specifically to the relationship between an organization and its publics, such as the fact that publics expect to be addressed via the communication channels that they prefer and that communication is more than information dissemination. Thus, organization-public relationships do possess some unique attributes that distinguish them from interpersonal relationships.

But as in interpersonal communication, a precondition for a good relationship is that both sides recognize they are in it (Bruning & Ledingham, 1998). Once they do, it influences their

attitudes and publics are more likely to evaluate an organization positively and remain loyal to it (Bruning, 2000; Bruning & Ralston, 2000; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000; Bruning & Hatfield, 2002). Willingness to remain with a company (in the case of this study, a telephone service provider) is largely determined by the relationship dimensions of openness, involvement, trust, commitment, and investment (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). But also time influences the perception of the relationship and can even be used as an indicator to predict behavior.

Ledingham, Bruning, and Wilson (1999) found that nascent relationships are much more likely to be terminated by the public than more mature relationships. While the levels of openness, involvement, commitment and investment were generally judged to be higher in more mature relationships, the level of trust hardly changed over time. Overall, relationships in this study conducted by Ledingham et al. (1999) experienced a “honeymoon period” (p. 179) in their first few years, then dipped and eventually recovered again.

However, organizations can positively influence how publics perceive their relationship with them (Hall, 2006). If customers are aware of an organization’s philanthropic programs, for example, they have a stronger feeling of being in a relationship with it and they regard the relationship as more communal (Hall, 2006).

Most research on OPR has dealt with the importance of relationships between organizations and their publics, the types of relationships and relationship outcomes that exist, and their effects on the behavior and attitude of publics, for instance on brand loyalty and satisfaction. Several studies defined dimensions of organization-public relationships (Ferguson, 1984; Grunig, 1993; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Huang, 2001; Kim, 2001; Jo, 2003), but the dimensions of control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, commitment, exchange relationship, and communal relationship, proposed by Hon and Grunig (1999), have become widely used (Huang,

2001; Jo & Kim, 2003; Kim & Chan-Olmsted, 2005; Hung, 2005; Hall, 2006; Ki & Hon, 2007; Yang, 2007). Hon and Grunig (1999) also developed a 9-point Likert-type scale that measures these factors.

Some scholars have suggested that it is necessary to add other dimensions in order to make the theory apply internationally. Huang (2001), for instance, added a concept specifically for the Eastern hemisphere: *face and favor*. The reasoning behind this was that the exchange of favors and the maintenance of face are highly important to Asian cultures. Western researchers generally do not seem to have adopted Huang's (2001) findings for subsequent studies. However, Jo (2003) did not only adopt it, but went even further. Wanting to make the framework more global, Jo (2003) added yet another dimension for the Eastern hemisphere: *personal network*.

Heath (2006) regarded the relationship dimensions not only as crucial for relationship-building, but also as important for crisis resolution because they determine whether an organization is perceived as having a positive "character" (p. 105).

The scale by Hon and Grunig (1999) was later adapted to relationship maintenance on social media, using the factors of Task Sharing, Communicated Relational Commitment, Conversational Human Voice, Responsiveness/Customer Service, Dialogue, Positivity/Optimism, and Responsiveness To Criticism, to be measured on a 5-point Likert scale (Kelleher & Miller, 2006). This scale was found to correlate with the Hon and Grunig (1999) scale (Kelleher & Miller, 2006).

Other scholars have focused more on the types of relationships between an organization and its publics. Bruning and Ledingham (1999) discovered three types of relationships: professional relationship, personal relationship, and community relationship. In their study of

bank customers this meant that in certain instances, customers viewed the bank as acting in a strictly professional and more distanced way (which was perceived more negatively), while in others the contact was more personal. Hung (2005) picked up this angle of research and discovered other types of relationships that are considered to be on a continuum from very altruistic to very egoistic: mutual communal (both parties worry about the welfare of the other), covenantal (open exchange between parties), contractual (relationship determined by terms of contract only), symbiotic (parties benefit from each other), manipulative, and exploitative. Reber, Petersone, and Berger (2010) later added another relationship type to this: facilitation of interaction among stakeholders. This type of relationship is on the altruistic side of the spectrum because the organization helps its stakeholders to engage with one another without being directly involved or expecting immediate reciprocation (yet still hoping it will result in loyalty and trust).

Heath (2006) has related this framework to the tensions that exist between *corporatas* and *communitas* and that have been described by Trujillo (1992). In the *communitas* framework public and organizations believe they are connected and need to achieve mutual benefit. These relationships benefit society. On the other hand, when organizations act as *corporatas*, they manipulate the relationship and take power away from the community through their dominance.

Organization-public relationship theory has been very heuristic and has been applied to different contexts and concepts, such as crisis communication (Coombs, 2000), brand attitude formation (Kim & Chan-Olmsted, 2005), organizational reputation (Yang, 2007), business-to-business communication (Bruning & Ledingham; 2000), or interactivity in digital communication (Jo & Kim, 2003; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007). Organizations under investigation have included, for instance, a telephone service provider (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998; Bruning & Ledingham, 1998; Ledingham, Bruning, & Wilson, 1999; Bruning & Ledingham, 2000), a

bank (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999; Bruning, 2000; Dougall, 2005), an insurance agency (Bruning & Ralston, 2000), an electronics manufacturer (Jo, 2003), utility companies (Bruning, Castle & Schrepfer, 2004; Hall, 2006), a software company (Wilson, 2000), and an environmental organization (Reber, Petersone, & Berger, 2010).

Not even two decades after it was first introduced, Sallot, Lyon, Acosta-Alzuru, and Ogata Jones (2003) found that OPR already accounted for nearly 10% of all articles devoted to theory building in PR journals from their inception to the millennium (14 out of 148). All along, theory development has been guided by, and proved to be very responsive to reviews of the theory. Beginning with Ferguson's (1984) original article, different scholars (Grunig, 1993; Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997; Kim, 2001; Sallot et al., 2003; Ledingham, 2003) have reviewed OPR and suggested directions for future research. Broom et al. (1997), for instance, lamented a lack of conceptual and operational definitions and measurement of the theory, which other scholars (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998; Hon & Grunig, 1999) provided only one and two years later, respectively. Most studies employing OPR have been quantitative and have used surveys and experiments administered to an organization's public.

Country-of-origin effect

Early research. Research on the country-of-origin effect (COO effect) first began in the 1960s in the field of marketing. In 1962, Dichter suggested taking a closer look at "made in" labels because he suspected that they impact consumer choices and that they should therefore be considered part of the marketing mix. However, it is Schooler (1965), who is typically credited for having first studied the COO effect. Schooler (1965) designed an experiment to research product bias in the Central American market. His subjects were college students in Guatemala

who were presented with a piece of fabric and a juice drink they were told were produced in one of four countries: Guatemala, Costa Rica, El Salvador, or Mexico. Even though all subjects were exposed to the same products, they considered the products better than the average Central American juice drink/fabric when they believed they were from Guatemala or Mexico, and worse if they believed they were from Costa Rica or El Salvador. Schooler (1965) noticed that differences in evaluation between the countries were more pronounced than in evaluation between the two different products. He also found that his subjects' perceptions of country of origin were linked to how they thought about the government and people of the respective country. He concluded that when consumers know the country of origin of a product, they make inferences about quality. Because COO-based decisions can be influenced by relatively solid information about products from a country as well as very general stereotypes, some scholars perceive the effect as mostly cognitive, while others perceive it as emotional (Fetscherin & Toncar, 2009).

Ever since its detection, the COO effect has received much attention from scholars from the marketing and advertising disciplines. Taking a positivist approach to national origin, they sought to uncover its impact on product evaluations and consequent purchase intentions (Suh & Smith, 2008). In general, highly developed countries (such as the United States, Japan, or Germany) have been found by researchers to be associated by consumers with high-quality products, while products from less developed countries are suspected of being of lower quality (Bandyopadhyay & Banerjee, 2002). This led scholars to talk about *country equity* (Shimp, Samiee & Madden, 1993; Biel, 1993).

Refining the construct: countries and products. In the 1980s, several scholars set out to develop broader studies of COO and to refine the construct. They took different approaches. Wang and Lamb (1983) and Shimp et al. (1993), for instance, focused on testing a large number of countries for COO perceptions, but did not test any specific products. Wang and Lamb (1983) came to the conclusion that people's perceptions of countries can be described in three categories: socio-economic factors (is the country developed, developing, etc.), political factors (is the country free/democratic?), and culture. Wang and Lamb (1983) looked at culture in very broad terms and only distinguished based on continents (European, Asian, American, etc.). They found that American consumers preferred products from countries that are developed, free, and as close to their own culture as possible. Wang and Lamb (1983) therefore recommended that marketers should pay more attention to where their products are produced, and suggested that this may be more important than the actual product. Shimp et al. (1993), on the other hand, developed clusters of countries and found that the European cluster was seen as slightly more favorable than the American cluster. They voiced surprise over this result, saying that American consumers typically display high levels of patriotism and consumer ethnocentrism, but apparently do not always prefer American products.

The approach of testing countries alone was met with criticism by Kaynak and Cavusgil (1983), who stated that research had focused too much on just countries, and set out to test whether the COO effect is also dependent on product type. In a study of Canadian consumers, they tested consumer perceptions of food, fashion, electronics, and home goods and found that there were indeed differences between product categories. Canadian consumers liked many products from the United States, but not food. Likewise, they had favorable opinions of electronics from Japan and fashion from France, but not vice versa. Kaynak and Cavusgil (1983)

concluded that studies focusing on countries only, without taking into account product type, were likely to result in skewed findings.

Impact of knowledge. Another group of researchers hypothesized and confirmed that knowledge, too, has an impact on COO perceptions. Bilkey and Nes (1982) and Johansson (1989) discussed the question whether the COO effect was something that COO researchers had (unintentionally) fabricated because they had created scenarios with fake brands and products that did not allow subjects to evaluate the products by relying on any other cues than COO – a situation unlikely to occur under natural circumstances. However, Johansson (1989) theorized that even if consumers were to draw from other knowledge, the COO effect would not disappear because it is a way to judge a product even when product information is very complex and consumers would be overwhelmed trying to evaluate all aspects. Johansson (1989) said that when consumers judge a product by its COO, they are doing it because they feel confident that they know enough about the COO to make that decision. Therefore, the COO effect should work best if a country is known for high or low quality of products overall. If there is a great variability between different product categories, consumers cannot feel as certain about their COO-based decisions.

The idea of consumer knowledge was consequently addressed by several scholars: Maheswaran (1994) found that there are differences between experts and novices in a particular product category. Novices, who have little to no product knowledge, are more likely to rely on country of origin than experts, who can evaluate other factors. However, if the information presented to experts is ambiguous, also experts are more likely to judge based on COO. Han and Terpstra (1988) found that familiarity with the brand has an impact, too. They studied consumer

perceptions of televisions, using big brands from different countries. They found that aside from COO, consumers also judged products based on whether they did or did not know the brand. Finally, Aqueveque (2008) uncovered that expert knowledge can also be replaced by expert reviews. Aqueveque (2008) presented consumers with wines from different countries and found that they responded less to differences in COO when they were able to read a wine critic's review of the particular product.

Fluidity. Overall, the strength of the COO effect has been found to be very situation-dependent and to be affected by a multitude of variables. Aside from the country, the type of product or service and product knowledge, it is impacted by politics as well, because positive feelings towards a country due to patriotism or negative feelings due to political tensions cannot only impact purchase decisions, but even the assessment of product quality. Because of that, the effect is not stagnant (Chavis & Leslie, 2009; Johansson, 1989).

Demographics and psychographics. Also demographic and psychographic characteristics of the consumer have an impact. Anderson and Cunningham (1972) found that people with low status concern, low dogmatism, low conservatism, and high education level are more likely to prefer foreign products than people with the opposite attributes. Also age, gender, and race have been found to have an impact: older, Caucasian females are most likely to base product evaluations on patriotism and to thus prefer products from the home country even when they don't necessarily believe that these products are superior (Johansson et al., 1985; Han, 1988). In addition, consumers from collectivistic countries (such as Japan) are more likely to prefer home-country products while people from individualistic cultures (such as the United

States) tend to prefer products from their own culture only if they find them to be truly better in some aspect than foreign goods (Gurhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 2000).

Applications of the COO effect. Most COO studies have focused on consumer products with varieties from many different countries, such as, for instance, chocolate (Camgöz & Ertem, 2008), wine (Aqueveque, 2008), personal computers (Maheswaran, 1994), automatic cameras (Bandyopadhyay & Banerjee, 2002), or televisions (Bandyopadhyay & Banerjee, 2002). Many researchers have conducted COO studies on automobiles. With many different brands and origins available, consumers tend to know and have opinions about the COO of their cars (Johansson, Douglas & Nonaka, 1985; Lawrence, Marr, & Prendergast, 1992; Levin, Jasper, & Mittelstaedt & Gaeth, 1993; Strutton, Pelton, & Lumpkin, 1994; Parameswaran & Pisharodi, 1994; Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch, & Preez, 1995; Yagci, 2001; Brodowsky, Tan & Meilich, 2004; Fetscherin & Toncar, 2009).

While the majority of studies have dealt with physical products, Berentzen, Backhaus, Michaelis, Blut and Ahlert (2008) showed that the effect is also present in respect to services such as banking and airlines.

It should be mentioned that most COO studies were conducted in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe, but the effect has been found to exist also among subjects in countries such as India (Bandyopadhyay & Banerjee, 2002), Turkey (Camgöz & Ertem, 2008), or Chile (Spillan & Harcar, 2012).

Measurement. After the COO effect had been researched for several decades without a dominant scale, Parameswaran and Pisharodi's (1994) scale became widely used and was

eventually included in *The Handbook of Marketing Scales* (Bearden, Netemeyer, & Haws, 2011). The authors divided the COO effect into three facets: General Country Attributes (how people think about the country), General Product Attributes (how people think about products from this country in general), and Specific Product Attributes (how people think about the particular product type from the particular country). Parameswaran and Pisharodi (1994) focused on cars and blenders in their study, so they developed Specific Product Attributes for these two products.

Recent criticism and responses. In recent years, some scholars have questioned whether the COO effect is still relevant because distinctions between countries of origin have become blurred in a business environment in which the country of design may not be the country of production and separate parts of one product may be manufactured in different countries and assembled in yet another one (Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch, & Paliawadana, 2011; Usunier, 2006). However, Thakor and Lavack (2003) found that aspects such as the country of manufacture or the country of parts were not relevant to evaluations of quality whenever consumers could base their decision on the brand's COO. Usunier (2011) agreed that while the country of manufacture is becoming "largely irrelevant" (p. 487), the COO of the brand has taken its place. Indeed, a recent study by Diamantopoulos et al. (2011) showed that COO still influences consumer purchase decisions and that it is an important aspect of brand image.

Another concern that has been voiced is whether consumers actually know the correct COO of the brands they interact with (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2008; Samiee, Shimp, & Sharma, 2005). To this end, Magnussen, Westjohn, and Zdravkovic (2011) established that while consumers do, in fact, not always know the *correct* country of origin, their brand attitudes are still affected by the *perceived* brand origin, whether accurate or not. The authors also identified

this as an opportunity for communication because educating consumers about the correct COO can impact brand attitude. On the other hand, organizations may avoid addressing COO when they fear that correcting a misperception may be disadvantageous. When choosing names for their brands and products, they may choose names that purposefully allude to their COO or that are so generic that they do not give any COO cues (Usunier, 2011). Some brands even choose names that suggest a COO different from their own. This approach, however, can easily backfire and lead to a decrease in purchase likelihood (Melnik, Klein, & Völckner, 2012).

COO and PR. COO has only once been applied to PR: Han and Wang (2012) used the concept to investigate consumer perceptions of China. They set out to study how media frames affect perception of COO. Subjects were exposed to a newspaper article framing products from China either as risky or as beneficial. The researchers found that these media frames did indeed have an impact on how consumers evaluated products. The impact of COO was less strong if consumers actually bought Chinese products on a regular basis. It should be noted that the study by Han and Wang (2012) did not in fact measure the COO effect using the established measures, but measured attitudes and perceptions of “Made in China” instead. Their study also only included one country, China. Therefore, it could be argued that they measured valence framing effects more than they did COO effects. Han and Wang (2012) recommended that COO should receive more attention in PR research.

COO has not been applied to relationship building yet. By doing this, this dissertation followed Ferguson’s (1984) call for the integration of scholarship from other disciplines into the study of organization-public relationships. Combining OPR with marketing research on COO will therefore add to the body of PR theory.

Another reason to apply country of origin research to PR is that with increasing globalization, the potential of COO to influence consumers also increases (Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2000; Jiménez & San Martín, 2012). As organizations expand, their publics become more diverse and more international. Simultaneously, publics are being exposed to a greater variety of origins in their immediate environment and even if a particular organization decides to stay local, it will likely have international competitors that it needs to set itself apart from. One goal of this project is to develop sound recommendations for the profession.

With the trend towards integrated marketing communication (IMC), marketing, advertising and PR are coming closer together, too (Hutton, 1996). Therefore, it is only sensible that the PR discipline should draw from previous research already conducted in its sister disciplines and apply existing theory to its own frameworks.

Patriotism, nationalism, ethnocentrism

Relatively little research has been conducted on the impact of patriotic appeals in public relations specifically, but the topic has been explored more thoroughly in advertising research, where it is often associated with particular times in U.S. history (Lamme, 2004; Latham, 2006; Kinnick, 2003; McMellon & Long, 2006; Gelb, 2002; Lee, Hong & Lee, 2003). Patriotic appeals were used, for instance, during World War I, to support prohibition and create support for the war (Lamme, 2004; Latham, 2006).

Another era of interest to researchers has been the post-9/11 climate. Kinnick (2003) content-analyzed newspaper advertisements after the terrorist attacks and found a clear distinction between two-thirds of the ads, which were compassionate and included “patriotic appeals” (p. 443), and a smaller number of ads “perceived as exploiting the tragedy” and

encouraging “readers to resume their shopping habits” (p. 443). McMellon and Long (2006) conducted a similar study of New York City newspaper advertising and found that many advertisers used this venue for patriotic statements, yet those were met with mixed emotions on the part of consumers: Some were sympathetic and receptive to patriotism, yet others reacted with disgust. In addition, Gelb (2002) argued that the real trade-off of patriotic appeals may not even be criticism on the part of the consumer, but the fact that a focus on a company’s patriotism detracts from its products.

Also focusing on consumer attitudes, Lee et al. (2003) uncovered that nationalism, not patriotism, was statistically significantly related to consumer ethnocentrism, meaning that “when American consumers exhibited ethnocentric tendencies, they did so out of their perception of national superiority and an orientation towards national dominance, rather than from pure love of and attachment to the USA” (p. 614). Their results also indicated that ethnocentric purchasing behavior is more likely found in females, older people, those with less education and lower income (Lee et al., 2003). On the other hand, in an earlier study, Han (1988) uncovered a relationship between patriotism and purchasing domestic products. However, Han’s definition of patriotism also likely differed from that of Lee et al. (2003), because he only mentioned patriotism in relation to consumer patriotism, which he defined as “consumers’ emotions towards domestic products and against foreign products” (p. 26).

These findings indicate that ethnocentrism may be a more appropriate concept to use in combination with COO than patriotism. While patriotism merely refers to a person’s commitment to the home country, ethnocentrism includes a values judgment, meaning that the person believes that his or her own country is better than other countries and, in the case of consumer ethnocentrism, that there is a responsibility to purchase products from the home

country (Lee et al., 2003). Lee et al. (2003) also emphasized that ethnocentrism can be fluid and that it increases in times when a nation is in crisis, for instance in the United States after 9/11.

Ethnocentrism has been linked to the COO effect because ethnocentric consumers are believed to prefer domestic over foreign products and services because they want to protect the domestic economy, but also because they often assume that domestic products are of better quality (Kaynak & Kara, 2002; Spillan & Harcar, 2012).

Like the COO effect, ethnocentrism appears to be related to culture. Suh and Smith (2008) studied subjects in South Korea because of the collective nature of the culture which they believed would make subjects more likely to display ethnocentrism. Another variable they introduced was attitude towards globalization. They suspected that subjects who are more open about globalization would rely less on COO. Interestingly, what they found was that attitude towards globalization did not have an impact. Even subjects who had reported favorable attitudes towards globalization acted ethnocentric in the study. The researchers concluded that this kind of self-reported openness to globalization was more superficial and did not necessarily translate into actual behavior. The ethnocentrism associated with a collectivistic country proved to have a bigger impact than self-reported attitude towards globalization (Suh & Smith, 2008).

Because ethnocentrism has been linked to the COO effect, it will be measured and controlled for as part of the quantitative study. To this end, the CETSCALE developed and validated by Shimp and Sharma (1987) will be used. It measures consumer tendencies to purchase American-made versus foreign-made products.

U.S. automobile market

The U.S. automobile market is relatively fractured. Most best-selling makes are either American or Asian (Japanese or South Korean). In 2010, Ford made the greatest number of sales, followed by Chevrolet, Toyota, Honda, Nissan, and Hyundai. The best-selling make that was neither American nor Asian was Volkswagen, which came in 12th place (Automotive News, 2011). For a list of car and light-truck sales by make see Table 1. The table uses data from 2010 because it appears that a full ranking of brands has not been published since then. However, according to Snyder and Beene (2013), little fluctuation has occurred in the past few years, with the main changes being that Volkswagen is now in 10th and Chrysler in 13th place, and that Acura passed Cadillac and pushed it out of the top 20.

Even though Ford and Chevrolet came out on top, it is important to recognize that while U.S. car manufacturers have been spending more and more money on marketing in recent decades, their market share has dropped, while that of foreign brands has increased (Chatterjee, Jauchius, Kaas, & Satpathy, 2002). In fact, the year 2009 marked the first time that more Asian cars than American cars were sold in the United States. A decade earlier, Chrysler, Ford, and GM combined had still accounted for 70% of American car sales; in 2009 they were down to 44.2% while Asian car brands held at 47.4% (AFP, 2010).

According to Chatterjee et al. (2002), the decline of U.S. brands is at least in part due to a loss of brand identity: “the once vast gaps in quality, performance, safety, fuel efficiency, and amenities have all closed significantly” (p. 135), to the point that any attempt to differentiate one brand from another needs to mostly focus on styling and an emotional appeal. The blurring of differences between products was largely caused by the manufacturers themselves. One example of this is the joint venture between GM and Toyota that included Toyota taking over the re-

Table 1*2010 top 30 car and light-truck sales in the United States by make*

Rank	Make	COO	Total sales (units)
01	Ford	United States	1,752,511
02	Chevrolet	United States	1,563,881
03	Toyota	Japan	1,488,588
04	Honda	Japan	1,096,874
05	Nissan	Japan	805,159
06	Hyundai	South Korea	538,228
07	Dodge	United States	383,675
08	Kia	South Korea	356,268
09	GMC	United States	333,204
10	Jeep	United States	291,138
11	Subaru	Japan	263,820
12	Volkswagen	Germany	256,830
13	Mazda	Japan	229,566
14	Lexus	Japan	229,329
15	Mercedes-Benz	Germany	224,944
16	BMW	Germany	220,113
17	Ram	United States	212,952
18	Chrysler	United States	192,446
19	Buick	United States	155,389
20	Cadillac	United States	146,925
21	Acura	United States	133,606
22	Infiniti	Japan	103,411
23	Audi	Germany	101,629
24	Mercury	United States	93,195
25	Lincoln	United States	85,828
26	Mitsubishi	Japan	55,683
27	Volvo	Sweden	53,948
28	Scion	United States/Japan	45,678
29	Mini	United Kingdom	45,644
30	Land Rover	United Kingdom	31,864

(Automotive News, 2011)

design of both the Toyota Corolla and the Chevrolet Prizm. Afterwards, both of them were manufactured side by side in the same plant, and had similar equipment and prices. Yet the Toyota sold much better. According to Chatterjee et al. (2002), this could be attributed to the emotional qualities consumers associated with Toyota and their perceptions of fuel economy and reliability.

Furthermore, a study by Strutton, Pelton, and Lumpkin (1994) revealed a disconnect between American car manufacturers who promoted their vehicles with “buy American” and “Made in the U.S.A” campaigns, trying to appeal to the American consumers’ patriotism, and the consumers themselves who in fact held negative stereotypes of domestically-produced cars. In a comparison of American and Japanese brands, Strutton et al. (1994) found that Americans rated Japanese cars higher for “dimensions of style,” “investment properties,” and “dimensions of quality” (p. 70). These findings contrast with studies from the 1980s that found that in the absence of further cues, Americans tend to rate domestic products more highly (Han & Terpstra, 1988; Kaynak & Cavusgil, 1983; Wang & Lamb, 1983). Strutton et al. (1994) hypothesized that this could be due to a change in the American self-concept, fueled by dissatisfaction with the country’s general development.

When buying a car, consumers typically consider several comparable models. As they become more familiar with these models, they add and/or drop one or another possible choice until they narrow down their list to their final pick. In this process, many information cues can make a difference, such as style, advertising, perception of typical owners, interaction with a dealer, experience of a test drive, rebates, etc. (Chatterjee et al., 2002). Manufacturers are well advised to consider all touch points to communicate favorable messages, including via their

websites, which are among the primary sources of information that consumers turn to when making purchase decisions (Chatterjee et al., 2002).

Carmaker websites and blogs

The emergence of the Internet has presented companies with new challenges, but also new opportunities in respect to brand-building. Aside from e-commerce, companies also use the Internet to forge customer relationships, build trust, and foster communication, all of which are functions of public relations. Even brands that have traditionally relied strongly upon dealers – such as car manufacturers – have found the Internet to be a useful tool to provide information and to actually help foster relationships between customers and dealers, rather than replace them (Rohm & Sultan, 2004). A 2004 study of different brands found, for example, that Saturn's website was highly retailer-focused, offering its dealers opportunities to track and start a conversation with potential buyers (Rohm & Sultan, 2004).

Aside from traditional websites, also blogs have become popular. These sites are typically updated more frequently than websites and they allow for reflections, comments, and hyperlinks. Corporate blogs are written by a person associated with the respective company, but they can be less formal and more personal than the company website. Blog posts are also displayed in reverse chronological order, which makes it easier to find current information (Kelleher & Miller, 2006, Yang & Lim, 2009). Blogs are not only relevant for building relationships and engaging in two-way communication with consumers directly, but are also used by journalists (Lariscy, Avery, Sweetser & Howes, 2009).

Interactivity

An important consideration in blog research is interactivity. Studies have found that interactivity on websites helps relationship-building (Jo & Kim, 2003; Yang & Lim, 2009) and that blogs might be even better tools for relationship-building than regular websites due to their greater dialogic nature (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007). Interactivity of a blog is related to the features that allow the exchange of information between the site and its visitors, such as links, feedback forms, downloads, etc. However, as Yang and Lim (2009) point out, it is not only these functional characteristics of the site that matter, but also the interaction for which these features are used. Truly interactive blogs are updated frequently, facilitate interaction and have good narrative structure. More interactive blogs result in higher relational trust scores (Yang & Lim, 2009).

In their study of interactivity on political campaign websites, Endres and Warnick (2004) developed rather practical criteria to judge the interactivity of a website. They mentioned, for instance, that highly interactive sites engage the user and encourage open deliberation, that dialogue rather than monologue will be fostered, that competing points of view will be discussed, that the reader will be treated as a partner, that the site will ask for feedback, that all parts of the page are easily accessible and load fast, that information is up-to-date, that the site makes clear who is speaking, and that conversation on the site emulates face-to-face communication (Endres & Warnick, 2004). It has been a common approach to identify interactivity in websites by measuring the presence or absence of features such as feedback forms, images, hyperlinks, etc. (Coyle & Thorson, 2001; McMillan & Hwang, 2002; Amichai-Hamburger, Fine, & Goldstein, 2004; Warnick, Xenos, Endres, & Gastil, 2005).

Kiousis (2002) reviewed definitions of interactivity from different disciplines and synthesized them into the following:

Interactivity can be defined as the degree to which a communication technology can create a mediated environment in which participants can communicate (one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many), both synchronously and asynchronously, and participate in reciprocal message exchanges (third-order dependency). With regard to human users, it additionally refers to their ability to perceive the experience as a simulation of interpersonal communication and increase their awareness of telepresence. (Kiousis, 2002, p. 372)

Kiousis' (2002) definition seems particularly relevant to blogs and other forms of social media because it implies that interactive technology provides a platform where individuals can interact with one another. When operationalizing his definition, Kiousis (2002) went beyond mere features of the medium. He conceptualized three main pillars where interactivity is established: the structure of the technology, the communication context, and user perception. Structure includes such aspects as speed, range, and flexibility, while communication context includes social presence and user perception includes proximity and perceived speed, for instance.

In general, there is some confusion among scholars about the concept of interactivity because it includes two rather distinct phenomena: Interactivity can occur between people and technology, but also between people and other people. Stromer-Galley (2004) labeled the first concept "interactivity-as-product" and the second concept "interactivity-as-process" (p. 391). Interactivity between people typically falls into the realm of interpersonal communication. This is the type of interactivity described by Rafaeli (1988) that includes a continuous exchange of

messages that are responses to previous messages. More precisely, Rafaeli (1988) defined interactivity as "an expression of the extent that in a given series of communication exchanges, any third (or later) transmission (or message) is related to the degree to which previous exchanges referred to even earlier transmissions" (p. 111). Aside from the messages themselves, typical topics of inquiry in this framework would be the identity of the interlocutors, the reciprocity of the conversation, or issues of power, conflict, emotion, etc. (Stromer-Galley, 2004).

However, Rafaeli (1988) recognized that interactivity could span the gap between interpersonal and mass communication by adding an in-between: "mediated-but-not-mass communication" (p. 130). In these cases, mediated communication replaces face-to-face communication; yet, the rules of person-to-person interaction still apply. Rafaeli (1988) specifically mentioned that while modern technology – such as bandwidth, user control or artificial intelligence – could be fascinating, they still did not present cases of true interactivity.

On the other hand, interactivity-as-product focuses on interaction with technology. Researchers typically study features of the technology that allow interaction, such as hyperlinks, videos, downloads, form fields, etc. (Stromer-Galley, 2004). This is more in line with the conceptualizations by Kiousis (2002) or Endres and Warnick (2004) and resembles more closely the type of interaction found on blogs. However, it could be argued that because blogs are a channel through which Internet users can communicate with an organization and with each other, in this case, a few components of interactivity-as-process still apply. An analysis could, for instance, include the reciprocity of the conversation in the comments sections of the blog. Stromer-Galley (2004) says about political websites that they allow citizens to interact with the elite, such as, in the case of her study, political candidates or government officials. This could

also be argued for interactive corporate websites and blogs. Therefore, issues of power could still potentially be analyzed.

According to McMillan (2002), “interactivity is generally considered to be a central characteristic of new media,” even though it is “not unique to new media” (p. 163). She also cautions against using the term ‘new media’ because rather than being something entirely new, new media have grown out of older media. While at the time that she wrote the piece, the Internet was considered to be the new medium, also technologies such as VCRs were labeled “new media” once.

McMillan’s (2002) approach is similar to Stromer-Galley’s (2004) in that she identifies different interactivity research traditions: “human-to-human interaction,” “human-to-documents interaction,” and “human-to-system interaction” (p. 163). Human-to-human (or user-to-user) interactivity includes phenomena such as interpersonal communication, symbolic interaction, and user-to-user interaction via media. Human-to-document (or user-to-document) interactivity means that humans interact with documents and their producers. Examples are parasocial interaction (for instance, when viewers feel they have a relationship with a character on screen) or interaction with media that may, aside from consumption, also include the creation of content. Human-to-system (or user-to-system) interactivity means that users communicate with the media system itself. This line of research investigates, for example, how users interact with computer interfaces, how they make decisions and even how they ascribe personality to the machine (McMillan, 2002). Following this categorization, blog interactivity appears to most closely resemble human-to-document interactivity, even though blogs may also enable human-to-human interactivity.

In advertising, higher levels of interactivity have been shown to have a positive impact on brand perception (Macias, 2003), attitude (Cho & Leckenby, 1999), involvement (Sundar & Kim, 2005), and purchase intention (Cho & Leckenby, 1999). In public relations, as previously mentioned, it has been found to foster relationship building (Jo & Kim, 2003; Yang & Lim, 2009; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007). Because this dissertation investigates organization-public relationships as the outcome of COO cues on blogs, interactivity was chosen as an additional variable. Blogs with higher levels of interactivity are expected to facilitate relationship building.

Representation

When dealing with different origins and cultures, it is necessary to conceptualize what culture actually is. According to Stuart Hall (1997a), what makes up culture is “shared meanings” (Hall, 1997a, p. 1). People within the same culture share a language, which helps them to communicate about values and to make sense of themselves and their surroundings (Hall, 1997a; Du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, & Negus, 1997). This means that culture is not about objects, but it is instead a “set of practices” (Hall, 1997a, p. 2). In this understanding, language is not restricted to what is typically considered a language (i.e. English, French, etc.), but also includes how people interpret images, sounds, or objects. Not everyone within the same culture will interpret all of these like everyone else, but people within the same culture can at least communicate about their differences and translate meaning to one another. This is why Hall (1997a) says, “meaning is a dialogue – always only partially understood, always an unequal exchange” (Hall, 1997a, p. 4).

Because meaning is created within a culture, it is not fixed. People in one culture might see an item and immediately recognize it as a stone, a cross, etc., but this does not mean that

someone from another culture would necessarily agree. Meaning is often derived from what people use something for, so they themselves are the ones who assign that meaning. On the flipside, meaning also gives people a sense of identity because it distinguishes one group from another (Hall, 1997a).

As previously mentioned, it is through language that people produce and communicate meaning. Language itself does not have a fixed meaning, either, but it uses representation. A language is a set of symbols that represent the meaning people have assigned to it. Only if two people share these symbols can they decode each other's ideas. The study of these symbols – or signs – and of what they signify to whom is the central idea of semiotics, a linguistic approach originally attributed to Saussure (Saussure, 1960; Hall, 1997a). An example of this is the cross (a sign), which does not only stand for cross, but also for Christianity (what is signified). There is nothing inherent in the shape of a cross that signifies Christianity – it functions as a sign only for those people who share this cultural representation (Hall, 1997b).

The constructionist approach to representation sees meaning as being constructed within culture and through language. Therefore, it is neither inherent in an object or concept, nor is it restricted to just one speaker. Constructionists thereby do not deny that there is a material world, but to them “it is not the material world which conveys meaning: it is the language system or whatever system we are using to represent our concepts” (Hall, 1997b, p. 25). Representation works in a system. It is not about a separate meaning for each individual sign, but about the relationships between different concepts. Meaning can be derived from what something is similar to or different from, what it causes or is caused by, etc. (Hall, 1997b). Representation is one of the practices that make up the *circuit of culture*, the process by which culture is produced (Du Gay et al., 1997). It creates meaning that allows people to get a feeling of belonging because

they can identify with their own group and recognize differences between groups (Woodward, 1997).

Mixed methods vs. multiple methods

It should be emphasized that representation is rooted in the constructionist paradigm. While it served to inform the formative research described in this proposal, it is not considered applicable to the experiment, which is rooted in the post-positivist paradigm. Some scholars argue that paradigms should not be mixed, but others simply see them as different ways of looking at the world that exist beside one another, that can deliver different types of insights and that can be brought together without harm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). These scholars see a value in mixed method approaches because triangulation can serve as validation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This is also the purpose of this dissertation. The two preliminary studies, which are qualitative, inform the quantitative portion significantly because they highlight completely different angles of the topic, namely COO messages and their creators as opposed to their reception. Different methods were chosen because they were best suited to answer the questions at hand.

However, according to Morse (2012), this dissertation should be categorized as a multiple methods study as opposed to a mixed methods study. Multiple methods studies combine several projects that could very well stand on their own and that can therefore also fall under different paradigms. Mixed methods studies, on the other hand, have one dominant component and use another component to inform the main study. The supplementary study in this case cannot stand on its own and it is usually just a precursor to the main project. Because of that, both components

of a mixed methods study typically follow the same paradigm (Morse, 2012). In this dissertation, the preliminary research serves to inform the quantitative study, but it can also stand on its own.

Research questions formative research

Textual analysis. While previous studies have taken a positivist approach to country of origin, this study sought to analyze it from a constructionist perspective. More precisely, the focus was on how car manufacturers construct and communicate their COO on their American websites. Therefore, aside from taking a new epistemological perspective, this study also took a different point of view on COO, namely by concentrating on how companies communicate COO rather than how consumers react to it. Car manufacturers have been popular research subjects in COO research because there are varieties from many countries and consumers typically know their COO (Johansson et al., 1985; Parameswaran & Pisharodi, 1994).

The following research questions were addressed:

RQ1: How, if at all, do the American websites of carmakers from different COOs communicate their country of origin?

RQ2: What representations of origin become apparent?

Interviews. This study focused on the production of COO communication. Interviews with high-ranking PR managers representing major domestic and foreign car manufacturers doing business in the U.S. addressed the following research questions:

RQ1a: Do practitioners perceive COO as an important communication consideration?

RQ1b: If so, how do they address that concern?

RQ2: What strategies and tactics are used to reach the U.S. market?

RQ3a: Do practitioners believe that country of origin can be an enhancing or limiting factor when doing business in the U.S.?

RQ3b: If so, have they noticed any attitude changes within the American population?

RQ4: Are practitioners aware of the country-of-origin effect?

Research questions experiment

The purpose of this quantitative study was to integrate a marketing concept, the country-of-origin effect, into public relations, by testing whether the country of origin (COO) of an organization has an impact on how publics perceive their relationship with said organization when they visit a company blog. The PR theory used for this purpose was organization-public relationship theory (OPR). In addition, the study incorporated two further variables: patriotic appeals and interactivity. The companies used for this study were two large international car manufacturers: Ford and Hyundai. Blogs were created as stimuli. To determine the potential intersection of OPR and COO, this study sought to address the following research questions and hypotheses. First, it was tested whether there is a connection between COO and OPR:

RQ1: Is there a relationship between OPR and COO effect?

Next, research questions and hypotheses concerning COO were tested:

H1: The American COO will be seen more positively than the South Korean COO.

The hypothesis addresses the assumption that a South Korean origin is considered less favorable than an American origin. This is a central assumption in COO research focusing on cars (Parameswaran & Pisharodi, 1994), but because country images can be fluid (Chavis & Leslie, 2009), it should be reconfirmed.

In addition, the study incorporated appeals to American patriotism and ethnocentrism. Because previous research on COO indicates that ethnocentrism can affect the COO effect (Lee et al., 2003; Suh and Smith, 2008), and because it was deemed appropriate to control for brand attitude because real brands were used, the following two research questions were addressed:

RQ2: What role, if any, does ethnocentrism play in COO appraisal?

RQ3: What role, if any, does brand attitude play in COO appraisal?

Next, research questions and hypotheses about OPR were tested. The preliminary textual analysis of carmaker websites in the United States included in this dissertation found that especially foreign carmakers tended to rely on appeals to American patriotism, for example by emphasizing their commitment to the American market and by pointing out the number of production facilities and employees in the United States. As the only American company under analysis, Ford, on the other hand, relied more on global appeals than on promoting its American origin.

This study now sought to find out whether the types of appeals have an impact on relationship building with consumers. Global appeals are defined as appeals that emphasize an organization's international commitment and point out its success around the world without focusing on any particular market. Appeals to American patriotism, for the purpose of this study, are defined as appeals that emphasize an organization's commitment to and success in the American market. In this case, the American market may or may not be the home market of the company. The following research questions were explored:

RQ4: For an American company, does it make an impact on OPR whether the company uses appeals to American patriotism or global appeals?

RQ5: For a foreign company, does it make an impact on OPR whether the company uses appeals to American patriotism or global appeals?

Because this study dealt with consumers building relationships with organizations through blogs, it also incorporated interactivity. Interactivity is a key feature of blogs (Kelleher & Miller, 2006). Interactive media have been found to foster involvement (Williams, Rice & Rogers, 1988), and blogs with more interactive components are more likely to lead to relationship building (Kelleher, 2009; Yang & Lim, 2009). It was tested whether this is also true in this study by addressing the following hypothesis:

H2: Participants viewing more interactive blogs will show higher OPR scores than those viewing less interactive blogs.

Because the study controlled for ethnocentrism and brand attitude, it also tested whether these variables really do impact OPR.

RQ6: What role, if any, does ethnocentrism play for organization-public relationships?

RQ7: What role, if any, does brand attitude play for organization-public relationships?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY - FORMATIVE RESEARCH

Study 1: Textual analysis

The method used to analyze the carmakers' websites was textual analysis. According to Stuart Hall (1975), textual analysis is an appropriate method to not only document content (which could also be accomplished by using content analysis), but to go deeper and investigate underlying assumptions and how meaning is constructed. In textual analysis it may still be appropriate to count certain phenomena depending on the research question, but it is not the purpose of textual analysis to make observations quantifiable or to adhere to a rigorous classification scheme. This allows this method to recognize and account for latent meanings, as well as to take into account the production and consumption of a text (Hall, 1975). Because the purpose of this study was to analyze the representation of origin, it was necessary to investigate the manufacturer websites in depth and to question the underlying meaning of what is said. This goal spoke for textual analysis as the method of choice. Special attention was paid to any patterns that emerged, but no pre-determined categories existed. Before choosing and analyzing the websites under investigation, a thorough "soak" was conducted, meaning that the researcher spent an extended period of time reading and interacting with many different car manufacturer websites in order to get a good overview of communication on these sites. The website in its entirety was considered the unit of analysis.

Because the purpose of this study was to investigate how car makers from different countries present their origin in the United States, the best-selling make of each COO

represented in the top 20 statistics from the U.S. car market (Automotive News, 2011; for a list see Table 1, p. 21) was chosen for this study. Therefore, the makes under analysis were Ford (COO: United States), Toyota (COO: Japan), Hyundai (COO: South Korea), and Volkswagen (COO: Germany). No other COOs were represented in the top 20 sales statistic. While it appears that the full ranking of brands has not been published anymore since 2011, little fluctuation has occurred since then and the ranking is largely still the same (Snyder & Beene, 2013).

The American websites of these four brands were analyzed in their entirety, meaning that every level and sub-page was visited. If a brand had separate websites for products and corporate information, both were included in the analysis. If a site linked to another site by the same manufacturer, it was included as long as it still targeted an American audience (some manufacturers link to all their international sites); if it linked to another company's website such as a lender or a specific dealer, it was not included. Separate social media pages and blogs were not considered the focus of this study.

The carmaker websites under investigation. Ford. Ford's American website can be found at www.ford.com. At the time of the analysis (late fall 2011), visitors to the site were greeted by a large color image taking up most of the screen. It showed a hilly landscape. In the foreground, three Ford models could be seen under a headline that pointed out their low mileage (Ford website, 2011). For screenshots of the sites see Appendix A.

Different links were superimposed on the image. On the top of the page, there were two rows of links. The top row showed, from left to right, the blue Ford logo, the slogan "drive one", the links "Ford Social" (an interactive Ford community), "Support," "Locate a dealer," "En Español," "More Ford" (links to a variety of topics such as racing, CSR, careers, investors, or

corporate information), as well as a search box. The row underneath had links to cars, SUVs, trucks, hybrids and EVs, commercial vehicles, and technology, as well as a choice of “shopping tools” such as financing, special offers, dealer search, brochures, and a vehicle configurator. All the links from the top of the page could again be found listed underneath the large picture (Ford website, 2011, homepage).

Superimposed at the bottom of the large image were several more links, which highlighted current topics such as the end of the year celebration, or a social media campaign that included the design of a customized Mustang. At the very bottom of the page were links to the site map, a glossary, a contact section, privacy information, etc. (Ford website, 2011).

Further into the website, a similar layout to the homepage remained. The backgrounds tended to be white or light grey, and the toolbars a dark shade of grey. Most images were professional photographs, often in darker shades. They typically showed Ford cars in action, such as driving through mountains, pulling boats or navigating cities. Computer-generated images sometimes featured ‘speed lines’ or blurry backgrounds to indicate swift movement of the vehicles. The website had many levels and a modern feel with some animations and videos incorporated into the pages (Ford website, 2011).

Toyota. Toyota’s American website can be found at www.toyota.com. Here, too the homepage was dominated by a large image that appeared to be computer-generated or at least enhanced. A large caption next to the car was titled “Toyotathon” and announced a year-end sales event. Right underneath, visitors of the page could use a search box to locate their nearest dealer. Superimposed on the image of the car was a box that announced the opportunity to donate to a charity, Toys for Tots. A link underneath led the visitor to the Toyota Prius Facebook page (Toyota website, 2011).

The layout of the homepage and the types of links very much mirrored those by Ford. Toyota's logo was placed in the top left-hand corner, its slogan "moving forward" underneath (Toyota, 2011). But while the information provided on the Toyota website was very similar to that provided by Ford, the visual appeal of the site was different. The main colors used were red and silver/grey, which are also the colors of the Toyota logo. Further into the website, there was less use of red and even more use of silver and grey. The images were mostly photographs, which looked relatively realistic, but the cars looked more static than on the Ford website because no speed lines had been added. The background of the images were very diverse; some showed modern urban cities (mostly in the case of regular passenger cars), others the countryside (trucks and SUVs), and others had futuristic backdrops (mostly hybrids). Overall, Toyota's website was somewhat less uniform than Ford's because the layout and styles varied and many links opened in separate windows which had a completely different structure from the previous one (Toyota website, 2011).

Hyundai. Hyundai's American website can be found at www.hyundaiusa.com. At first glance, the site was very similar to those by Ford and Toyota: a large image dominating the page and above and below it, as well as superimposed, a series of links covering the same topics as the competitors' sites (Hyundai website, 2011).

However, a few aspects were unique. Rather than displaying one static image in the background, this site alternated between five different images. All of these featured computer-generated graphics of one or more cars in various arrangements. The color scheme was very diverse (Hyundai website, 2011). What also set this site apart was that it was the only one that addressed the upcoming holiday season by linking to a holiday-related commercial and displaying an image with cars surrounded by snowflakes and the headline "Hyundai Holidays."

In addition – albeit not positioned very prominently – the Hyundai website was the only one with links on the homepage that were related to its status as an international organization: Visitors of the site could access Hyundai’s other international websites and, rather than Spanish, the site had the option to be translated into Korean (Hyundai website, 2011).

Hyundai’s logo, positioned in the upper left corner as in all the sites, was the only one not to be accompanied by a slogan (Hyundai website, 2011).

Volkswagen. Volkswagen’s American website can be found at www.vw.com. Just like the other homepages under analysis, it boasted a large image with rows of links above and below. Upon first glance, Volkswagen only had one image; however, reloading the page revealed that there were in fact four different ones that alternated. They all showed computer-generated images of vehicles. Even though these images were not photographs, but had presumably been produced by a graphic designer, all pictures seemed overexposed and had a white gleam to them. The overall color scheme of the page was dominated by white as well. Occasional use of blue made the page resemble the blue and white Volkswagen logo in color. The logo was positioned in the upper left corners as in all the other pages. The caption underneath read “Das Auto.”, which is German for “the car” (Volkswagen website, 2011, homepage).

The topics that the Volkswagen homepage linked to were the same ones found on the competitors’ pages, however VW linked to a greater variety of blogs than other brands. The majority of these blogs were devoted to a specific model, while some of them were targeting VW enthusiasts in general or those interested in concept cars (Volkswagen website, 2011).

Study 2: Interview study

This study used semi-structured research interviews. As a method, interviews allow researchers to go in depth and find out about why people do what they do and how their thought processes work. Both the researcher and the interviewees have important roles in this conversation because knowledge is created between them that did not exist before and that could not be obtained any other way (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Because interviews are concerned with in-depth information, findings of an interview study cannot be generalized to a larger population. However, depending on the sample and similarities to another case, it can still be possible to make inferences (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).

Participants and sampling. The study employed criterion sampling; those individuals were approached who were seen as experts on the topic. The researcher contacted the U.S. communications departments of the 10 best-selling American and the 10 best-selling foreign car brands in the United States. A list of brands can be found in Table 1 (p. 21). Communications managers were first approached by email, starting with the highest-ranking practitioner available, and employing follow-up email as necessary. The contact information of these managers was obtained from the company website, if possible. In some cases, the individual who was first contacted designated a team member to participate in the interview. Determining the most appropriate interviewee was at the discretion of the respective department. Nevertheless, all interviewees were senior managers.

It is common among car companies to not list public relations contacts publicly. Because of that, the researcher employed a snowballing technique, asking previous interviewees to refer colleagues from other carmakers. These contacts were interviewed even if they represented a

brand that was not among the top 20. Because the car industry consists of relatively few large companies that are well connected, this strategy proved to be very efficient and all brands in the final analysis were among the top 30 in the country. A total of 11 interviews were conducted until saturation was achieved because responses had become repetitive. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), theoretical saturation is achieved when similar instances occur repeatedly. As Bloor and Wood (2006) point out, “most researchers follow this pragmatic approach to theoretical saturation, ceasing further data collection and analysis when it seems likely that to continue would be almost futile” (p. 165). In addition, because several car companies sell more than one brand, these 11 practitioners represented a total of 19 different brands. This was considered a success given that the top 20 brands had originally been contacted for the study and almost all of them ended up being included.

Titles of the interviewees were diverse and included director of public relations, vice president of corporate communications, department manager product and technology, vice president of public affairs, senior group manager product public relations, or global product communications manager. All interviewees worked in external communication.

Participants represented nine brands from the United States and 10 brands headquartered in other countries (five in Japan, two in South Korea, two in Germany, and one in Sweden). On average, practitioners had worked for the respective companies for 8.64 years (minimum: 4 months; maximum 26 years, $SD = 8.77$) and in their current positions for 3.06 years (minimum: 2 months; maximum 5.50 years, $SD = 1.97$). Most practitioners' final degree was a bachelor's degree ($n = 9$); a couple held master's degrees ($n = 2$). Public relations, journalism, and communication were the most common areas of study ($n = 6$). The other participants had degrees in business/marketing ($n = 2$) and English ($n = 3$). All interviewees ($n = 11$) were male.

Following IRB regulations, the participants were read and asked to agree to a consent statement that educated them about their rights and told them they could terminate the interview at any time or refuse to answer any questions. Interviews were only conducted if practitioners agreed to the consent statement. Confidentiality was granted; therefore the names of the interviewees, as well as the brands they represented, are not mentioned in the findings.

Interviews were conducted between March and May of 2012.

Interview guide. The interview was semi-structured. This allowed the researcher to change question order, explain questions, and add probes and follow-up questions if needed. The interview guide included 15 main questions. It can be found in Appendix B. Most questions were designed to be open-ended (if not the question itself, then the follow-up question was open-ended) and allow for responses in narrative form. Examples of questions include “How important is the country of origin of your brand/company for your communication and messaging?”, “Is the country of origin of your company/brand mentioned frequently in your communication?”, “How do you think American consumers respond to the country of origin of your company/brand”, “Have you noticed a change during the current recession? If so, what?”, or “In your communication, do you contemplate or address American patriotism and the possibility that some customers might prefer to buy American?” Interviewees were also asked whether they were familiar with the COO effect and whether they could explain it. In addition, several demographic questions were added that asked about the practitioners’ position in the company and educational background. Gender was recorded.

Procedure and data analysis. Once a practitioner had agreed to participate in an interview, a date and time were arranged for a phone conversation. Because the interviews were conducted with busy executives, they were designed to only take 20 minutes, if necessary, yet interviewees who were willing to spend more time were able to do so. The longest interview lasted 44 minutes. During this time, practitioners were asked a number of questions. The researcher allowed the conversation to flow and adjusted question order when needed. If interviewees led the conversation into a direction they found important, they were given the chance to voice their opinions also on topics that were not included in the interview guide. The researcher engaged in active listening and asked follow-up questions to clarify that she had understood the interviewee's point of view correctly. She also probed and asked candid questions if interviewees answered questions evasively. However, she remained professional and respectful of the interviewees. The interview questions were arranged in an order that allowed the conversation to begin and end with easier questions. The researcher thanked the participants at the end of the conversation and mailed thank you notes. All interviews were recorded so that the researcher was not distracted by note-taking. As soon as the interview was completed, the researcher wrote a journal entry about her first impressions. All these strategies are recommended by Hermanowicz (2002).

Kvale and Brinkman (2009) warned that interviews can be more difficult to conduct interculturally. Given the nature of the topic, the researcher was very aware of her own country of origin (Germany) and how interviewees might interpret her accent. Most interviewees ($n = 10$) were of American origin and all interviews were conducted in English. The researcher chose to not proactively mention her origin because of Germany's presence in the automotive industry. Interviewees might have spoken less candidly about the different countries. However, if the

interviewees asked about her origin during the conversation, she did not conceal it, either, acknowledging the fact that a qualitative researcher is always a part of his or her own study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Only two participants asked about her accent. They had perceived it as foreign, but could not place it. There were no obvious differences between these interviews and those with practitioners who did not ask. The researcher's origin was acknowledged, but did not become a major part of the conversation.

Once the interviews were completed, they were transcribed. The transcripts and journal entries were then analyzed side by side looking for patterns. The participants' responses to each interview question were compared to one another in order to determine what they had in common and what stood out. Responses were also compared between the different countries of origin and interpreted in clusters.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY - EXPERIMENT

The nature of this study was quantitative. According to Williams et al. (1988), new media are at first typically not well-suited for quantitative research. However, in the case of blogs that phase has already been passed by previous researchers (for example Kelleher & Miller, 2006; Kelleher, 2009; Sweetser, 2010). Quantitative studies have frequently been used in OPR and COO research as well, and reliable measurements have already been established (Parameswaran & Pisharodi, 1994; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Kelleher & Miller, 2006).

This study used a pre-test-post-test experimental design with control group. The number of participants included in the analysis was $N = 489$. Because the sample was not random, it must be considered a quasi-experiment. According to Williams et al. (1988), advantages of the experimental method are that experiments can establish causation, that there is enough control to rule out alternative explanations, and that they have high internal validity.

The experiment had three independent variables: COO (two levels: United States and South Korea), appeals (two levels: global appeals and appeals to American patriotism), and blog interactivity (two levels: high and low). The dependent variable was OPR. The experiment therefore had a 2x2x2 factorial design. Because there was also a control group, participants were randomly assigned to one of nine cells of about equal size. Each participant was exposed to only one condition (one possible combination of IVs or control group).

Sample and participants

The sample used for this study was a convenience sample of students enrolled in undergraduate classes in mass communication at a large Southeastern university. Non-random samples are typical for experiments in mass communication research where random sampling is often not possible (Thorson, Wicks, & Leshner, 2012). The final analysis included $N = 489$ subjects. On average, participants were 20.51 years old ($SD = 2.81$). Among them, there was a relatively even distribution of sophomores ($n = 142, 29.03\%$), juniors ($n = 158, 32.31\%$), and seniors ($n = 154, 31.49\%$), as well as a small number of freshmen ($n = 35, 7.15\%$). Reflecting the gender distribution within the discipline, the number of female participants was higher than that of male participants (female: $n = 391, 79.95\%$; male: $n = 98, 20.04\%$). The majority of subjects was Caucasian ($n = 407, 83.23\%$), followed by African American/Black ($n = 48, 9.81\%$), Asian ($n = 13, 2.65\%$), Hispanic/Latino ($n = 10, 2.04\%$), American Indian/Alaska Native ($n = 1, 0.20\%$), and Pacific Islander ($n = 1, 0.20\%$). Nine students (1.84%) identified as “Other” and typically explained that they were multiracial.

Students were considered a relevant population for this study for several reasons. Students are frequently used for COO research (for example Yagci, 2001; Jo, 2005; Lee & Lee, 2009) and by staying in this tradition, the results of this research project will be easier to compare and relate to previous findings. It has been found that the COO effect is impacted by demographic variables, such as age or education (Anderson & Cunningham, 1972; Johansson et al., 1985; Han, 1988). By having a relatively homogeneous sample, the impact of these factors can be reduced so that findings are indeed caused by the IVs and not by confounding variables. In fact, even graduate students were eliminated from the sample to keep the sample as

homogeneous as possible. Of course this may limit generalizability to only younger populations as well, yet this is preferable to producing flawed results.

Another reason why college students are deemed a relevant population is because of their relative inexperience with car ownership and car buying. It has been found that the COO effect can be mediated by product knowledge and that more experienced consumers are less likely to rely on COO cues (Biswas & Sherrell, 1993; Maheswaran, 1994; Cordell, 1997; Lee & Lee, 2009). This, too, was held constant by choosing this homogeneous and young population. The great majority of participants ($n = 435$, 88.95%) had owned a car before in their lives; 424 (86.70%) owned one at the time of data collection. The average model year of current cars was 2004 ($SD = 4.46$). They had last acquired a vehicle on average 3.57 years ago ($SD = 2.14$).

The subjects' relative inexperience with car buying was confirmed by the fact that out of the students who had ever owned a car, only 14.71% ($n = 64$) had selected the vehicle all by themselves and only 7.58% ($n = 33$) had paid for it all by themselves. The majority of vehicles had been selected by either the parents and the student together ($n = 183$, 42.06%), or the parents alone ($n = 158$, 36.32%), and had been paid for by either the parents alone ($n = 298$, 68.50%), or the student and the parents together ($n = 70$, 16.09%). Other answers included grandparents and other family members, friends, as well as insurance and a raffle.

Finally, students have been found to be a very relevant population for blog research because young people remain to be the main users of social media (Yang & Lim, 2009; Sweetser, 2010; Brenner, 2012). Subjects reported visiting an average of 4.24 ($SD = 10.91$) blogs every day and spending a daily average of 31.99 minutes ($SD = 41.91$) reading them. They also visit blogs written by companies. On average, they visit 1.35 ($SD = 3.12$) corporate blogs per day and spend 8.07 minutes ($SD = 10.62$) reading them.

A total of $n = 120$ participants (24.53%) reported writing a blog or several blogs themselves. Subjects who write their own reported having an average of 1.57 blogs ($SD = 1.38$). They spend 27.65 ($SD = 68.11$) minutes writing blog posts per day.

Subjects of a nationality other than U.S. American were dropped from the analysis due to the chance that they might view COO differently from American subjects.

The study sought to recruit at least $n = 45$ participants for each cell. A power analysis found that for a power of .08, each cell should have at least 38 subjects (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang & Buchner, 2007). Therefore, the study sought to recruit a minimum of 45 subjects to account for possible invalid cases that would need to be dropped from the analysis. Also, data from non-American participants and graduate students were dropped from the analysis. This left a total of $N = 489$ valid responses used for the analysis. The final cell sizes were the following: $n = 51$ for United States/global appeals/high interactivity, $n = 56$ for United States/global appeals/low interactivity, $n = 55$ for United States/patriotic appeals/high interactivity, $n = 57$ for United States/patriotic appeals/low interactivity, $n = 48$ for South Korea/global appeals/high interactivity, $n = 59$ for South Korea/global appeals/low interactivity, $n = 54$ for South Korea/patriotic appeals/high interactivity, $n = 53$ for South Korea/patriotic appeals/low interactivity, and $n = 56$ for the control group. The variation in cell sizes was caused by the random assignment of participants.

Subjects were also asked for the brand of their most recent vehicle. A great variety of different brands ($N = 34$) was mentioned. The brands most frequently owned by the subjects were Honda ($n = 77$, 17.70% of subjects who owned or had owned a car before), Toyota ($n = 60$, 13.79%), Ford ($n = 43$, 9.88%), Jeep ($n = 33$, 7.58%), and Nissan ($n = 31$, 7.12%). Therefore, Japanese and American brands were most prominent (reflecting overall car sales in the U.S.), but

no single brand reached 20%. Only $n = 9$ subjects reported owning a Hyundai (2.06% of car owners).

When asked whether they knew COO of their own vehicle's brand, $n = 272$ (62.52% of car owners) said that they did, yet only $n = 236$ (54.25%) did indeed identify it correctly. When comparing participants who identified the COO of their vehicle correctly with those who could not identify it or gave the wrong answer, differences in COO became apparent. While 68.03% ($n = 83$) of students who owned an American brand identified its origin correctly, this was true for only 47.53% ($n = 106$) of those who owned a Japanese, 40.00% ($n = 2$) of those who owned an English, and 31.57% ($n = 6$) of those who owned a South Korean brand. The highest percentage of correctly identified countries of origin was among German ($n = 35$, 79.54%), the lowest among Swedish ($n = 2$, 13.33%) brands. A chi-square test revealed that these differences were significant, $\chi^2(6, N = 431) = 39.41, p < .01$. It should be noted that some of these groups were relatively small (only 19 participants owned a brand from South Korea, 15 from Sweden and 5 from England).

Stimuli

The stimuli administered to the participants were be company blogs that they were led to believe were written by a car manufacturer. In reality, the blogs were created by the researcher based on examples taken from real car company blogs. Each blog contained several posts about the car manufacturer's values, history, production, employees, etc. Rather than focusing on particular products, the information resembled what manufacturers post on their corporate pages in order to allow for greater consistency. Several of the posts were in fact adapted versions of posts found on the blogs of real manufacturers. Eight different blogs were created based on the

factorial design. Each participant was exposed to only one of these blogs. Blogs have been found to be relevant for public relations purposes because they are a good tool for relationship building and relationship maintenance (Kelleher, 2009). For screenshots of the blogs see Appendix C.

Thorson et al. (2012) emphasized the importance of having theory and variables clearly reflected in the stimulus of an experiment. The stimuli of this experiment reflected all three independent variables of the experiment, which were directly derived from theory.

The COOs under investigation were the United States and South Korea. The car manufacturers under investigation were Ford and Hyundai. Ford was chosen because it is the best-selling automotive brand in the United States (Automotive News, 2011). The best-selling foreign brand is Toyota (Automotive News, 2011). However, a decision was made not to compare these two brands because it has been shown that Japanese brands are perceived as being high quality and that they do not appear foreign or exotic anymore. This is also due to the fact that Toyota produces more vehicles in the United States than Ford does (Levin et al., 1993). Among all the COOs represented in the top 20 brands in the United States, only South Korea has been considered to have a disadvantageous COO in the eyes of the American consumers (Parameswaran & Pisharodi, 1994; Automotive News, 2011). In order to include two countries with distinct country image perceptions, this study chose Hyundai as the second brand to be included in the analysis. Hyundai is the 6th best-selling car brand in the United States and the best-selling brand from South Korea (Automotive News, 2011; Snyder & Beene, 2013).

Culturally, the United States and South Korea are quite different. Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory categorizes cultures by assigning scores for the cultural dimensions of *power distance*, *uncertainty avoidance*, *individualism/collectivism*, *masculinity/femininity*, *long-/short-term orientation* (Hofstede, 2001). Typically scores range from 1 (low) through 100 (high),

however because some countries were added to the study later on that showed even higher values than the original categorization, some scores above 100 can be found. A comparison of Hofstede scores can be found in Appendix D. It shows that South Korea (score of 60) ranks higher on power distance than the United States (40), meaning that “the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions accept and expect that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede, 2001, p. xix) is greater in South Korea. South Korea (85) also ranks higher in uncertainty avoidance than the U.S. (46), meaning that Koreans feel more uncomfortable in “unstructured situations” (p. xix) than Americans. In respect to individualism, South Korea (18: mostly collectivistic) and the United States (91: mostly individualistic) are basically opposites, meaning that “the degree to which individuals are supposed to look after themselves” (p. xx) is completely different. Furthermore, the United States (62) is a more masculine society than South Korea (39), meaning that assertive and tough behaviors are valued more than nurturing behaviors. Lastly, South Korea’s culture (75) shows a much higher score on long-term orientation than the United States (29), meaning that Koreans are more willing “to accept delayed gratification of their material, social, and emotional needs” (Hofstede, 2001, p. xx). Overall, the United States and South Korea display distinct differences across all dimensions of culture. Therefore, it is justified to conclude that their country images among U.S. consumers will differ as well.

Also the other IVs were present in the stimulus. Blog interactivity was either high or low. High and low interactivity blogs did differ in the use of hyperlinks, images, videos, download and feedback forms, possibility to like, comment on, and share posts, frequency and current nature of updates, as well as dialogic nature (whether readers were asked questions and encouraged to give feedback). High interactivity blogs also had links to social media sites;

however access to the sites themselves had to be blocked to maintain control over the manipulations. Blogs with low interactivity provided informational text, but did not have these other features (Endres & Warnick, 2004; Yang & Lim, 2009).

Blogs had either patriotic or global appeals. Those with appeals to American patriotism mentioned the company's commitment to the American market, incorporated American flags and emphasized that companies are producing in the United States and employing American citizens. Also CSR activities described on these blogs were focused on the United States only. In the "About" section, the manufacturer was described as an American company. Blogs with global appeal had a broader focus and mentioned that the company is a global citizen engaged in markets around the world. CSR activities mentioned focused on another country (Haiti), which was also represented in the flags shown on the site. Employment and sales statistics were international and reflected the global focus of the company.

Aside from these manipulations, blog content and appearance was kept consistent. Subjects in the control group completed the instrument, but did not view a stimulus. The same approach was taken by Sweetser (2010). A focus group was conducted to test the manipulations of the stimuli. Participants ($N = 8$) recognized the respective blogs as interactive/non-interactive and having patriotic/international appeals without being prompted to focus on these aspects.

The decision was made to use real brands (Ford and Hyundai) rather than create fake brands. Previous COO research has seen both approaches. Using a fake brand name has the advantage that subjects cannot judge the brand according to previous knowledge. This was practiced frequently in early COO research; however Bilkey and Nes (1982) criticized these studies for having created artificial scenarios that did not allow participants to base their decisions on anything but COO. They even went as far as to suggest that the effect was

completely fabricated by these early researchers because it may not occur at all when consumers can base their information on a variety of cues like they would in a natural situation (Bilkey & Nes, 1982). In the meantime it has been shown that while knowledge and familiarity with a brand do impact COO evaluations, they do not cancel out the COO effect (Johansson, 1989; Maheswaran, 1994).

Because real brands from real countries were used, it was necessary to monitor the news for current events that could have possibly impacted perceptions of these countries or brands. It was decided to run the experiments between late November of 2012 and late January of 2013. Therefore, data collection began several weeks after the U.S. Presidential election and concluded before the Super Bowl. Leading up to the election, the bailout of American car manufacturers had become relevant again and it was even considered a major factor in helping Barack Obama win the election (Cauchon, 2012). During the Super Bowl 2013, two American car brands owned by Chrysler showed commercials with appeals to American patriotism that were extremely popular among viewers: The Jeep ad *Whole Again* featured U.S. troops returning home from war, while Ram's *Farmer* praised the values and work ethic of American farmers (Klayman & Saba, 2013). If an event like this had occurred during the weeks of data collection, it could have skewed the results.

Instrument

There were two instruments: a pre-test and a post-test questionnaire. Both were administered to all participants and both used scales that had already been found to be valid and reliable in previous research. The instruments can be found in Appendices E and F.

The pre-test questionnaire measured participants' attitude toward the brands presented in the stimuli. It therefore included the brand attitude scale developed by Belch (1981; 1982) and MacKenzie, Lutz, and Belch (1986). The scale consisted of 4 items to be measured on a 5-point semantic differential scale. Items included *unfavorable/favorable*, *bad/good*, *foolish/wise*, and *harmful/beneficial*. Brand attitude is a unidimensional construct.

Aside from the scale items, the pre-test instrument included many demographic questions, asking participants for their age, gender, nationality, and race, and but also asking them about car ownership and blog reading and writing habits. Higher-level questions were preferred to lower-level questions, meaning that whenever possible they asked for ratio data rather than categorical data, for example. This allowed for more complex statistical tests.

The post-test questionnaire included scales for OPR, COO, and ethnocentrism. For OPR, the relationship maintenance strategies scale by Kelleher and Miller (2006) was used. This scale has been found valid and reliable in previous studies (Kelleher & Miller, 2006; Sweetser & Metzgar, 2007; Kelleher, 2009; Sweetser, 2010). The scale was specifically adapted to social media, so that no further adjustments were necessary. It has also been applied to relationship maintenance with a carmaker before (Sweetser, 2010). The scale consisted of 25 items, to be rated on a 5-point Likert scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Relationship maintenance is a multidimensional concept consisting of seven factors: *Task Sharing*, *Communicated Relational Commitment*, *Conversational Human Voice*, *Responsiveness/Customer Service*, *Dialogue*, *Positivity/Optimism*, and *Responsiveness To Criticism*. Items include "attempts to demonstrate they are committed to maintaining a relationship" for *Communicated Relational Commitment*, "attempts to make communication enjoyable" for *Conversational Human Voice*, "would answer telephone calls from me and

others” for *Responsiveness/Customer Service*, “invites people to conversation” for *Dialogue*, “uses positive, optimistic tone” for *Positivity/Optimism*, and “would admit a mistake” for *Responsiveness To Criticism* (Kelleher & Miller, 2006).

COO was measured using the scale established by Parameswaran and Pisharodi (1994) that is widely recognized in marketing research (Chang, 2004; Meng, Nasco & Clark, 2007). The COO effect consists of three constructs: *General Country Attributes* (GCA: attitudes towards a specific country and its people), *General Product Attributes* (GPA: attitudes towards products in general from said country), *Specific Product Attributes* (SPA: attitudes towards products of a particular category, for example cars, from said country). Parameswaran and Pisharodi (1994) developed their scale particularly for blenders and cars, so that a SPA scale for cars exists and the scale did not need to be adapted. The scale consists of 40 items: 12 for GCA, 18 for GPA, and 10 for SPA for cars. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Items included “friendly and likeable” and “hard-working” for GCA, “unreasonably expensive” and “long lasting” for GPA, and “have little maintenance” and “have good fuel economy” for SPA (Parameswaran & Pisharodi, 1994). The three constructs GCA, GPA, and SPA are unidimensional.

Ethnocentrism was measured on a scale (CETSCALE) developed by Shimp and Sharma (1987). It consisted of 17 items measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. Items included “American people should always buy American-made products instead of imports,” “Buy American-made products. Keep America working,” or “Foreign products should be taxed heavily to reduce their entry to the U.S.” Ethnocentrism is a unidimensional construct (Shimp & Sharma, 1987).

The questionnaire also asked several manipulation check questions that confirmed that the participants had paid attention to the brand and COO in the stimulus and noticed the appeals and interactivity.

Almost all participants correctly identified the brand whose blog they had just read: 97.26% ($n = 213$) for Ford and 100% for Hyundai ($n = 213$). This was significant according to a chi-square test, $\chi^2(2, N = 432) = 412.45, p < .01$.

When asked for the COO of the brand whose blog they had just read, 97.71% ($n = 214$) of subjects in the Ford condition correctly identified Ford's COO. Only 43.19% ($n = 92$) of the subjects in the Hyundai condition correctly identified Hyundai's COO. Frequent wrong assumptions were that Hyundai was an American ($n = 49, 23.00\%$) or Japanese ($n = 29, 13.61\%$) brand. Interestingly, blog appeals made a big difference here: Among those participants viewing a Hyundai blog with global appeals ($n = 107$), 71.02% ($n = 76$) correctly identified it as South Korean and only 2.80% ($n = 3$) as American. Among those viewing a Hyundai blog using appeals to American patriotism ($n = 106$), only 15.09% ($n = 16$) correctly identified it as South Korean, while 43.39% ($n = 46$) thought it was American. A chi-square test revealed that these findings were statistically significant: $\chi^2(6, N = 213) = 109.07, p < .01$. It should be noted that some of the cell counts were below 5.

Manipulation checks also tested how participants perceived the level of patriotism and interactivity in the blog they had viewed on a scale from one through five. An independent samples t-test confirmed that appeals to patriotism in blogs were indeed recognized. Subjects viewing blogs with these appeals ($n = 219$) found the blogs significantly ($t(413) = 9.22, p < .01$) more patriotic ($M = 3.91, SD = .92$) than subjects ($n = 214$) who viewed a blog with global appeals ($M = 3.00, SD = 1.12$).

Participants in the high interactivity cells ($n = 208$) rated the level of interactivity of the blog they had just seen as higher ($M = 3.30$, $SD = .92$) than participants in the low interactivity cells ($n = 225$, $M = 3.23$, $SD = 1.15$). According to an independent samples t-test, these differences were significant ($t(431) = 10.33$, $p < .01$). In the high interactivity condition, 8.17% ($n = 17$) commented on the blog or liked posts.

Procedure

The experiment was conducted in computer labs on campus where students would normally take classes or work on projects. The labs were chosen as a location because while they could be controlled by the researcher, they were also a natural location that subjects were familiar with and where they could act normally. This decision was made to reduce the likeliness of the Hawthorne effect. Students were recruited through their classes and professors and asked to sign up for one of 43 time slots at a lab. Each research session was scheduled to last up to 45 minutes. During each time slot, all subjects began participation in the experiment at the same time to avoid interference. The experiment was conducted by a casually dressed researcher not much older than the subjects. All sessions were administered by the same researcher to ensure consistency. While conducting the entire experiment online and allowing subjects to participate from home would have been a good option to make the process more organic, the lab setting was chosen to increase control. The facilitation guide for the experiment can be found in Appendix G.

After signing the consent form and being told about their rights as participants, students were seated at a computer with the Internet browser already showing the pre-test questionnaire. Once it was completed, the researcher instructed them on how to pull up the browser tab in

which the respective blog had already been opened. Subjects were asked to interact with the blog for 10 minutes while the researcher took the time. Afterwards, they completed the post-test questionnaire. The pre- and post-test instruments were hosted online through the survey software Qualtrics. Therefore, the entire experiment was conducted at the computer. The study employed online questionnaires in order to benefit from the advantages that Fricker, Galesic, Tourangeau, and Yan (2005) pointed out for online surveys: By eliminating transcription from paper questionnaires to statistical software, transcription errors are avoided. Fricker et al. (2005) also found that respondents of online surveys were more likely to express an opinion than to mark “I don’t know,” for instance.

Because the subjects were led to believe that they were interacting with a real company blog, there was an element of deception involved in this experiment, and participants needed to receive a debrief. This statement was included in the online survey itself. Contact information for the researcher and the Institutional Review Board was provided. After the debrief, participants were given the option to discard their answers and withdraw from the study.

Some professors offered extra credit to their students for participating in the experiment. Therefore, a list of participants had to be kept. However, both the consent forms and sign-up sheets for extra credit were kept separately from the completed instruments, so that it was not possible to associate data with information revealing the identity of participants. Confidentiality was granted.

Data analysis

Data were imported into and analyzed using the statistical software packet SPSS. The manipulation checks were analyzed using chi-square tests and independent samples t-tests.

Descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, frequencies, and distributions were calculated and reported.

The treatment of the scale items followed examples from previous research employing the same scales. The organization-public relationship scale was factor analyzed with principal axis factoring (varimax rotation; Kelleher, 2009; Sweetser, 2010). It recognized five unique constructs, with 63.80% of the variance explained. Aside from the fact that five instead of seven factors were recognized, the result of the factor analysis was very similar to Sweetser (2010). Many factors from her analysis remained intact. *Responsiveness/Customer Service* and *Responsiveness To Criticism* combined into a single factor and *Positivity/Optimism* combined with *Conversational Human Voice*. The factor names established in previous research could largely be used to describe the constructs. The following factors were found: *Conversational Human Voice / Positivity* (alpha = .88), including items such as “uses positive, optimistic tone” and “treats me and others as human;” *Communicated Relational Commitment* (alpha = .86) including items such as “stresses commitment to me and others” and “demonstrate they are committed to maintaining the relationship;” *Responsiveness* (alpha = .78), including, for instance, “would answer email from me and others” and “would admit a mistake;” *Task Sharing* (alpha = .83), including items such as “performs its organizational responsibilities” and “emphasizes the quality of our relationship;” and *Dialogue* (alpha = .90), which included only two items: “invites people to conversation” and “is open to dialogue.” The full list of items within the different factors and factor loading scores can be found in Table 2.

COO was analyzed following the example of Parameswaran and Pisharodi (1994), summing the items within the three groups of attributes to form unidimensional indices. Some items were reverse-coded (see Table 3). The general country attitude items were summed into

Table 2

Factor analysis: Relational maintenance strategies factor loadings

Factors	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Factor Loadings				
			1	2	3	4	5
Factor 1: <i>Conversational Human Voice / Positivity</i> (alpha = .88)							
Present themselves as cheerful and optimistic regarding the future	4.44	.72	.74				
Uses positive, optimistic tone	4.58	.64	.73				
Tries to be interesting in communication	4.15	.85	.68				
Tries to communicate in a human voice	4.27	.82	.66				
Attempts to make communication enjoyable	3.99	.89	.52				
Uses conversation-style communication	3.92	1.08	.50				
Treats me and others as human	4.17	.80	.43				
Uses sense of humor in conversation	3.49	1.06	.40				
Factor 2: <i>Communicated Relational Commitment</i> (alpha = .86)							
Stresses commitment to me and others	4.02	.90		.72			
Implies relationship has future/long term commitment	3.95	.93		.64			
Desire to continue to maintain and/or build a relationship with me and others	4.22	.85		.63			
Demonstrate they are committed to maintaining the relationship	4.25	.86		.61			
Factor 3: <i>Responsiveness</i> (alpha = .78)							
Would answer telephone calls from me and others	3.51	.99			.68		
Would answer email from me and others	3.85	.93			.66		
Willing to address complaints or queries, rather than taking negative reactions	3.81	.89			.61		
Provides prompt feedback addressing criticism with a direct, uncritical manner	3.10	.98			.50		
Would admit a mistake	3.21	.93			.44		
Provides links to competitors	1.75	.99			.36		
Factor 4: <i>Task Sharing</i> (alpha = .83)							
Directly addresses organizational responsibilities	3.63	.93				.79	
Performs its organizational responsibilities	3.91	.85				.66	
Does not shirk duties	3.54	.79				.60	
Emphasizes the quality of our relationship	3.80	.91				.50	
Directly discusses the nature of the organization	3.93	.91				.42	
Factor 5: <i>Dialogue</i> (alpha = .90)							
Invites people to conversation	3.81	1.16					.80
Is open to dialogue	3.74	1.19					.70
Eigenvalues			9.89	2.06	1.76	1.13	1.09
Percent of variance explained			39.56	8.27	7.03	4.54	4.37
Overall variance explained: 63.80%							

Table 3*Indices country-of-origin effect scale*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
General Country Attributes (GCA), alpha = .87		
Index	46.61	7.44
friendly and likable	3.88	.982
artistic and creative	3.93	.94
well educated	4.22	.81
hard-working	4.35	.72
good technical education	4.20	.82
achieves high standards	4.31	.77
raised standards of living	4.11	.94
has technical skills	4.26	.75
similar political views	3.01	1.17
economically similar	3.29	1.13
culturally similar	3.00	1.30
participates in international affairs	4.05	.93
General Product Attributes (GPA), alpha = .78		
Index	62.50	7.31
unreasonably expensive	3.20	.90
luxury products	3.10	.97
meticulous workmanship	3.21	.93
imitations*	3.18	.91
known mainly for industrial products	3.19	.88
sold in many countries	3.73	.93
not attractive*	3.71	.88
intensely advertised	3.83	1.01
frequent repairs*	2.93	.81
wide range of models	3.82	.80
long lasting	3.48	.89
are advertised in an informative way	3.63	.89
difficult to service*	3.37	.88

Continued on the next page.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
cheaply put together*	3.33	.87
high technology	3.83	.78
good value	3.76	.76
easily available	4.02	.78
Prestigious	3.18	.93
Specific Product Attributes, cars (SPA), alpha = .85		
Index	35.98	5.74
good fuel economy	3.50	.88
attractive exterior styling	3.79	.89
good workmanship	3.74	.82
handle well	3.74	.79
little maintenance	3.24	.88
very comfortable	3.79	.76
difficult to get parts for*	3.51	.99
quality service	3.61	.75
made to last	3.56	.94
overall excellent	3.48	.90

*Note: Items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale.
Items with an asterisk (*) were reverse-coded.*

the index GCA ($\alpha = .87$), the general product attitude items into the index GPA ($\alpha = .78$) and the specific product attitude items into the index SPA ($\alpha = .85$). Mean scores can be found in Table 3.

The CETSCALE was analyzed by computing an index. This procedure follows the example by Shimp and Sharma (1987) and Lee et al. (2003). The scale alpha was .94. Mean scores can be found in Table 4.

The brand attitude scale was also analyzed by computing an index (Belch, 1981, 1982; MacKenzie, Lutz, & Belch, 1986). For brand attitude toward Ford, the scale alpha was .93, for brand attitude toward Hyundai, it was .91. Mean scores can be found in Table 5.

Research questions and hypotheses were tested using Null Hypothesis Significance Testing (NHST). According to Levine, Weber, Hullett, Park and Lindsey (2008), NHST is the most commonly used procedure to establish statistical inference in mass communication. Research questions and hypotheses were analyzed using appropriate statistical tests.

Table 4*CETSCALE index*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
CETSCALE alpha = .94		
Index	39.52	12.31
American people should always buy American-made products instead of imports.	2.36	1.05
Only those products that are unavailable in the U.S. should be imported.	2.51	1.10
Buy American-made products. Keep America working.	3.46	1.01
American products, first, last, and foremost.	2.70	1.00
Purchasing foreign-made products is un-American.	1.75	.85
It is not right to purchase foreign products, because it puts Americans out of jobs.	2.09	.95
A real American should always buy American-made products.	1.90	.90
We should purchase products manufactured in America instead of letting other countries get rich off us.	2.53	1.16
It is always best to purchase American products.	2.51	1.09
There should be very little trading or purchasing of goods from other countries unless out of necessity.	2.15	1.03
Americans should not buy foreign products, because this hurts American business and causes unemployment.	2.19	.96
Curbs should be put on all imports.	2.27	.93
It may cost me in the long run-run but I prefer to support American products.	2.96	1.05
Foreigners should not be allowed to put their products on our markets.	1.67	.79
Foreign products should be taxed heavily to reduce their entry into the U.S.	2.11	.99
We should buy from foreign countries only those products that we cannot obtain within our own country.	2.56	1.17
American consumers who purchase products made in other countries are responsible for putting their fellow Americans out of work.	1.81	.92

Note: Items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale.

Table 5*Brand attitude index*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Brand attitude Ford, alpha = .93		
Index	14.63	3.58
Unfavorable – favorable	3.59	1.07
Bad – good	3.70	1.00
Foolish – wise	3.65	.92
Harmful – beneficial	3.70	.89
Brand attitude Hyundai, alpha = .91		
Index	13.03	3.24
Unfavorable – favorable	3.11	1.02
Bad – good	3.26	.93
Foolish – wise	3.29	.85
Harmful – beneficial	3.38	.78

Note: Items were measured on a 5-point semantic differential scale.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS - FORMATIVE RESEARCH

Textual analysis

This study analyzed the mention and treatment of COO on the U.S. websites of four car manufacturers Ford, Toyota, Hyundai, and Volkswagen.

RQ1: How, if at all, do the American websites of carmakers from different COOs communicate their country of origin?

Ford. The Ford website was very much centered on the car-buying experience. Information about any model, style, and price was immediately available and well connected via links, while information about the company, careers, CSR, etc. was available, but not in plain sight of the visitor to the site. Information about the different models was technology and style-oriented. Technological features were described, but with no reference to COO. In fact, no reference to the United States could be found on the first levels of the site (Ford website, 2011).

Some of Ford's partnerships could be considered America-focused, for example a sponsorship of NASCAR, fundraising efforts for Feeding America, sweepstakes for a Toby Keith country music concert, or a campaign for breast cancer awareness together with the American actress Jennifer Aniston (Ford website, 2011). While these topics could be assumed to be chosen specifically for the U.S. market, the relation to the United States was not addressed specifically.

The corporate part of the website was kept international. Accomplishments were mentioned not only for the U.S. market, but for markets around the world. The following is an excerpt from the sustainability section that exemplifies the general tone and focus of the corporate statements:

Ford employees around the world are actively engaged in making a positive difference in their communities. Our Ford Volunteer Corps, which was established in 2005, encourages salaried employees to take two work days per year to serve as volunteers. In 2010 some 27,000 Ford employees and retirees in 41 countries provided more than 112,000 hours of work on more than 1,100 community service projects. (Ford website, 2011, corporate site)

While the United States was mentioned, it was usually mentioned together with other countries. Also in respect to investments, Ford emphasized its devotion to creating jobs in all its regions around the world and its plans to invest into future growth in North and South America, Europe, Asia Pacific and Africa (Ford website, 2011).

A section of the corporate pages focused on Ford's heritage and Henry Ford's legacy. This part of the website featured several mentions of the United States and Ford's impact on its history. It portrayed the Ford family as an American family closely tied to the development of the automobile, but also to events in American history. It mentioned the Ford Mustang as a "true American icon." With that, it was the only part of the website that specifically addressed American heritage, but even here the focus was more on technical achievements than country of origin. In addition, it took about 4-5 clicks from the homepage to even access this information, so that the average visitor of the website might never see it (Ford website, 2011).

Toyota. The Toyota website also was centered on the car-buying and car-owning experience and it was obvious that the company tried to provide whatever may be necessary or helpful in that respect, including numerous tutorials and videos, tools to compare models, very detailed technical information, etc. However, the information designed for car buyers and owners was completely free of any references to Toyota's Japanese origin (Toyota website, 2011).

What is more, many aspects of the site in fact appeared relatively American, such as the sponsorships of American nonprofit organizations, Toyota's involvement in NASCAR, or the urban city backdrops in a lot of the photographs. The site also highlighted a series of videos in which Toyota owners told stories of how their car kept them safe in a particular situation. All of these owners were portrayed with their families and all of them were quintessential American families living in quintessential American homes, thanking Toyota for protecting their children, spouses, mothers, and fathers. Most people portrayed on the site were Caucasian, some appeared to be African American or Latin American. There was a noticeable lack of anyone looking Japanese or even Asian/Asian American in general (Toyota website, 2011).

The corporate part of the website had a slightly different layout than the main part. It was here that Toyota became even more openly American. The corporate website was completely focused on the U.S. market. It emphasized sales and employee figures for the United States only, as well as the facts that nine models are manufactured stateside and that Toyota made \$18 billion worth of investments into its U.S. operations (Toyota website, 2011). The following quote is an excerpt from "About Toyota":

Toyota directly employs more than 35,000 in North America and its investment here is currently valued at more than \$23 billion, including sales and manufacturing operations, research and development, financial services and design. Toyota's annual purchasing of

parts, materials, goods and services from North American suppliers totals nearly \$25 billion. In addition, the company has contributed more than half a billion dollars to U.S. nonprofits over the past 20 years. (Toyota website, 2011, corporate section)

The fact that Toyota is a Japanese company was mentioned nowhere in the “About Toyota” section. This pattern could be found repeatedly: Rather than discussing the import of Japanese cars into the United States, the site emphasized the export of vehicles produced in its 14 manufacturing plants across the U.S. to South Korea and Japan. Even the section labeled “Our history” began with Toyota’s entry into the American market, as evidenced by the very first sentence: “In 1957, when Toyota first came to America, Elvis was king of rock n’ roll, big cars with tailfins were ‘in’ and postage stamps were just 3 cents” (Toyota website, 2011, corporate section). Evidently, the company tried to display its understanding of American culture and to demonstrate its integration into American history. In addition, the corporate website showcased several videos of American employees who describe what Toyota means to them and who use terms such as pride, quality, reliability, customer-centered, and even family, emphasizing again Toyota’s ties to America (Toyota website, 2011).

Aside from dozens of American charity projects presented on this page, Toyota did promote a campaign designed to benefit the survivors of the 2011 natural disaster in Japan: It asked visitors of the site to send a “message of hope and support to our friends, colleagues and neighbors in Japan” (Toyota website, 2011, corporate section). This was in fact the only reference to Toyota’s Japanese origin that could be located; and it was just one of many charity projects.

Hyundai. Hyundai's website also centered on the car-buying experience, but differed from the previously discussed sites in that it did offer links to its international websites and to a Korean translation of the page right on the homepage. However, further into the site, references to Hyundai's country of origin did not continue. Most images showed cars in front of nondescript modern urban backgrounds. These cities could have been anywhere. The rural images tended to show nothing but untouched landscape in the background – landscape of the type that is found in moderate climates, but other than that was still nondescript. Similar to the Toyota website, images with people tended to show Caucasians, African Americans and Latin Americans, but hardly any Asian Americans or Asians (Hyundai website, 2011).

An interesting finding that speaks for the Americanization of Hyundai is that none of its models had particularly Korean-sounding names, but several were in fact North American. Hyundai's crossover models, for example, were called Tucson, Santa Fe, and Veracruz (Hyundai website, 2011).

Hyundai's site featured a "Why Hyundai" section, which managed to promote the brand entirely without any mention of COO. It did, however, mention Hyundai's manufacturing plant in Alabama. This American subsidiary was treated as its own entity: Hyundai Motor Manufacturing Alabama (HMMA). It even had its own corporate website, which opened in a separate window and had a distinctly different design from the homepage. This subdivision of Hyundai, Hyundai's first factory in the United States, was not opened until 2005. The site described in detail the investments that were made and the jobs that were created by this venture. Even though the page centered on HMMA only, the history did go back much further on this site than on the main site, starting with the birth of Hyundai's first chairman in 1915, who was born as the son of a poor Korean farmer and worked hard to found multiple businesses that were

credited with making “Korea the economic powerhouse that it is today,” while at the same time he worked as an “ambassador of peace” trying to foster the reunification of Korea. The history continued to talk about Hyundai’s entry into the American market in 1986 and finally the construction of HMMA. The HMMA corporate site featured everything that the other corporate sites featured as well, namely sections on employment, diversity, CSR, a media center, etc.; yet most of the information was targeted at the Montgomery, Alabama, area (Hyundai website, 2011).

However, the HMMA site was not the only corporate page on the Hyundai website. A second corporate section existed for Hyundai in general, which had a different URL and design than that of HMMA. On this site, Hyundai repeated much of the same information, but with a less local angle. Interestingly, the story of Hyundai’s Korean heritage was not told on this page. Instead, Hyundai presented itself as rather American. A section labeled “Reborn in the USA” started like this, for instance:

Hyundai may be a Korean company, but over half the cars we sell in the U.S. are made in the U.S. We have a technologically sophisticated manufacturing facility in Montgomery, Alabama, engineering facilities in Michigan, plus design, research, and testing grounds in California. All of which provides around 5,000 jobs for American automotive workers. Add to this more than 20,000 employees at Hyundai dealerships and 6,000 workers employed by our various vendors, and you’ve got quite the microeconomy. (Hyundai website, 2011, corporate section)

In this section, Hyundai acknowledged its South Korean heritage (even though it never added “South” to Korean), but it immediately went on to brush it aside and highlight its ties to the United States. It also claimed to be “home to hundreds of America’s brightest engineers” and

“one of the most advanced manufacturing facilities in North America,” which again emphasized that Hyundai sees itself as competing with American brands on a level playing field, trying to be just as American as everyone else (Hyundai website, 2011, corporate section).

Yet, because Hyundai had two corporate sub-sites with different information contents, it came across as somewhat confused about its identity: The overall American corporate site depicted it as an American company while the Alabama site acknowledged the Korean roots more and the story of the first chairman almost sounded like a Korean version of the American dream as personified by Henry Ford (Hyundai website, 2011).

Volkswagen. In contrast to what its German slogan may have suggested, Volkswagen’s German origin did not play a big role on its website. As on the previous sites, the information related to car buying and car ownership but included no reference to origin whatsoever. Special programs were promoted for college graduates and military. These were accompanied by pictures showing graduates in the typical American caps and gowns and military personnel in uniforms that clearly bore an American flag. Other images, too, looked quite American on closer inspection. This was true for roads and road signs or families and their homes. Volkswagen even Americanized its own brand name by suggesting that the V stands for VIP or by referring to its cars as “v-dub” (Volkswagen website, 2011, corporate section).

This trend was continued on the corporate pages, which welcomed the visitor with a large image of an American flag and the caption “Focused on customers. Dedicated to responsibility. Committed to America” (Volkswagen website, 2011, corporate section). Just like Toyota and Hyundai, Volkswagen provided numbers for its investments and employees solely for the American market. Also similar to these brands was the ample mention of its American assembly

plant in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and its labs in Silicon Valley. VW further emphasized that it wants to be a part of all the communities in which it operates:

Being a part of these communities and American businesses means a lot to us. And we take our responsibilities as good corporate citizens very seriously. Wherever we do business, Volkswagen Group of America will do what we can to invest in and give back to the community. Because being a good neighbor is simply the American way.

(Volkswagen website, 2011, corporate section)

As a good neighbor and community member, VW also put a lot of emphasis on CSR, but with a distinctly American focus. The site did, however, contain a few mentions of Germany. Interestingly, Germany never stood alone in these cases – it was always mentioned in relation to the U.S., such as in this quote on the corporate pages: “Here in the U.S., we are blending German engineering with American ingenuity.” Other popular phrases were “in the U.S., Germany, and across the globe,” or, completely without Germany, “in the U.S. and worldwide” (Volkswagen website, 2011, corporate section). This way, VW at the most branded itself as a global company, but never as a German company. While it did at times refer to its German origins, it was quick to point out that it was only successful because of their fusion with American values.

RQ2: What representations of origin become apparent?

This analysis dealt with four carmakers from four different countries of origin. However, the study of the four websites revealed that this was not how the companies presented themselves. The identity that Toyota had constructed on its website seemed more American than Ford’s. Its Japanese origin was never addressed specifically, but its American investments and

commitments were emphasized to the point that an uninformed visitor of the page would have had to assume that it is an American brand.

Hyundai and Volkswagen were next on this continuum, using a somewhat mixed approach. Both mentioned their countries of origin, but tied them directly to American values and their investments in the U.S. market and never let their origin stand by itself. Hyundai addressed this specifically when it said “Hyundai may be a Korean company, but . . .” (Hyundai, 2011, corporate section). In this quote, Hyundai clearly managed consumer perceptions by juxtaposing what they may perceive as its origin with how it really wants to be seen, namely as an important player on the American market that benefits American society. Yet Hyundai did not always carry through with constructing its American identity, which was symbolized by its two corporate websites, one that acknowledged its South Korean origin and one of that did not. This left its identity somewhat blurry. Further confusion may be added by the fact that Hyundai never distinguished between North and South Korea.

Volkswagen employed a similar method by always mentioning its German origin in combination with American resources and values, but because it did so coherently, it generated a more fused identity which is reminiscent of the American melting pot: the strengths of two nationalities coming together to create something better than each could have achieved on its own. Because of this, Volkswagen retained some of its German roots while still emphasizing its American commitment. Volkswagen’s desire to appear more American was also reflected in its use of language and slang, which added a layer of nativeness that foreign companies do not naturally have.

As the only American brand under analysis, Ford presented itself the least American. In fact, mention of its American COO was rare and buried rather deep within the website. Instead, Ford presented itself as more international.

The companies under analysis employed different methods of constructing national identity. Aside from direct mention on the website, they also guided the perception through their use of topics: What did they consider their history? What CSR activities did they subscribe to? Were sponsorships limited to the American market? Which production facilities did they feature on the website? All foreign carmakers under analysis kept these topics almost entirely U.S.-focused. Ford was the only one to really diverge from this.

The images used helped to construct meaning as well. Almost all product images were completely stripped of origin. Cars did not have license plates and were placed in front of backgrounds that could be found almost anywhere in the developed world. Even urban backgrounds were nondescript and the architecture of the buildings so modern that they could be found in most large cities around the world. Therefore, the product images did not really construct any meaning in respect to origin at all. The backgrounds were similar to a blank canvas that could be presented to consumers around the world without evoking any impression of foreignness.

Unlike the product images, lifestyle photos of people and homes tended to communicate American culture more directly. This was achieved by using mostly Caucasian models with a few other races mixed in. The absence of Asian models among the Asian brands was noticeable. Homes tended to have the typical features of American suburban houses, such as large driveways and garages, porches, siding, beige and brown interiors, large open floor plans, etc.

Following Stuart Hall's (1997a) definition of culture as shared language and shared meanings, it stands out that all four carmakers used very similar language and had websites with rather similar layouts, content, and images. This is done to the point that differences between cultures have been erased in favor of a common language of carmaker websites. Differences in practice are minor at best. This was achieved not only by what was said, but possibly even more by what was omitted, both in terms of the visuals and the content (company history, worldwide business statistics, etc.). Because the constructed meaning is so similar especially among the foreign carmakers, they are not able to use it to gain a sense of identity because in this case meaning really does not distinguish one manufacturer from another. The companies' COO, which could have been used as a symbol to represent positive qualities of that particular country, was almost entirely erased in favor of an artificial 'Americanness.'

Update. The four sites were visited again in March, 2013 to confirm whether representation of origin had changed since the original analysis. In short, it had not. In fact, the imagery and layout of the sites had hardly changed. Ford's website still featured global information about manufacturing, sales, sustainability, and more (Ford website, 2013).

Toyota's American homepage (Toyota website, 2013) had become even more centered on the car buying experience due to an interactive "shop assist" feature. The corporate pages still did not mention Japan and very much focused on the United States. The company did briefly address manufacturing facilities in Canada and Mexico, but nothing outside of North America. The site even mentioned an American design agency that Toyota works with on the design of the vehicles – something that one might expect would typically occur at the headquarters in Japan.

Only the investor relations reports that could be downloaded from the page mentioned that Toyota's world headquarters are in Japan.

Hyundai still offered to display the site in Korean (now aside from Spanish or Chinese), but no longer provided direct links to the international Hyundai websites (Hyundai website, 2013). The HMMA still existed as a separate entity and had not changed. Also the corporate section of the main homepage had remained exactly the same, using the same wording about being "reborn in the U.S.A" and saying that "Hyundai may be a Korean company, but" Hyundai's Korean heritage was not mentioned and all corporate information focused on the United States. On both the Toyota and the Hyundai websites, the absence of pictures showing Asians or Asian Americans was still noticeable and backdrops of images were still rather nondescript.

Visually, Volkswagen's website had barely changed at all. The company still used puns, however, it can be argued that "Springtoberfest" (Volkswagen website, 2013) was indeed a reference to its German origin. And while the "values" section managed to address company values without tying them to its heritage, it did mention that the vehicles are "Autobahn-inspired." Yet these two details were not indicators of a general change in communication. The corporate pages had remained as they were, mentioning Germany – if at all – only in combination with the United States or the world, and emphasizing that VW had become a part of its local communities in Tennessee, Virginia, California, and Michigan. It also still used a large American flag on the corporate site and emphasized its commitment to America.

Overall, aside from a few details, representation of origin on these websites did not change since 2011.

Interview study

As previously mentioned, the 11 participants represented 19 brands: nine from the United States and 10 foreign brands (five Japanese, two South Korean, two German, and one Swedish).

RQ1a: Do practitioners perceive COO as an important communication consideration?

RQ1b: If so, how do they address that concern?

Because regional similarities became apparent, interview answers were combined for the three global regions, United States, Europe, and Asia.

American brands. Representatives of American companies differed in how important they perceived COO to be for their brands. Answers ranged from “enormously important” to “less and less important.” According to one practitioner, COO today is less important as a key driver of purchase decisions than other factors: “We do know that drivers like fuel economy, like value, quality (both in terms of appearance and look and feel, but also quality in terms of long term reliability), these factors are far more major drivers in the car purchase than the country of origin.” Another interviewee emphasized that COO is an important part of his brand and can, but must not be, a decisive factor for purchase decisions.

However, all interviewees agreed that consumers are very aware of where cars are made and that some will only buy American vehicles. One interviewee said:

Because [our brand] is so well-known . . . , [COO is] not something we tend to focus our communications on. I think if people were asked to name five American companies, [we] might well come up as one because of that high awareness. And because of that awareness, it allows us to very much focus on what we believe . . . [are] the key drivers of

the purchase decision. . . . It would be interesting if Americans didn't know [our brand] – I think that we'd have a very different approach if Americans didn't know that [our brand] was an American brand. If we were a new company in America, I think we might have a different approach. But we are a company of 100+ years of American [history]. . . . I think because of that, we don't really contemplate celebrating that American heritage. I don't think we shy away from it at any point, but it's not something we actively and aggressively promote.

Even though all interviewees were aware that all their brands are construed as American, the practitioners were very careful about how they defined what constitutes an American vehicle. While their companies are based in the United States, many of the vehicles are built, for instance, in Mexico and Canada. Interviewees were very clear about not wanting to conceal this fact and not promoting vehicles as American if they are not indeed manufactured in the United States. This leads to a situation where COO is often not communicated at all or only communicated for those brands and vehicles that are actually manufactured exclusively within the United States. In addition, COO tends to be more important for vehicle types that are considered to be quintessentially American, such as pickup trucks. In this case, American vehicles are associated with being long lasting and dependable, which according to one practitioner are quintessentially American values.

Interviewees also emphasized regional differences within the United States. Detroit as a manufacturing location is indeed a very important asset to communicate because the companies want to show their support for their hometown and region. One practitioner even said that for his company Detroit as the city of origin may indeed be more important than the United States as country of origin. Because American brands are so concerned with the location of

manufacturing, communication strategies vary regionally. In an area where vehicles are produced, the location (city, region and country) of origin is very much central to the communication strategy. In other areas, however, it is not. Practitioners agreed that regional differences may have a greater impact on their communication strategy than differences in the types of public they talk to (consumers, dealers, etc.).

Practitioners also frequently mentioned regional differences in respect to consumers' general attitudes towards American-made vehicles. One interviewee said: "Our large markets for pickups are in Texas and in the Sunbelt, and those are fiercely patriotic people, and they want to know that they are getting an American truck, so we will tell them that." Another area mentioned where the brands "wave the American flag" was the Midwest. California, on the other hand, was cited as a region where an emphasis on COO might in fact be detrimental to success: "Being an American company doesn't help you sell cars in California. In California, actually, they don't want American cars; they've lined up not to buy American cars because they believe that American cars are poor quality, bad fuel economy, not for them."

This is in part due to another point that came up frequently in the interviews, namely that American vehicles do not necessarily have a good reputation among American consumers, especially not for smaller passenger vehicles and luxury vehicles. One practitioner mentioned that many consumers remember the American cars their families owned in the 1970s, '80s and even '90s, that were not always dependable or desirable, or that they are just generally associated with being cars for older generations. Therefore, among some consumers, an American origin can be perceived as negative, even though the brands are working hard to build great vehicles that prove these beliefs wrong. Part of the strategy here, too, is to emphasize when new passenger vehicles are built in the United States and by American workers. One interviewee

mentioned that it is very difficult for any brand to produce subcompact cars profitably within the United States, but that it was important for his brand to find a way to do it and make it “an important part of our story.”

Interestingly, the representative of one American company mentioned that for this particular brand, great success in China was what made the brand attractive again to American consumers and helped it to regain some credibility that it had lost along the way.

Because of the complexity of the American perception of American vehicles, COO is not mentioned very frequently in national communication outputs. It is typically part of the boilerplate in press releases and included in the talking points for media, but not showcased too much aside from that. Rather, it is inserted more subtly, and it is more likely to be mentioned among publics who are not as familiar with the automotive industry and might not be as aware of which brands belong to which companies.

One of the more subtle strategies of communicating COO is by partnering up with American institutions such as NASCAR, for instance. One practitioner explained: “NASCAR, for example, is a purely American sport, born and raised here, and we know that a lot of our customers and potential customers follow that sport - and we are very prominent in it. We win a lot there; and people like to identify with a win.”

Nevertheless, as one practitioner said:

We don’t overtly put “We are an American company and we are proud of it” in communications. However, if anyone ever asked, or if the communication is a back and forth, there’s certainly never an opportunity we wouldn’t say, absolutely yes, we are an American company and we are proud of that.

European brands. Representatives of the European brands under analysis all agreed that the country of origin of their respective brand is an important consideration for their communication and messaging. One interviewee even said he believed it was the number one reason why Americans buy a car from his brand. It was also mentioned that even though car brands may be sold to companies from different countries, it is crucial that the original culture and philosophy that are reflective of the original COO are kept intact. While it is becoming more and more common in the industry that foreign investors buy struggling companies, one practitioner pointed out: “It’s not necessarily about who owns it, it’s about where the designers are and what are they influenced by and is the design of the car and the car itself – are they reflective of that home country from which they come?” He later provided a comparison with soccer to further illustrate his point:

In the English Premier League, the world’s most famous football league, Manchester United, the world’s most famous soccer team, is owned by an American. So does that mean it’s any less English because it’s owned by an American? No. And even though they have players from Spain or France or Germany on the Manchester United team, does that make the team any less English? No. It doesn’t. So that’s where I’m going.

Practitioners cited different country stereotypes that work to their advantage. All European interviewees mentioned that their brands are associated with outstanding engineering and technology. The German brands, for example, emphasized the connotation of German engineering, which signifies durability, well-built products, craftsmanship and cars engineered for the Autobahn “where there are no speed limits, so the cars are created with extra robustness and also quality.” One interviewee also mentioned that cars are somewhat of a religion in Germany: “People are very religious about their cars, they don’t eat in their cars in Germany, and

the more highly educated and well-travelled customer understands that the Germans have a more holy connection to their automobiles and the transportation business in general.” He also pointed out that while American consumers may not consciously think about such factors when making a purchase decision, it is something they are subconsciously aware of.

The same interviewee mentioned the importance of the engineer in German automotive culture. He said that while in America, engineers are “just one of many people” at a car company, in Germany they “are the superstars” and because they also tend to speak good English, they “can really explain the technology in a sexy, super smart manner.” Because of that, it has become commonplace to use German engineers as spokespeople for automotive media. According to the interviewee, this is something that American journalists enjoy greatly because they make fun of the German engineers’ translations and word creations, but at the same time they respect them and see them as authentic.

The representative of the Swedish company, on the other hand, mentioned technology directly related to Sweden:

We are working on a new safety technology with animal detection, where the car will actually identify large animals on the side of the road with a camera and radar and track them, because as you probably know, in Europe, there is a lot greater chance that you will be driving along and a deer or an elk or a moose will come out on a country road and they can do a lot of damage. So that kind of technology we focus on and it does translate to the United States, because there are a lot of places in the U.S. where large animals can be a safety hazard. So we talk a lot about that. . . . Whenever there’s other technologies that we’ve invented or that we’ve patented over the years and we’ve shared with other car companies over the years, we bring Sweden into that mix.

Aside from engineering, the European design of the vehicles played an important role as well. Even though not all vehicles are actually produced in Europe, they are all designed there at the company headquarters. Interviewees mentioned the emotional component of European design culture, which they cited as something especially the automotive media could very well relate to and understand after the numerous business trips they have taken to Europe. One interviewee saw the country of origin of his brand as an added value that is helpful especially in the luxury sector. While a \$12,000 and a \$200,000 car can both take them to the same place, it is often philosophy and emotional values that help consumers justify the luxury purchase, he said. The country of origin and what it stands for were seen as such an emotional asset. European practitioners were not as concerned about where their cars are actually produced as long as the design is European.

Country stereotypes vary between different European countries. The representative of a Swedish brand said that Swedish culture is considered to be about the collective group rather than the individual. Because of that, the brand's philosophy is that cars are driven by people and that the priority of the company needs to be safety in order to protect the people in the cars. A representative of a German company, on the other hand, said that Germany is associated with precision and correctness. He mentioned that this even goes so far that the automotive press reacts even more sensitively to typos and mistakes coming from a German company because perfection and attention to detail are expected.

Practitioners also mentioned that while they try to have a consistent messaging strategy across different publics, how much they push the COO of their brands varies depending on publics, circumstances, and media. While messages get adapted to the American market, they are kept as close to the original from the European headquarters as possible. On the other hand,

certain products, especially large SUVs, are specifically created for the American market and would be considered “big gas-guzzling piggish cars” in Europe. For these, a unified communication strategy across markets is not always possible.

While the interviewees agreed that COO plays a big role for their brands, these opinions do not necessarily result in frequent mentions of the COO in communication outputs. One practitioner stated that COO gets mentioned frequently in government and corporate communication, but it is relatively absent in product communication where it could distract consumers from thinking about the product itself that they want to buy. It was also mentioned that the European headquarters is not always comfortable with mentions of what could be perceived as national pride and prefers to speak about global perspectives. One practitioner put it simply: “It’s better to be global now.” At the same time, practitioners assume that consumers are already aware of their brand’s country of origin, so that the actual heritage is implied even when a different angle is promoted. But also an American angle is sometimes taken when European heritage is downplayed in favor of displaying pride of American production facilities.

Asian brands. Out of the five public relations practitioners interviewed, four said that the Asian country of origin of their brands was important or very important for their communication strategy in the United States. Only one said it is less important than it used to be. Overall, there appears to be a difference between Japanese and South Korean brands in respect to how well they are received by American consumers. Japanese brands have been on the U.S. market longer than South Korean brands, and while they were not considered to be high quality in the beginning, the perception of American consumers has changed and there was agreement among

the interviewees that being a Japanese brand today is an asset. South Korean brands entered the market later and are still not as well-received as Japanese brands.

This shift in attitude was the reason why one representative of a Japanese manufacturer stated that COO is not as important for his company anymore as it used to be even 10 years ago when it was still “a major issue.” He believes that “consumers are more and more aware and more accepting of that it’s a global economy and that brands that they buy are international and it [COO] is less of an important purchase reason.” As indicated by the fact that all other interviewees stated that COO was still important, this impression was not generally shared by the other brands. One practitioner said that no matter where you produce and how many facilities you have in the U.S., “your brand impression will always be known as your country of origin. So . . . we are very much known as a Japanese manufacturer globally, and I think that’s the brand impression that many consumers have.”

One thing that helped Asian brands was to invest heavily in the U.S. market and establish American manufacturing plants, to the point that some produce the majority of their vehicles in the United States. This allows these brands to talk about employing American workers and producing vehicles that are in fact American. One interviewee even stated that for his particular brand, the country of origin of the product is the United States. Several practitioners mentioned that when it comes to where cars and parts are produced, the Toyota Camry, for instance, is more American than many vehicles produced by American-based companies. It is facts like this one that play an important role in the communication strategy of Asian car companies because it helps them to counteract accusations that they take jobs overseas and don’t support American suppliers.

One interviewee compared the situation of Japanese car companies to a person:

Overall, I would describe it as an individual who . . . was born in Japan, has Asian descent, looks Asian, but has lived in America most of their lives. They are American, they certainly portray American patterns in their speech, in their mannerisms, and the environment that they interact with, but it is obvious from their outward appearance that they are Asian or Japanese. And they have a cultural background in Japan. I think it's very similar to the way that companies present themselves. While they may have an origin that is unmistakable from a certain area of the world, the way that people perceive them has to do with how they interact on a day-to-day basis.

As several practitioners mentioned, the situation is slightly different for Asian-made luxury vehicles. Due to smaller numbers, these tend to still be produced in the home country, but this is not perceived negatively by consumers because luxury vehicles tend to be foreign-made in general. Therefore, consumers do not expect anything different and they may even perceive a foreign COO as an asset. When it comes to luxury brands, the communication can thus revolve much more around COO than in the case of other brands.

Interestingly, however, producing regular passenger vehicles in the United States is not always positive in the eyes of consumers, either. In the case of the Japanese brands, some consumers actually want to buy an import car because they associate them with cutting-edge technology and are not sure they will receive the same quality if the car is produced within the United States. One interviewee mentioned that there was a time when a particular model on the American market was available as a U.S.-built *and* a Japanese-built car and consumers in fact asked for the vehicles made in Japan.

Most interviewees said that the COO of their brands is not mentioned frequently in communication outputs. One participant said that while his brand would never pretend not to be a Japanese company, business dealings in the U.S. “can be fine-tuned in terms of their local identity. And that’s really what we attempt to do when we are communicating.”

However, several practitioners mentioned that investor relations are an exception because investors expect them to be very transparent and to be knowledgeable about the economic climate in the country of origin, current exchange rates, government policy, and more. Also government relations was cited as an exception. Regulators and elected officials are concerned about jobs in the United States, so it is important to communicate to them about American investments and employees and to highlight how the United States benefit from the presence of the company. Aside from that, one representative of a Japanese company explained that the 2011 tsunami in Japan led to an increase of mention of COO especially in community relations. Also occasions when production is shifted from Japan to other countries tend to be instances when COO is included in communication.

While all the other brands emphasized how American their vehicles really are today, only one brand representative portrayed his company as completely Japanese. Incidentally, this company also does not build any vehicles in the United States. According to this spokesperson, being a Japanese car manufacturer is very beneficial because Japanese cars are associated with high quality. Because of that, it is very important to this company to mention its heritage and to maintain a Japanese design language. This manufacturer compares its history to the history of Japan and even uses Japanese expressions to explain its designs to American publics. According to its representative, being Japanese allows the company to tell stories that relate to its origin and to tell them “in a more lyrical manner” than companies from other countries can. This is because

Japanese culture is “softer” and “gentler,” and the storytelling tradition is steeped in Japanese culture, while European cultures, for instance, are “more fact-based, more hard edged, more results-oriented.” Yet, even this company only mentions its origin on a case-by-case basis in its communication outputs.

As previously explained, representatives of South Korean companies stated explicitly that they do not perceive the COO of their brands as an asset. They said it is important for their work to keep their heritage in mind in order to be sensitive and understand that other companies have been on the market longer and that the American media are therefore biased against South Korean companies. They also mentioned the importance of being aware that some American consumers perceive foreign brands as a threat. One practitioner mentioned regional differences, saying that in the Detroit area, for example, his brand is always going to have a difficult time appealing to both consumers and local media because they “are still pulling [for] the Big Three [meaning GM, Ford and Chrysler].” Another interviewee made it clear that the best he can hope for is that the COO of his brand is irrelevant to consumers, because if it is relevant, it tends to be “an elimination factor.” He said: “There are certain portions of our market that just won’t consider us because we are a Korean company and a Korean brand.”

Consequently, South Korean practitioners are relatively unlikely to mention COO in their communication outputs in the United States, but they do include it in the media release boilerplate for accuracy. Aside from that, practitioners could not think of many outputs where it may play a role. One practitioner said: “I guess if you dug deep enough on [our] U.S. website, you’d find something about Seoul.”

Representatives of all South Korean brands emphasize how invested their companies are in the U.S. market, especially when communicating with dealers. One interviewee also said that rather than presenting the brand as South Korean, he presents it as global.

RQ2: What strategies and tactics are used to reach the U.S. market?

While the representatives of most brands under analysis stated that country of origin is an important consideration for their communication, none of them could think of any specific strategies or policies for how it is addressed. When asked about this, practitioners typically responded that this is something they decide on a case-by-case basis and that they mention their COO “when it fits.”

American brands. The practitioners of some of the American brands said they were more likely to highlight other attributes of their products, assuming that COO is in a way implied because consumers know about their origin and because the specific attributes of the cars are tailored to North American taste. However, when specific models are built in the U.S., the COO will usually be mentioned. As one interviewee said: “We don’t have policies, but we do have practices.”

When asked whether there were any differences between their strategies for mention of COO in PR and advertising, representatives of different brands agreed that advertising focuses mainly on selling the product and its features within 30 or 60 seconds, which leaves no room for COO. However, COO does play a role in public relations. They thought it to be especially important in regions where vehicles are built, because it can be the local tie-in for the story.

Regionally then, COO might indeed also appear in advertising, namely in the case when local dealers create their own messaging:

Some dealers go very much out of their way to wave the American flag, and I think that that is, again, regional. I think that . . . if you go out to Nebraska, Iowa, if you go out to the breadbasket of America, down to parts of Kentucky or wherever, Texas maybe, you'll find some dealers who very much go out of their way to wrap themselves in the American flag because they feel that's what their customers want to hear. So that's different than how we are from a corporate point of view.

European brands. Representatives of European brands stated that COO plays a more important role in corporate communications than in product communications. Overall, they could think of no policies for how COO is communicated. However, they did say that it is often done by employing metaphors, emotional appeals, and jokes, rather than in direct matter-of-fact statements.

One exception may be one brand that included a reference to its COO in its tagline, which is used to promote all vehicles. Because the tagline appears in all advertising materials, it is a very constant reference and reminder of COO. The company representative was aware that this is something other brands do not do:

You don't have that in a lot of our competitors. I think that in your studies you will find that we're probably the strongest or as strong as anyone else in tying back to our . . . heritage than any other brand because it is something that has a great reputation of quality and safety and things that we want to remind people of when they are deciding on a car purchase.

He also mentioned strict communication and legal guidelines to make sure that the tagline is only used in the correct context when it is truthful and there is a real advantage to tout.

While this company's tagline automatically introduces COO to advertising materials, the other brands saw COO as something that is more important for public relations than for advertising because it can communicate an emotional appeal and even luxury. When dealing with automotive press, it is common to bring journalists to the country of origin and tell a story surrounding a new vehicle. One practitioner mentioned that especially online media need to create a lot of content, which is why they are very prone to using puns and talking about heritage in an informal way.

Asian brands. Also the representatives of the Asian brands could not think of any specific guidelines or policies that they follow in respect to how COO is communicated. One interviewee explained: "There are certainly no rules. I guess if we think it's going to help add something to the conversation, we will bring it up." On the flipside, practitioners said there are also no rules as to when *not* to mention COO. However, one interviewee said. "I think that in a very general sense we characterize our company as a global company with its headquarters in Japan. In terms of just style and consistency, that's really the only – and I hate to call it a policy—that's the only practice that I can think of that we generally try to adhere to." Another interviewee mentioned that in his company there is a specific wording for how to refer to the American headquarters of his brand and distinguish it from the headquarter in the home country, as well as other brands from the same COO: "We have Q&A documents for our executives to use when answering questions from the media, and that language is very specific and approved by our legal department."

Asked about whether they employ specific strategies or tactics when communicating about origin, a couple of interviewees mentioned using terms from the language of their brands'

COO, such as “monozukuri” (Japanese for “the art of making things”) or KODO (a Japanese design language that is “meant to evoke the strength and the length of movement that is embodied in a leap of cheetah”). They do not have any pre-defined practices for when to use this language, so they rely on it when they see fit.

Practitioners were split on whether there are any significant differences between public relations and advertising in respect to whether and how COO is communicated. Some emphasized the importance of speaking with one voice across platforms. The others stated that to them, public relations was more likely to employ references to COO than advertising because advertising is very product-focused and references to COO could distract consumers from making purchase decisions. In public relations, on the other hand, COO is mentioned more frequently, even if it is just because it appears in the boilerplates of news releases. One practitioner said:

Advertising, I would say, is less apt to refer to country of origin. In fact, I can’t think of anything in our advertising that has really referenced country of origin, other than the origin of our vehicles that are made in the US. And that is pertinent, I think, to your project. We do talk about country of origin, but not Japan. It’s U.S. and North America. . . . So it does play a role, but not in the context of us being from a foreign country.

RQ3a: Do practitioners believe that country of origin can be an enhancing or limiting factor when doing business in the U.S.?

RQ3b: If so, have they noticed any attitude changes within the American population?

All practitioners agreed that country of origin can be both a limiting and enhancing factor depending on the circumstances and the respective COO. For the automotive industry in the United States, there was general agreement that an American COO or a European COO is usually quite good to have, and that certain Asian COOs are not necessarily beneficial. However, rather than Japan or South Korea, practitioners usually referred to China and India as being negative in these cases.

Japanese vehicles were described by interviewees from all regions as being practical and as having high quality, technology, and precision, but only the representatives of the Japanese brands themselves thought of them as having good design and styling. They also tended to say that Americans have a high impression of their brands. Representatives of American and European brands, on the other hand, did see their respective COOs as being relatively similar to one another in respect to reputation, with Asian brands somewhat behind and lacking in style.

South Korean vehicles were generally perceived as similar to Japanese vehicles, although with a reputation that still lags behind and is more similar to the reputation of Japanese brands several years ago. A representative of a South Korean company said: "I think that Koreans are now recognized as being extremely hardworking, dedicated, producing quality products. So I don't think of that as a negative at all, except for some very old-school thinking, a kind of protectionism or something like that." The representative of the other South Korean company, however, was less optimistic, stating: "I do think that Korean bias, if you will, bias against Koreans and their culture or whatever, is definitely a challenge in the marketplace in the U.S."

Also the representative of one of the Japanese companies thought that communicating COO would be more challenging for South Korean brands than for Japanese brands.

There was no general consensus as to whether an American or a European origin would be easier to communicate successfully on the American market. A representative of several American brands said: “Sometimes there’s still a lagging perception that vehicles made in the U.S. are not as good, but studies in the U.S. are showing that they are as good as vehicles made anywhere else, so that’s for us to communicate.” He said that his company operates a plant where two similar vehicles are produced – one for an American brand and one for a European brand. Both are manufactured by the same people on the same assembly line, and yet consumers believe that the vehicle by the European brand is better quality.

The other two interviewees from American companies viewed American origin more positively. One of them explained: “I think what we find is that if all else is equal, we do have a small advantage being American. If all else is equal, meaning the price is about the same, I like the looks of both cars, the quality is the same, the fuel economy is the same, the value is about the same.” The third interviewee held a similar view: “If you are going to try to win in the marketplace in the United States, your country of origin being the United States gives you the best chance for success. But everyone has proven that you can find success even if that isn’t the case, for sure.”

European origin was generally viewed to be beneficial in the luxury sector. A representative of a European company also said he believes that European brands have an easier time in North America than other foreign brands because “the Europeans just have more in common with the Americans than not. . . . There are always misunderstandings, but there are less of them with the Europeans and the Americans.” Another advantage that was mentioned was the

origin of the American public itself where most consumers can trace their family histories back to Europe and they are proud of that heritage. These impressions voiced by practitioners from European brands were supported by a practitioner from an Asian brand who said that European companies benefit from their cultural and historical similarity to the United States, as well as from being on the market longer and having become a well-accepted part of American consumption.

Patriotism. Interviewees were also asked whether their brands address American patriotism and the possibility that consumers may prefer to buy American. For American brands, patriotism was generally seen as an advantage, even though not all cars are indeed produced in the United States. The representative of one company said: “Since we are an American brand, they [American consumers] construe what we sell, for the most part, as American brands. So even though some of the cars are made in Canada and some vehicles are made in Mexico, they are not construed as foreign-made vehicles.” Because of that, American brands generally benefit from consumer patriotism.

One representative of an American company saw a direct connection between patriotism and sales:

After 9/11 we had a surge of patriotism in the country, and I think our market share. . . .

People had a surge in pride and since they know that we are American, that probably had a positive impact. And when we are at war, there are different time periods that American pride starts to surge and I think that is good for us. Because they do identify us as an American brand.

Representatives of two European brands reported that they do not explicitly address American patriotism, yet they do frequently mention their investments in the American market. However, one interviewee also stated that his company does not do anything to address American patriotism: “Well, we are aware of that, but if people already have that attitude, they are not going to be shopping our brand. So you can’t worry about that.”

Interviewees from Asian brands also stated that they do not explicitly mention patriotism in their campaigns, but (with the exception of one brand) they do emphasize that many of their products are built in the United States because they know that it is an “important consideration for a select number of buyers in the country.” It is a common strategy to cite third-party sources for this kind of information in order to increase credibility. One interviewee also mentioned the importance of dealers that support the local communities because those are very visible to American consumers.

Change over time. With one exception, all interviewees agreed that there have been changes in consumer perception of certain COOs over time.

For American vehicles, all representatives of these companies agreed that cars from 10 or 20 years ago that were not as high in quality as they should have been, still have an impact on consumer attitudes today because:

. . . the perception always lags behind reality in this market. Because cars are so expensive, that if people had a bad experience 10, 15 years ago, even if you’ve improved greatly, they are not going to forgive you for it right away and they will just assume that you are still making junk. But we tell them, look, everything has shown that our quality has improved. Once a consumer has been burned after spending a lot of money for a

vehicle, it's hard to win them back. So after a bad experience, we are probably not going to get them back for a while.

However, the practitioners from American brands also reported that they believe the reputation of their vehicles has greatly improved and they are winning customers back.

All representatives of Asian brands mentioned that several years ago (when exactly, differed between “in the 60s” and as recently as “seven years ago”) there was a time when American publics perceived their vehicles to be of low quality or they just generally disliked Asian brands, but that their reputation and sales have much improved since then. One interviewee explained:

There were days 30 years ago where people were slashing tires of Toyota and Honda cars in parking lots. If you drove a Honda or a Toyota or a Japanese car, you'd be forced to park far away from where you worked if you worked in the auto industry. You don't see much of that anymore.

There was a general consensus among the Asian brands that opinions used to be more polarized in former decades between people who would only buy American and people who would only buy foreign, but that this polarization has weakened. One practitioner revealed that his company surveys the market for the top 10 reasons why consumers purchase or reject its vehicles and he said that while COO used to be among the top reasons for either side, it no longer is. He also mentioned that the previously existing polarization has returned to a degree during the recent recession because some Americans responded to the crisis by buying more American, while others were upset about the bailouts of American car manufacturers and bought fewer American vehicles.

Recession. Interviewees were asked whether the recent recession had an impact on how their company's country of origin is perceived. While most brands' sales suffered during the recession, interviewees of different brands mentioned different experiences.

One representative of an American company said that during the recession, his company used more patriotic appeals and messages designed to say "we are all in this together," which benefitted his company. But the economic crisis created new challenges for American brands as well. Two companies out of the "Big Three" (GM, Ford, Chrysler) received bailout money from the government, which was not necessarily seen favorably by media and consumers who tended to talk about the bankruptcy of the American car companies. At this time, the one company that did *not* receive bailout money put great emphasis on separating itself from being part of the Big Three: "At that point, we did have a very clear policy of defining what it meant to be an American brand in that we were this successful American company, we were different." The company also paid close attention to the media and requested corrections every time it was claimed that "the American car companies were going bankrupt." According to this practitioner, being the American company that did not go bankrupt eventually caused an "astronomical" increase in favorability.

A practitioner from an Asian company also referred to the bailout crisis and said his company may have benefited from it because it made American publics reconsider how they view foreign brands. An interviewee from another Asian brand, on the other hand, said that while the crisis caused consumers to buy fewer American vehicles for a while (especially from the two companies that received bailout money), this is no longer an advantage for foreign brands: "There is a very heavy 'buy American' sentiment again in the U.S. Americans are, as you know, wonderfully nationalistic, unlike any other country . . . , I would argue."

However, it was also mentioned by two practitioners that Asian vehicles, which tend to offer a good value for the money, became more appealing to some American consumers because of the recession. One interviewee cited a journalist saying that “value was the new cool” and said this is indeed reflected in his company’s sales figures.

A representative of a European brand, on the other hand, talked about how the recession forced his company to become more innovative to remain competitive on a shrinking market. This led the company to adjust better to the needs of the American public that differed from the home country, which eventually led to record sales levels for more high-end vehicles. Therefore, the consequences of the recession must be viewed as extremely complex with opportunities and challenges for companies from all countries.

RQ4: Are practitioners aware of the country-of-origin effect?

Not one of the interviewees had ever heard of the country-of-origin effect. However, when the researcher explained it, almost all of them expressed interest in it and found it very applicable to their daily work in public relations. The researcher was encouraged by participants to continue this line of research and include different product categories. A practitioner of a German brand explained how he could relate to the country-of-origin effect:

I mean, any relationship, if you are married or you have brothers or sisters, any relationship that you have with your business or your colleagues or your professor is based on managing expectations. So when I talk to my media, they have the expectation that I work for a German car company and that I know certain things and that the car will deliver in a certain way. So in theory, that makes a lot of sense in that people will expect things based on the country of origin. So when you talk about being successful with a

customer or in relationship with a media person, the management of that expectation has a lot to do with country of origin.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS - EXPERIMENT

As previously noted, data were analyzed from 489 college students who were assigned to one of nine cells (eight treatment groups or control group). Appropriate statistical tests were performed to test the research questions and hypotheses. Questions and hypotheses regarding the COO effect were tested first, followed by those about organization-public relationships.

RQ1: Is there a relationship between OPR and COO effect?

Correlation coefficients were computed among the COO indices and the standardized factor scores for OPR. The results of the correlational analyses are presented in Table 6. It shows that 18 out of the 28 correlations were statistically significant. Because all indices and factors were compared, several of these correlations occurred between factors of the same variable. All COO indices correlated with one another: GCA and GPA ($r(287) = .50, p < .01$), GCA and SPA ($r(287) = .39, p < .01$), and GPA and SPA ($r(287) = .70, p < .01$). Among the OPR factors only OPR 1 (Conversational Human Voice / Positivity) and OPR 2 (Communicated Relational Commitment, $r(287) = .11, p = .01$), OPR 2 (Communicated Relational Commitment) and OPR 4 (Task Sharing, $r(287) = .09, p = .02$), and OPR 3 (Responsiveness) and OPR 4 (Task Sharing, $r(287) = .09, p = .02$) correlated with one another. These correlations were frequently weak, but were not a central focus of the study.

More interestingly, there were also significant correlations between COO and OPR factors. In fact, all OPR factors except Dialogue (OPR 5) were significantly correlated with all

Table 6*Bivariate correlations between COO indices and OPR factors*

		GCA	GPA	SPA	OPR 1	OPR 2	OPR 3	OPR 4	OPR 5
GCA	Pearson <i>r</i>	1							
	Sig. (2-tailed)	-							
	<i>N</i>	489							
GPA	Pearson <i>r</i>	.507***	1						
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	-						
	<i>N</i>	489	489						
SPA	Pearson <i>r</i>	.392***	.703***	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	-					
	<i>N</i>	489	489	489					
OPR 1	Pearson <i>r</i>	.124**	.114*	.101*	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	.011	.026	-				
	<i>N</i>	489	489	489	489				
OPR 2	Pearson <i>r</i>	.118**	.094*	.154**	.115*	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	.037	.001	.011	-			
	<i>N</i>	489	489	489	489	489			
OPR 3	Pearson <i>r</i>	.124**	.190***	.227***	.042	.020	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	.000	.000	.354	.656	-		
	<i>N</i>	489	489	489	489	489	489		
OPR 4	Pearson <i>r</i>	.235***	.204***	.202***	.026	.099*	.099*	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.564	.028	.029	-	
	<i>N</i>	489	489	489	489	489	489	489	
OPR 5	Pearson <i>r</i>	.084	.050	.051	.071	.013	.073	-.006	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.064	.274	.261	.116	.780	.106	.900	-
	<i>N</i>	489	489	489	489	489	489	489	489

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

COO indices: OPR 1 with GCA ($r(287) = .12, p < .01$), GPA ($r(287) = .11, p = .01$), and SPA ($r(287) = .10, p = .02$), OPR 2 with GCA ($r(287) = .11, p < .01$), GPA ($r(287) = .09, p = .03$), and SPA ($r(287) = .15, p < .01$), OPR 3 with GCA ($r(287) = .12, p < .01$), GPA ($r(287) = .19, p < .01$), and SPA ($r(287) = .22, p < .01$), and OPR 4 with GCA ($r(287) = .23, p < .01$), GPA ($r(287) = .20, p < .01$), and SPA ($r(287) = .20, p < .01$). For an overview see Table 6.

These relationships indicate that it is indeed justified to bring OPR and COO together.

Country-of-origin effect

To measure the relationships between independent and dependent variables in this study, a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was used. This procedure was chosen in order to reduce Type I error, to account for possible interaction effects among the independent variables, and because it allowed to control for ethnocentrism and brand attitude.

First, a three-way MANCOVA was conducted to test the hypothesized impact of COO stimulus (U.S., South Korea, control), appeals (global appeals, appeals to patriotism, control), and interactivity (high, low, control) on COO effect (GCA, GPA, and SPA) while controlling for ethnocentrism and brand attitude. Because Box's Test of Covariance Matrices was not significant ($p = 0.34$), the MANCOVA using Wilks' Lambda proved to be appropriate in this case. The multivariate tests found significant results for several variables and combinations of variables.

Main effects were found for country of origin (Wilks' $\lambda = .85, F(3, 475) = 27.79, p < 0.01, \eta^2 = .14$) and appeals (Wilks' $\lambda = .98, F(3, 475) = 2.70, p = 0.04, \eta^2 = .01$), and interaction effects for country of origin*appeals (Wilks' $\lambda = .96, F(3, 475) = 6.62, p < 0.01, \eta^2 = .04$) and country of origin*interactivity (Wilks' $\lambda = .98, F(3, 475) = 2.66, p = 0.04, \eta^2 = .01$). Significant

main effects were also discovered for the brand attitude covariates (Ford: Wilks' $\lambda = .92$, $F(3, 475) = 13.52$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta^2 = .07$; Hyundai: Wilks' $\lambda = .93$, $F(3, 475) = 11.34$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta^2 = .06$). Table 7 contains the means and standard deviations on the dependent variables for the independent variables. Table 8 shows the significance values for between-subjects effects. It indicates highly significant relationships for COO and for the brand attitude covariates, as well as a somewhat weaker, but still significant relationship for appeals. Analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) on each COO index were conducted as follow-up tests to the MANCOVA to test research questions and hypotheses.

H1: The American COO will be seen more positively than the South Korean COO.

Follow-up ANCOVAs to the MANCOVA were conducted to test the relationship between country of origin and the COO effect while controlling for ethnocentrism and brand attitude.

For General Country Attributes (GCA), the ANCOVA was significant, $F(2, 483) = 37.97$, $MSE = 45.29$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .13$. Pairwise comparisons showed that the country of origin of Ford ($M = 49.46$, $SD = 6.55$) was rated significantly higher than that of Hyundai ($M = 43.66$, $SD = 7.55$, M difference = 5.79, $p < .01$). The control group, which was asked to think of a car company and complete the COO questionnaire for it, rated GCA significantly higher ($M = 46.67$, $SD = 5.80$) than Hyundai (M difference = 3.01, $p = .01$) and significantly lower than Ford (M difference = -2.78, $p = .02$).

For General Product Attributes (GPA), the ANCOVA was significant, $F(2, 483) = 10.54$, $MSE = 47.14$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$. Pairwise comparisons showed that products from the home country of Ford ($M = 63.88$, $SD = 6.96$) were rated significantly higher than those from the

Table 7*Means and standard deviations on COO indices for the independent variables*

		General Country Attributes (GCA)		General Product Attributes (GPA)		Specific Product Attributes (SPA)	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
COO	U.S. (Ford)	49.46	6.55	63.88	6.96	36.47	5.77
	S. Korea (Hyundai)	43.66	7.55	60.80	7.39	34.86	5.59
	Control	46.67	5.80	63.58	7.11	38.28	5.31
Appeals	Patriotism	47.17	7.00	62.42	7.15	36.02	6.00
	Global	46.01	8.20	62.29	7.53	35.32	5.44
	Control	46.67	5.80	63.58	7.11	38.28	5.31
Interactivity	High	47.09	7.61	62.53	7.28	35.80	5.78
	Low	46.14	7.64	62.19	7.39	35.56	5.70
	Control	46.67	5.80	63.58	7.11	38.28	5.31

Table 8*MANCOVA: Tests of between-subjects effects COO*

	General Country Attributes	General Product Attributes	Specific Product Attributes
Ethnocentrism	.279	.965	.759
Brand attitude Ford	.000***	.000***	.000***
Brand attitude Hyundai	.000***	.000***	.000***
COO	.000***	.000***	.002***
Appeals	.042*	.543	.055
Interactivity	.151	.537	.515
COO*Appeals	.000***	.005**	.130
COO*Interactivity	.007**	.160	.111
Appeals*Interactivity	.779	.938	.597
COO*Appeals*Interactivity	.352	.702	.407

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

home country of Hyundai ($M = 60.80$, $SD = 7.39$, M difference = 3.07, $p < .01$). Also the control group rated GPA significantly higher ($M = 63.58$, $SD = 7.11$) than Hyundai (M difference = 2.78, $p = .03$). The control group rating was only slightly lower than Ford's. These differences were not significant.

Also the ANCOVA for Specific Product Attributes was significant, $F(2, 483) = 10.19$, $MSE = 27.79$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$. Pairwise comparisons showed that cars from the home country of Ford ($M = 36.47$, $SD = 5.77$) were rated significantly higher than those from the home country of Hyundai ($M = 34.86$, $SD = 5.59$, M difference = 1.61, $p < .01$). Also the control group rated SPA significantly higher ($M = 38.28$, $SD = 5.31$) than Hyundai (M difference = 3.42, $p < .01$). Again, the difference between the control group and Ford was not significant. However, interestingly, in the case of SPA the control group ratings were higher than those of both treatment groups.

The analysis showed that when controlling for ethnocentrism and brand attitude, the COO stimulus made a difference for all attributes of the COO effect and H1 was confirmed in that for all three COO indices, the American COO was rated higher than the South Korean COO. In fact, even the control group ratings were higher than the South Korean ratings.

Because the MANCOVA found interaction effects between country of origin and interactivity, as well as country of origin and appeals, further tests using ANCOVAs on select cases were conducted to analyze COO in relation to these variables.

For interactivity, the analysis revealed that whether interactivity was high or low, for all COO indices, Ford was rated higher than Hyundai. These differences were statistically significant for the high interactivity blogs for General Country Attributes (Ford: $M = 50.74$, $SD = 6.44$; Hyundai: $M = 43.31$, $SD = 6.43$; M difference = 7.43, $p < .01$), General Product Attributes

(Ford: $M = 64.40$, $SD = 6.88$; Hyundai: $M = 60.64$, $SD = 6.86$; M difference = 3.75, $p < .01$), and Specific Product Attributes (Ford: $M = 36.96$, $SD = 5.43$; Hyundai: $M = 34.63$, $SD = 5.42$; M difference = 2.33, $p < .01$), and for the low interactivity blogs for General Country Attributes (Ford: $M = 48.17$, $SD = 6.82$; Hyundai: $M = 44.08$, $SD = 6.83$; M difference = 4.09, $p < .01$). This suggests that when an American brand uses high interactivity, its advantage over a foreign company becomes even more pronounced across all dimensions of the COO effect.

For appeals, the findings were similar. No matter whether appeals to American patriotism or global appeals were used, Ford was always rated higher than Hyundai. These differences were statistically significant for the blogs with appeals to American patriotism for General Country Attributes (Ford: $M = 48.68$, $SD = 6.58$; Hyundai: $M = 45.61$, $SD = 6.56$; M difference = 3.06, $p < .01$), and for blogs with global appeals for General Country Attributes (Ford: $M = 50.19$, $SD = 6.51$; Hyundai: $M = 41.78$, $SD = 6.52$; M difference = 8.41, $p < .01$), General Product Attributes (Ford: $M = 64.69$, $SD = 6.76$; Hyundai: $M = 59.85$, $SD = 6.77$; M difference = 4.83, $p < .01$), and Specific Product Attributes (Ford: $M = 36.44$, $SD = 4.97$; Hyundai: $M = 34.15$, $SD = 4.98$; M difference = 2.29, $p < .01$). This indicates that when using global appeals, the advantage of the domestic brand over the foreign brand is even more pronounced.

The previous findings raise the question which appeals strategy produced higher COO scores for which brand. Further ANCOVAs of the relevant select cases revealed that for Ford, COO scores were consistently somewhat higher for global appeals than for appeals to American patriotism. However, these differences were not large enough to be statistically significant for any of the COO indices. For Hyundai, appeals to American patriotism consistently led to somewhat better COO scores than global appeals. These differences were statistically significant for General Country Attributes (patriotism: $M = 45.72$, $SD = 5.14$; global: $M = 41.66$, $SD = 5.14$;

M difference = 1.70, $p = .04$) and Specific Product Attributes (patriotism: $M = 35.76$, $SD = 6.86$; global: $M = 34.05$, $SD = 6.85$; M difference = 4.05, $p < .01$). This suggests that while for a domestic organization like Ford, global appeals may even be slightly more beneficial (at least not less) than appeals to American patriotism, for a foreign organization like Hyundai, appeals to American patriotism are preferable over global appeals.

RQ2: What role, if any, does ethnocentrism play in COO appraisal?

The MANCOVA revealed no main effects for ethnocentrism. Consequently, also the post-hoc ANCOVAs did not show any significant relationships.

RQ3: What role, if any, does brand attitude play in COO appraisal?

As described, the MANCOVA found significant main effects for brand attitude (Ford: Wilks' $\lambda = .92$, $F(3, 475) = 13.52$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta^2 = .07$; Hyundai: Wilks' $\lambda = .93$, $F(3, 475) = 11.34$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta^2 = .06$). In fact, after COO, the partial eta squared was highest for the two brand attitude variables. As Table 8 illustrates, both brand attitude variables showed highly significant relationships with all three indices of the COO effect. While brand attitude was not a focus of this study, this confirms the importance of controlling for brand attitude whenever studying the COO effect in relation to other independent variables.

Organization-public relationships

Another three-way MANCOVA was conducted to test the hypothesized impact of COO stimulus (U.S., South Korea, control), appeals (global appeals, appeals to patriotism, control),

and interactivity (high, low, control) on organization-public relationship (all five factors, using standardized factor scores) while controlling for ethnocentrism and brand attitude.

In this case, Box's Test of Covariance Matrices was significant ($p < 0.01$). Because cell sizes were similar, the test was continued using Pillai's Trace Criterion instead of Wilks' Lambda (Freeman & Moser, 2009; Mertler & Vannatta, 2005). The multivariate tests found significant results for several variables and combinations of variables. Main effects were found for interactivity (Pillai's Trace = .20, $F(5, 473) = 23.79$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta^2 = .20$) and interaction effects for country of origin*interactivity (Pillai's Trace = .02, $F(3, 473) = 2.73$, $p = 0.01$, $\eta^2 = .02$) and COO*appeals*interactivity (Pillai's Trace = .03, $F(3, 473) = 3.20$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta^2 = .03$). Significant main effects were also discovered for the brand attitude covariates (Ford: Pillai's Trace = .06, $F(5, 473) = 6.02$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta^2 = .06$; Hyundai: Pillai's Trace = .02, $F(5, 473) = 2.42$, $p = 0.03$, $\eta^2 = .02$) and ethnocentrism (Pillai's Trace = .02, $F(5, 473) = 2.74$, $p = 0.01$, $\eta^2 = .02$). Table 9 contains the means and standard deviations on the dependent variables for the independent variables. Table 10 shows the significance values for between-subjects effects, revealing highly significant relationships for interactivity and brand attitude. Analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) on each OPR factor were conducted as follow-up tests to the MANCOVA to test RQs and hypotheses.

RQ4: For an American company, does it make an impact on OPR whether the company uses appeals to American patriotism or global appeals?

To answer this research question, ANCOVAs were performed for select cases of appeals as independent variables, the OPR factors as dependent variables and ethnocentrism and brand attitude as covariates.

Table 9

Mean standardized factor scores and standard deviations on OPR factors for the independent variables

		Conversational Human Voice / Positivity		Communicated Relational Commitment		Responsiveness	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
COO	U.S. (Ford)	.07	.81	.02	.88	-.09	.86
	S. Korea (Hyundai)	.06	.92	.03	.85	-.02	.83
	Control	-.53	.95	-.24	.85	.47	.82
Appeals	Patriotism	.03	.90	.03	.84	-.08	.87
	Global	.10	.83	.02	.90	-.03	.82
	Control	-.53	.95	-.24	.85	.47	.82
Interactivity	High	.14	.68	-.00	.88	.02	.78
	Low	.00	1.01	.06	.86	-.13	.90
	Control	-.53	.95	-.24	.85	.47	.82

		Task Sharing		Dialogue	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
COO	U.S. (Ford)	.04	.87	.00	.91
	S. Korea (Hyundai)	-.06	.91	.00	.98
	Control	.05	.75	-.01	.52
Appeals	Patriotism	.05	.88	-.01	.96
	Global	-.07	.90	.02	.93
	Control	.05	.75	-.01	.52
Interactivity	High	-.03	.92	.43	.65
	Low	.02	.86	-.39	1.00
	Control	.05	.75	-.01	.52

Table 10*MANCOVA: Tests of between-subjects effects OPR*

	Conversa- tional Human Voice / Positivity	Communi- cated Relational Commitment	Responsive- ness	Task Sharing	Dialogue
Ethnocentrism	.019*	.510	.059	.517	.080
Brand attitude Ford	.000***	.000***	.099	.183	.506
Brand attitude Hyundai	.595	.107	.222	.005**	.241
COO	.785	.848	.334	.246	.754
Appeals	.667	.716	.454	.087	.310
Interactivity	.055	.457	.039*	.516	.000***
COO*Appeals	.482	.540	.622	.160	.294
COO*Interactivity	.005**	.326	.556	.416	.082
Appeals*Interactivity	.939	.685	.314	.836	.914
COO*Appeals*Interactivity	.005**	.559	.717	.309	.009**

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

For Ford, the tests revealed the following relationships:

1. For Conversational Human Voice / Positivity (OPR 1), while patriotic appeals rated slightly higher, it did not make a significant difference whether appeals to American patriotism ($M = .08$, $SD = .84$) or global appeals ($M = .06$, $SD = .83$) were used. Only the control group ($M = -.53$, $SD = .83$) ranked significantly lower than the other two (patriotism: M difference = $-.62$, $p < .01$; global: M difference = $-.59$, $p < .01$).
2. For Communicated Relational Commitment (OPR 2), there were no significant differences between the groups.
3. For Responsiveness (OPR 3), global appeals ranked slightly higher, but there was no significant difference between global appeals ($M = -.08$, $SD = .82$) and appeals to American patriotism ($M = -.10$, $SD = .85$). Only the control group ($M = .48$, $SD = .85$) ranked significantly higher than the other two (patriotism: M difference = $.58$, $p < .01$; global: M difference = $.56$, $p < .01$).
4. For Task Sharing (OPR 4), there were no significant differences between the groups.
5. For Dialogue (OPR 5), there were also no significant differences between the groups.

Overall, these findings show that for an American company operating in the United States, it does not make a significant difference for organization-public relationships whether communication uses global appeals or appeals to American patriotism.

RQ5: For a foreign company, does it make an impact on OPR whether the company uses appeals to American patriotism or global appeals?

To answer this research question, ANCOVAs were performed for select cases of appeals as independent variables, the OPR factors as dependent variables and ethnocentrism and brand attitude as covariates.

For Hyundai, the tests revealed the following relationships:

1. For Conversational Human Voice / Positivity, while global appeals rated slightly higher, it did not make a significant difference whether appeals to American patriotism ($M = .25$, $SD = .92$) or global appeals ($M = .96$, $SD = .92$) were used. Only the control group ($M = -.53$, $SD = .91$) ranked significantly lower than the other two (patriotism: M difference = $-.55$, $p < .01$; global: M difference = $-.62$, $p < .01$).
2. For Communicated Relational Commitment, there were no significant differences between the groups.
3. For Responsiveness, global appeals ranked slightly higher, but there was no significant difference between global appeals ($M = .01$, $SD = .83$) and appeals to American patriotism ($M = -.07$, $SD = .83$). Only the control group ($M = .46$, $SD = .83$) ranked significantly higher than the other two (patriotism: M difference = $.54$, $p < .01$; global: M difference = $.44$, $p < .01$).
4. For Task Sharing, there were no significant differences between the groups.
5. For Dialogue, there were also no significant differences between the groups.

In four out of five cases, global appeals rated slightly higher than appeals to American patriotism, but the difference was never significant. Therefore, for a foreign company, there is no statistically significant proof that global appeals are better for relationship building.

H2: Participants viewing more interactive blogs will show higher OPR scores than those viewing less interactive blogs.

The MANCOVA showed a significant relationship between interactivity and OPR scores (Pillai's Trace = .20, $F(5, 473) = 23.79$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta^2 = .20$). Follow-up ANCOVAs were conducted to test the relationship between interactivity and OPR while controlling for ethnocentrism and brand attitude.

For Conversational Human Voice / Positivity, the ANCOVA was significant, $F(2, 483) = 13.78$, $MSE = .75$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .05$. Pairwise comparisons showed that high-interactivity blogs ($M = .14$, $SD = .68$) were rated higher than low-interactivity blogs ($M = .00$, $SD = 1.01$), however, the difference was not statistically significant. Interestingly, the control group, which was asked to complete the OPR score thinking about a car company of their choice, rated Conversational Human Voice / Positivity ($M = -.53$, $SD = .95$) significantly lower than the high interactivity (M difference = $-.67$, $p < .01$). and low interactivity cells (M difference = $-.53$, $p < .01$).

For Communicated Relational Commitment, the ANCOVA was not significant, $F(2, 483) = 2.74$, $MSE = .72$, $p = .06$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$.

For Responsiveness, the ANCOVA was significant, $F(2, 483) = 12.12$, $MSE = .70$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$. Pairwise comparisons showed that high-interactivity blogs ($M = .02$, $SD = .78$) were rated higher than low-interactivity blogs ($M = -.13$, $SD = .90$), however, the difference was not statistically significant. Interestingly, the control group rated Responsiveness ($M = .47$, $SD = .82$) significantly higher than the high interactivity (M difference = $.44$, $p < .01$) and low interactivity cells (M difference = $.60$, $p < .01$).

For Task Sharing, the ANCOVA was not significant, $F(2, 483) = .72$, $MSE = .76$, $p = .75$, partial $\eta^2 = .00$.

For Dialogue, the ANCOVA was significant, $F(2, 483) = 54.62$, $MSE = .67$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .18$.

Pairwise comparisons showed that high-interactivity blogs ($M = .43$, $SD = .65$) were rated significantly higher than low-interactivity blogs ($M = -.39$, $SD = 1.00$, M difference = $.82$, $p < .01$). The control group's rating of Dialogue ($M = -.01$, $SD = .52$) was located between the two standardized factor scores, being significantly lower (M difference = $-.44$, $p < .01$) than the high-interactivity score and significantly higher (M difference = $.38$, $p < .01$) than the low interactivity score.

These findings indicate that it is indeed true that interactivity helps with relationship building. More interactive blogs were rated higher than less interactive blogs for every relationship factor, but the difference was not always statistically significant. It made the biggest difference for the evaluation of Dialogue.

However, the MANCOVA also revealed that there are interaction effects between country of origin and interactivity. Therefore, further tests with select cases were conducted to test interactivity in relation to country of origin while controlling for ethnocentrism and brand attitude.

For the Ford blogs, Dialogue was the only OPR factor for which there was a statistically significant difference between high and low interactivity. Here, high interactivity ($M = .35$, $SD = .79$) coincided with higher relationship scores than low interactivity blogs ($M = -.35$, $SD = .79$, M difference = $.68$, $p < .01$).

For the Hyundai blogs, there was a statistically significant difference between high and low interactivity for two factors: Conversational Human Voice / Positivity and Dialogue. For the first factor, high interactivity ($M = .25$, $SD = .90$) coincided with higher relationship scores than low interactivity ($M = -.11$, $SD = .91$, M difference = $.37$, $p < .01$). Similarly, for the fifth factor ($M = .50$, $SD = .80$), high interactivity was also associated with higher scores than low interactivity ($M = -.44$, $SD = .80$, M difference = $.95$, $p < .01$).

While there were slight differences among the brands because Hyundai results were statistically significant for one more factor, overall, high interactivity coincided with better standardized factor scores for both of them.

RQ6: What role, if any, does ethnocentrism play for organization-public relationships?

As described, the MANCOVA found significant main effects for ethnocentrism (Pillai's Trace = $.02$, $F(5, 473) = 2.74$, $p = 0.01$, $\eta^2 = .02$). As Table 10 illustrates, it had a significant relationship with Conversational Human Voice / Positivity at $p = 0.01$. This indicates that controlling for ethnocentrism was justified. While the relationships with Responsiveness and Dialogue were close to being statistically significant, they did not meet the threshold of $p \leq 0.05$.

RQ7: What role, if any, does brand attitude play for organization-public relationships?

As previously described, the MANCOVA found significant main effects for brand attitude (Ford: Pillai's Trace = $.06$, $F(5, 473) = 6.02$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta^2 = .06$; Hyundai: Pillai's Trace = $.02$, $F(5, 473) = 2.42$, $p = 0.03$, $\eta^2 = .02$). As Table 10 illustrates, brand attitude showed highly significant relationships with Conversational Human Voice / Positivity, Communicated Relational Commitment, and Task Sharing. Interestingly, brand attitude towards Ford and brand

attitude towards Hyundai affected different factors: Conversational Human Voice / Positivity and Communicated Relational Commitment for Ford and Task Sharing for Hyundai. While brand attitude was not the focus of this study, this confirms the importance of controlling for brand attitude whenever studying the organizational-public relationships in relation to other independent variables.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION

Textual analysis

None of the car manufacturer websites in this analysis explicitly emphasized the brand's country of origin. This was true for both Ford and the foreign carmakers. This is relevant in the context of country-of-origin research because the COO of a brand could indeed be used as a means to symbolize certain qualities typically associated with that particular country. Therefore, this may be considered a missed opportunity for PR practitioners and a symptom of the phenomenon mentioned in the literature review that car companies themselves are blurring the lines between one another and thus eliminate what used to make them stand out (Chatterjee et al., 2002).

If country of origin or heritage was addressed at all, it was done indirectly. Volkswagen, called its vehicles "Autobahn-inspired," rather than blatantly praising their German engineering. Ford talked about its sponsorship of NASCAR, a truly American sport, rather than explicitly expressing its commitment to American values. But because these indirect references to origin are discreet, they are also utilized by non-American companies. Toyota is involved in NASCAR, too, and just as Ford expresses its connection to American history, so does Toyota. Therefore, the indirect allusions to heritage do not serve to make any one brand unique.

This phenomenon could be interpreted as a sign that rather than national cultures, carmaker websites primarily represent a culture of car manufacturers, which may be quite coherent in itself with a rather unified language, but may differ from the culture of other

businesses. All websites had a similar design language, used similar imagery, were similarly centered on the car-buying experience and buried corporate information several layers deep into the page. It seems that potential buyers are not to be distracted from the products with information about the organization. This raises the question of whether with increasing globalization, COO does in fact become less important rather than more important.

On the other hand, the lack of COO information and the degree to which commitment to the U.S. market was emphasized by foreign brands was too evident to be a coincidence. When Toyota writes an article about its brand history, it does not simply forget that it is Japanese. And if COO does not matter in today's market, why not provide a comprehensive history of the company? Why do Hyundai and Toyota's websites show photos with models of every ethnicity except for Asian? It can only be concluded that these companies have an interest in appearing more American and less foreign. Yet if this is the case and foreign companies make a deliberate effort not to address their heritage, it would be false to assume that COO does not matter anymore. In this sense the findings support the argument by Diamantopoulos et al. (2011) that COO is still an important consideration.

What confirms this notion is that even when foreign companies did mention their COO – which rarely happened – it came with a qualifier: Hyundai is not just South Korean. “Hyundai may be a Korean company, but” it produces many vehicles in the United States. Volkswagen is not just German. Everything it does is “in the U.S., Germany, and across the globe.” And even typical American values were addressed when Hyundai's chairman made it from rags to riches thanks to an American Dream-like life story, or when Volkswagen attributed its success to a melting pot-like scenario in which German and American strengths come together and lead to success.

However, it stands out that all foreign companies emphasized how American they were, but the one brand that actually was American hardly mentioned it. As pointed out previously, Strutton et al. (1994) found a disconnect between American car manufacturers who promoted their vehicles based on their American origin and consumers who actually in some respects preferred the foreign makes. The findings of this study show almost the opposite: The American car manufacturer did not appeal to patriotism much, but the foreign manufacturers tried hard to strip off their origin and become more American. Strutton et al. (1994) hypothesized that their findings could be due to a change in the American self-concept, fueled by dissatisfaction with the country's general development. This raises the question of whether another change in the American self-concept has occurred since Strutton et al.'s study. Because that study was conducted before 9/11 and before the economic crisis of the late 2000s, this seems plausible. Yet if this is the case and Americans prefer to buy American again, Ford is missing an opportunity by not alluding to its origin. One might argue that Ford did not mention its American origin much because it assumes that consumers already know about it. However, this does not explain why the company emphasized its international success and engagement. Therefore, Ford's communication strategy in respect to country of origin appears to indeed differ from that of the foreign manufacturers.

Contributions of the interview study

The interview study helped to answer some of the questions raised by the textual analysis but also created new ones.

As the findings indicate, country of origin is a very complex topic. Nevertheless, it is a topic that PR practitioners found to be absolutely relevant to their profession. Most practitioners

expressed that COO is important for what they do and all agreed that consumers are aware of the COO of their brands. Therefore, the practitioners also refuted the argument that COO may no longer be significant.

Practitioners tended to find COO more important for public relations than for advertising – a discipline that has actually researched the COO effect for decades. This only further illustrates the importance of introducing the country-of-origin effect to public relations. According to the interviewees, it may be more relevant for corporate communication (including government and investor relations) than for product communication. This explains why the textual analysis never found references to origin in the product-related sections of the websites. They were indeed perceived as too distracting. It is also consistent with the finding that Toyota did briefly mention its origin in its information for investors.

Practitioners also agreed that some countries of origin are easier to communicate on the U.S. market than others. An American or European heritage is generally seen as an advantage, while Asian origins may be somewhat more difficult to communicate. This confirms the findings by Wang and Lamb (1983) that publics prefer products from countries with cultures similar to their own. Because Asian companies face more adversity, they are more likely to play up their investments in the American market in order to express belonging. This explains why the textual analysis found so few references to Asian origin and so many statements emphasizing commitment to the American market. However, it does not explain why Ford did not play up its American heritage more.

Interestingly, the practitioners expressed the notion that an American origin is not always beneficial, either, be it because of a perception of low quality or because of bailout money received by some of the largest companies. Because the American culture is highly

individualistic (Hofstede, 2001), this may be viewed as confirmation of Gurhan-Canli and Maheswaran's (2000) findings that individualistic cultures prefer domestic products only if they see a true advantage in them. In addition, American companies are much more cautious about where vehicles are actually manufactured and are hesitant about calling a vehicle American if it is not in fact also manufactured in the U.S., including all its parts. This was a view expressed exclusively by American brands and it offers a likely explanation for why Ford appeared to have a different communication strategy in the textual analysis and did not emphasize its American origin as much as it could have. For Ford, country of origin was more closely related to country of manufacture than to country of design. This raises the question of whether American publics share this view and whether they prefer global appeals over appeals to patriotism. Previous research by Thakor and Lavack (2003) and Usunier (2011) would suggest that country of manufacture is much less relevant than the original COO of the brand.

The American brands' reluctance to tout their origin in PR communication is also interesting given the fact that the situation appears to be slightly different in advertising. During the Super Bowl 2013, Jeep and Ram (both owned by Chrysler) each showed commercials with appeals to American patriotism. The Jeep ad talked about U.S. troops returning from war and Ram's commercial paid tribute to the American farmer. Notably, the vehicles themselves only played a minor role. Klayman and Saba (2013) saw these commercials as the continuation of the Chrysler Corporation's "winning trend that started two years [prior] with a spot featuring Eminem and [2012's] two-minute ad starring Clint Eastwood." With their emotional depictions of topics that are dear to the hearts of many Americans, both ads created positive buzz for the brands. Chrysler CEO Sergio Marchionne explained that while the corporation is now controlled by Italian manufacturer Fiat, it should be understood that it will stay as American as it always

has been (Klayman & Saba, 2013). While the commercials' patriotic appeals make a lot of sense in this context, a similar strategy could not be confirmed for public relations. It is possible that these commercials remain an isolated phenomenon that can only be observed during the Super Bowl – arguably the most quintessentially American sports event of the year. During a match that calls itself a world championship game despite the fact that only American teams compete, appeals to American patriotism may be more successful than usually.

Unlike American brands, European brands associated COO more with country of design. This makes Volkswagen's reference to its engineering being "Autobahn-inspired" appear in a different light. It is not just a reference to Germany, but more precisely, a reference to its vehicles being developed in Germany. On the other hand, overall Volkswagen only rarely alluded to Germany. This is not quite in line with practitioners' statements that a European heritage is generally an asset and stands for quality. If this is truly what practitioners believe, at least Volkswagen was not using this advantage as much as it could. Further European brands would have to be analyzed to find out whether this is also the case for other organizations.

However, there may also be a difference in strategy across different channels. One representative of a German brand spoke about using German engineers as spokespeople for automotive media. Volkswagen has used German references in commercials. That there were not more references on its corporate website may not be the result of a strategic decision. None of the brands reported having a clear strategy and guidelines for how they addressed COO in public relations. Instead, they reported inserting it into their communication outputs on a case-by-case basis. Therefore, Volkswagen's dearth of reference on the website may in fact be less of a strategic decision and more a result of not having a clearly defined strategy.

Moreover, the study revealed that the United States should not be treated as a homogeneous market in respect to COO research. At least in the automotive industry, PR professionals see great regional differences. This is an interesting finding because COO has never been researched in a regional context. However, according to the interview participants, results of COO research studies may be very different depending on whether a study is conducted in Michigan or California. At the very least, scholars need to identify where within a country their study was conducted.

Constructionism and representation provide a relevant lens for the study of COO. The automotive industry is an industry where boundaries are extremely blurred. A vehicle is often designed in one country, built in another, and sold in a third, while the company is owned by an investor from yet another country. What is the vehicle's COO? This question can be difficult to answer; and it does in fact get answered differently by different people. The U.S. companies tend to lean on the side of production, while the European manufacturers go with the design. The anecdotal evidence provided by the interviewees suggests that consumers may mostly consider the original site of the company headquarters. However, because consumers were not included in the study, this cannot be said with certainty. What can be said with certainty is that all parties involved construct origin in their own way and that there may not necessarily be shared meanings and shared language yet like Stuart Hall (1997) would suggest. This could be a great opportunity for PR to come in and create meaning through words or symbols. On some level, this is already being done when companies define themselves as global with Japanese/German/Swedish roots, for instance, or when they mention that their COO creates a potential for storytelling. But the interviews also indicate that this type of communication is not necessarily strategic at the moment. Most practitioners talked about addressing COO on a case-

by-case basis when they feel that it fits, rather than having any clearly defined policies or practices.

When the interviewees were asked to say which countries of origin are good or bad and to describe where their own company's origin falls on this spectrum, answers were varied and no clear-cut hierarchy emerged. This does confirm the previously mentioned supposition that a specific COO by itself is neither good nor bad, but that its evaluation depends on the people who assign meaning to it and how they go about doing so. This is a dialog and process that car manufacturers should not miss out on. COO can be both an asset and a stigma, but the companies are not powerless when it comes to determining which one it is.

The interviewees also confirmed that COO perceptions are fluid. Currently, a South Korean origin is likely to be a disadvantage, but 30 years ago, so was a Japanese origin. It seems likely that South Korean brands can rise in popularity while we will see Indian or Chinese brands enter the market once again on a lower level. This type of fluidity may be less due to political tensions than to consumers getting used to a COO that was not previously known to produce a particular product.

The notion of fluidity was also confirmed by the statements regarding 9/11 and the economic crisis that began in 2008. Practitioners mentioned that patriotism surged after 9/11 and that it affected how consumers viewed domestic and foreign brands. The recession had rather complex consequences that benefited some American brands while hurting others and also benefiting some of the foreign brands. These two shifts in perception confirm that the findings by Strutton et al. (1994), namely that American car manufacturers promote their vehicles based on their American origin and consumers actually in some respects preferred the foreign makes, likely no longer hold up. At least they were not true after 9/11 and only partially true during the

recession. Scholars have to be careful when analyzing these types of preferences because they can easily change following political or economic incidents.

When they do encounter negative consequences of American patriotism, foreign brands have limited ability to counteract them, aside from showing their commitment to the American market – a strategy that became very obvious in the textual analysis.

Contributions of the experiment

As the findings for RQ1 showed, there is indeed a relationship between organization-public relationships and the country-of-origin effect. All OPR dimensions except for Dialogue correlated with the three COO indices. It also makes sense conceptually that if a person has a positive attitude about products from a country, he or she should also have a positive attitude toward the organization that produces them. Yet if there is a relationship between these two concepts, organizations who focus on building strong relationships with publics may also be able to somewhat offset a COO perception that is not ideal. Further research would be necessary to confirm this.

H1 was confirmed: Ford was rated higher for all three COO indices than Hyundai. Interestingly, even the control group tended to have higher scores than Hyundai. Ford's advantage over Hyundai remained present regardless of the level of interactivity and no matter whether appeals to American patriotism or global appeals were used.

Remarkably, Ford blogs with global appeals had slightly higher COO scores than Ford blogs with appeals to American patriotism (though not statistically significant). This may be considered somewhat surprising. At least if one suspects the reason for Ford's higher scores to be its home field advantage, it may be expected that reminding publics of this home advantage

would be beneficial. However, this was not the case. Given that the study controlled for brand attitude and ethnocentrism, these two variables could not have contributed to this finding. Yet it confirms the results of the textual analysis and the interview study: American brands may indeed be better off – or at least not worse off – using global appeals. This may truly be due to the fact that consumers know that not all vehicles are in fact produced in the United States. However, because the difference was not statistically significant, further research will be necessary.

Interestingly, Hyundai blogs achieved higher COO scores if they used appeals to American patriotism than if they used global appeals. Therefore, it would be wrong to assume that global appeals are preferred in general. This finding was statistically significant. It, too, corresponds to what has been found in the textual analysis. Even though foreign brands reportedly did not have a clearly defined strategy for when to mention or omit COO, they, possibly instinctively, did what proved to lead to higher COO scores, namely appeal to American patriotism.

A possible reason for this finding may be that blogs with appeals to American patriotism – just like the websites analyzed in the content analysis – did not mention the COO of the foreign brand. As the manipulation check showed, this resulted in much larger numbers of subjects who could not correctly identify Hyundai's COO: In the global appeals condition, 71.02% ($n = 76$) correctly identified it as South Korean and only 2.80% ($n = 3$) as American. But when appeals to American patriotism were used, only 15.09% ($n = 16$) correctly identified it as South Korean, while 43.39% ($n = 46$) thought it was American.

This result is rather striking. When practitioners were interviewed, they appeared quite certain that consumers know and respond to their brand's COO. Yet, at least in the case of Hyundai, subjects confronted with appeals to American patriotism seemed easily convinced that

Hyundai was an American brand and the same group of subjects gave it higher COO scores. This leads to the conclusion that the extreme mention of commitment to the United States that was found on the foreign brands' websites may indeed be the best strategy for foreign organizations because publics are willing to disregard a foreign-sounding name and accept that this company is somehow American because it said so. This is of course very reminiscent of constructionism and representation. It appears that through communication, foreign brands cannot only redefine what their origin means but they can to an extent even change what it is. As Usunier (2011) stated, it is true that knowledge of a brand's COO is not always present and organizations can – for instance through brand names – successfully suggest a different COO from their own.

While the subjects' willingness to accept Hyundai as an American brand could be attributed to their young age and relative inexperience with car buying, it could also be viewed as a product of their culture. One of the representatives of a Japanese brand compared his organization to an individual born in Japan and looking Asian who has lived in America for a very long time and acts American in his or her speech, mannerisms, and interaction with others. He said, "While they may have an origin that is unmistakable from a certain area of the world, the way that people perceive them has to do with how they interact on a day-to-day basis." The United States has always been a nation of immigrants who redefined themselves and became American without entirely giving up their heritage. It could be argued that this process is so familiar to American research subjects that they are willing to accept the same type of redefinition from foreign brands.

Interestingly, appeals did not have the same impact on relationship-building as they did on the COO effect. Because nothing similar has been researched in relation to OPR before, literature does not offer any good explanations for this finding. However, because so many

factors of COO and OPR correlated, it is very well possible that future research will uncover a relationship between appeals and OPR after all.

The results did confirm the importance of interactivity for relationship building. Dialogue, the one dimension that did not correlate with COO, had the strongest relationship with interactivity. This confirms the assumption that more interactive communication leads to better relationship outcomes (Jo & Kim, 2003; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007; Yang & Lim, 2009). In fact, high interactivity coincided with better OPR scores across the board. Whether an organization is domestic or foreign, high interactivity is always beneficial for relationship building. While foreign organizations cannot change the fact that they are foreign, they can improve their relationship with publics by being interactive and offering two-way communication.

Also the other additional variables in the study all proved to be worth including. Ethnocentrism and brand attitude did indeed have an impact on the dependent variables, which justified controlling for them as they were not the focus of the study. Future research should investigate these concepts as independent variables as they clearly matter.

Contributions to theory and professional practice

Overall, COO has proved to be a worthwhile concept to study in relation to the PR efforts of car manufacturers in the United States. The three studies complemented one another and resulted in some findings that may have been unexpected.

COO was not only relevant to practitioners, but a relationship between COO and OPR was discovered. Many of the same variables have an impact on both. Therefore, public relations scholars would be wise to further research country of origin. This will extend PR theory. More precisely, it will address the concern voiced by Molleda and Laskin (2005) that public relations

has produced little international theory because many international PR studies are simply comparisons of practice in different countries without any true theory development. Han and Wang (2012) already recognized this potential when they first introduced COO to PR. However, it can be argued that their study focused more on valence framing than on the actual COO effect because unlike the experimental study presented here that used the recognized COO scale in order to benefit from previously established reliability and validity, they did not in fact measure the COO effect.

Aside from adding to PR theory in general, this dissertation adds in particular to OPR theory. Ferguson (1984) recommended integrating theory from other disciplines as early as 1984. This is precisely the approach that was taken for this dissertation. Public relations may have produced little truly international theory (Molleda & Laskin, 2005), but it does not need to reinvent the wheel. It can instead build on 50 years of COO research in other disciplines. The studies conducted here serve as a first step.

Adding an international component to organization-public relationship theory was already started by Huang (2001) and Jo (2003), but in order to internationalize the theory, it will not only need dimensions that are applicable to non-Western cultures, but it will also need more studies that identify factors that impact relationship-building internationally, such as COO

Furthermore, OPR theory has been criticized for not measuring true relationships, but instead only measuring how one party (the public) perceives its relationship with another party (the organization). This creates an elite bias because the organization can receive information about how the public views the relationship, but not vice versa (Broom et al., 1997; Kim, 2001). This dissertation used an established scale to measure relationships as part of the experiment and could therefore be accused of the same bias. However, in reality it did include the organization's

point of view by means of conducting interviews with practitioners. This approach had not previously been taken in OPR research and it is a further advantage of taking a multiple methods approach.

This dissertation also helps to expand COO research. Instead of solely measuring product evaluations for different product groups and countries, it took a more holistic approach and analyzed what COO means for the PR process, how it impacts the production of messages, the messages themselves, and the consumption of these messages. Thanks to the findings of the textual analysis, it also added the concept of appeals, which had never been studied in relation to the COO effect before. The types of appeals used by a domestic or foreign organization proved to have a great impact on COO evaluations. Another very relevant contribution to COO research is that COO perceptions can be regional rather than just national. None of these aspects have previously been addressed in COO literature.

Furthermore, the findings confirm existing research on COO. As suggested by Parameswaran and Pisharodi (1994), the South Korean COO was indeed perceived as inferior, often not only to the American COO, but even to the control group. This can also be explained relying on research by Wang and Lamb (1983) who found that people generally prefer cultures similar to their own. Interestingly, however, it was possible to affect perceptions through appeals. A South Korean manufacturer appealing to American patriotism fared better than one using global appeals. This affirms Usunier's (2011) claim that it is possible to suggest a COO different from reality to achieve a more positive consumer response. In the end, what matters is what consumers believe is the COO of an organization. Overall, this research supports Diamantopoulos' (2011) claim that COO is indeed still important today, even in a fractured market.

Also research on interactivity was confirmed because blog interactivity did indeed help with relationship building (Jo & Kim, 2003; Yang & Lim, 2009; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007). Regardless of COO or appeals used, any organization is well advised to make its communication interactive.

Finally, this dissertation adds to the body of knowledge about the U.S. automobile market because while the interviews revealed that it is indeed very fractured and lines between brands are blurred (as suggested by Chatterjee et al., 2002), the textual analysis also indicated that it is no longer true that U.S. brands promote vehicles using patriotic appeals (Strutton et al., 1994).

The studies presented here have shown that COO is indeed a relevant topic for PR. Therefore, for PR managers, developing a strategy for the communication of origin is useful regardless of industry and country. It is a relevant topic not only for a foreign brand entering the U.S. market, but also for an American company going abroad or even an American company operating solely in the United States. Because of that, the findings of these studies should be useful to a great range of practitioners.

Organizations would be well advised to define what their COO means to them and to develop more specific strategies that prevent them from appearing somewhat confused about their identity in the way that Hyundai did on its two different corporate websites. They should be aware that this strategy could very well mean omitting any mention of country of origin to avoid negative consequences of the COO effect.

PR departments would be wise to research not only how their organization is perceived by publics, but also how their organization's COO is perceived. They also should not make any assumptions about how well-known their organization's COO is. The example of Hyundai in the

experiment revealed that as soon as global appeals were used, people's awareness of Hyundai's true country of origin was not very high anymore.

These findings should also be interesting to any organization that enters a new market. In the case of car manufacturers, it can be expected that the current situation will change significantly once Chinese and Indian companies really enter the market. COO is likely to gain in importance again when American consumers are confronted with new origins. If the experiences of the Asian manufacturers are any indication, it is likely that publics will receive these new brands with initial skepticism and that it may take years or even decades until they can become associated with quality.

CHAPTER 8

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Because country of origin is such a new topic in PR research, this dissertation can only be a first step toward studying the subject in depth. The textual analysis, for instance, only covered four manufacturers, and only focused on websites. A wider range of communication outputs and brands should be studied to see whether they follow the same patterns. Similarly, the experiment only included two manufacturers and should be repeated including European brands, for instance.

Also publics other than consumers would be a relevant population to study. Because they serve as gatekeepers and are likely to have very different insights into the industry, journalists would be a public of relevance. In addition, for this particular trade, also car dealers and local communities surrounding manufacturing facilities may be of interest, for example. Interviewees also mentioned government and investor relations as specific cases in which COO matters.

Many adaptations could be made to the experiment. Aside from using more brands from more countries, luxury brands might be used. Interviewees expressed that consumers are more open to foreign origin when it comes to luxury vehicles. Also, as previously mentioned, ethnocentrism and brand attitude deserve to be studied. Moreover, future research should seek to confirm whether for domestic organizations, global appeals really are more effective than or equally effective as appeals to patriotism. The possible relationship between appeals and OPR deserves further attention as well. As previously pointed out, the fact that the experiment was limited to college students is a limitation, too. Future studies should expand the population.

However, they will still have to find ways to control for demographic and psychographic differences because COO perceptions are impacted by so many variables. Further studies could also compare research populations in different geographic areas of the United States because according to the interviewees, differences exist even within countries. In this particular study, subjects were recruited from a Southeastern university, but a study on the West Coast, for instance, might reveal different attitudes.

Of course COO research should not only be about car brands and the United States. In fact, several of the interviewees suggested expanding this line of research to other industries. As one of the practitioners said, if a person never buys a home, the car may be the most expensive purchase that person ever makes. Therefore, the decision-making process is likely to be very different from that of a person deciding on a bottle of wine at the grocery store, for instance. While this study did not focus on the actual products and purchase intentions, it still remains a valid argument that perceptions are likely to be influenced by industry. Previous COO research supports this reasoning (Kaynak & Cavusgil, 1983).

Furthermore, the line of research should be expanded to include different markets and cultures to find out how American brands present themselves abroad, how foreign brands present themselves in their home countries, and how all of them are perceived. As one of the interviewees said, Americans are “wonderfully nationalistic.” Other countries may not cause foreign brands to appeal quite as much to local patriotism.

In addition, this research would benefit from longitudinal studies to uncover changes in society that are reflected in whether and how COO is communicated and how publics receive it. In this context, further qualitative studies could include interviews of consumers about their COO perceptions to achieve a deeper understanding of how these notions develop culturally and

how they are rationalized by individuals. It would be interesting to know, for example, how these perceptions may be influenced by an individual's parents or by habituation. It could also be explored whether factors such as gender, race, or ethnicity might have an impact. Further research could explore the meaning of a certain product (in this case, the car) in American culture in general. Another possible longitudinal study would be an analysis of historic materials communicating COO.

Yet COO should not only be relevant to external communication. It would be interesting to study how a multinational organization communicates its country of origin to its employees, especially those employees in another country. Do employees at Hyundai Motor Manufacturing Alabama see their employer as South Korean or as American? What communicative aspects impact this assessment and what are the consequences for communication within the organization? From here, this topic could easily inspire studies in the realm of interpersonal communication as well, answering questions such as how American and South Korean Hyundai employees talk to one another and how their own identity informs their intercultural communication within the organization and externally. It was interesting, for example, that almost all U.S. PR managers interviewed for the study were American and the one practitioner who was not American, was not from the same COO as his company, either. This raises the question, how the American communication managers of foreign organizations understand the company's heritage and what they do to preserve the cultural identity of the organization while negotiating their own American identity.

It was also striking that all PR managers in the interview study were male. Female managers could potentially have a different approach to communicating country-of-origin.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

More than 120 years after changes to the British Merchandise Marks Act established the “made in” label, the country of origin of organizations and products is not only still relevant to their operation and success, but is complex enough to continuously pose questions. This is especially true for public relations, a discipline that is only just starting to pay attention to this topic.

Practitioners reported not having specific policies for how they communicated their organization’s COO, yet patterns became apparent that seemed unlikely to be coincidental, and the experiment revealed that the different strategies used by domestic and foreign manufacturers may be exactly what publics like to see.

The studies discussed here revealed that COO perceptions may be even more fluid than expected because publics may be quite willing to base their country-of-origin assessments on how an organization defines and presents itself. Organizations should not miss this opportunity to take charge of how they portray their heritage and cultural affiliation, be it with the home or host country. Unlike knives with a visible “made in” label, organizations have the chance to actively manage COO perceptions. In some cases this may not solely be an opportunity but may instead be a necessity. The German organization mentioned in the introduction should not leave it up to chance whether its origin will be associated with high technology or Adolf Hitler. It is a PR practitioner’s responsibility to be aware of COO images and to address them with proper communication strategy, even if that strategy may mean omitting COO references when they

might be distracting. For the car manufacturers studied here, not distinguishing themselves through communication about COO may not necessarily be a missed opportunity when it has a strategic background.

While this dissertation offers new insights for both organization-public relationship theory and the country-of-origin effect, many questions remain to be answered. Future research will be necessary to truly integrate country of origin into PR theory.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Screenshots of car manufacturer websites

Image 1: Screenshot of www.ford.com (2011)

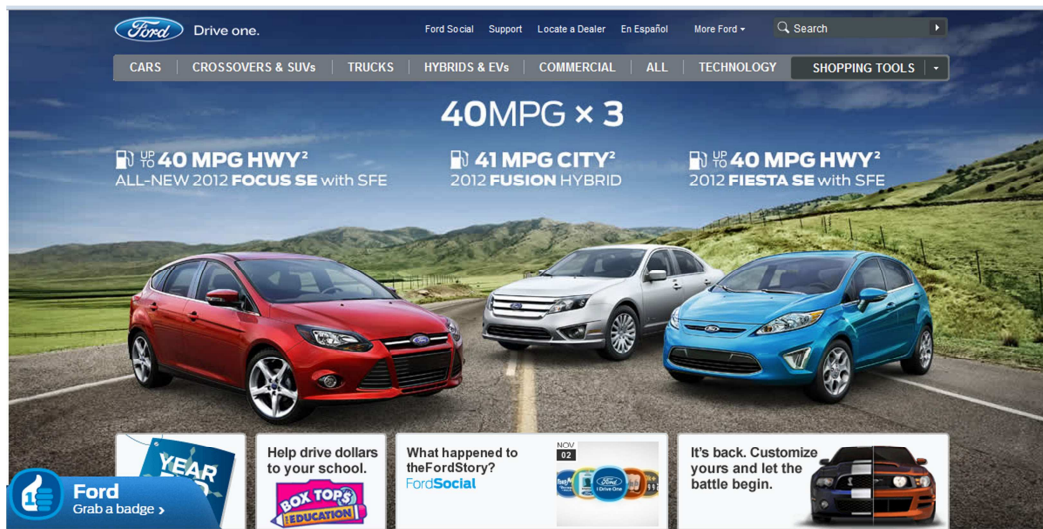


Image 2: Screenshot of www.toyota.com (2011)

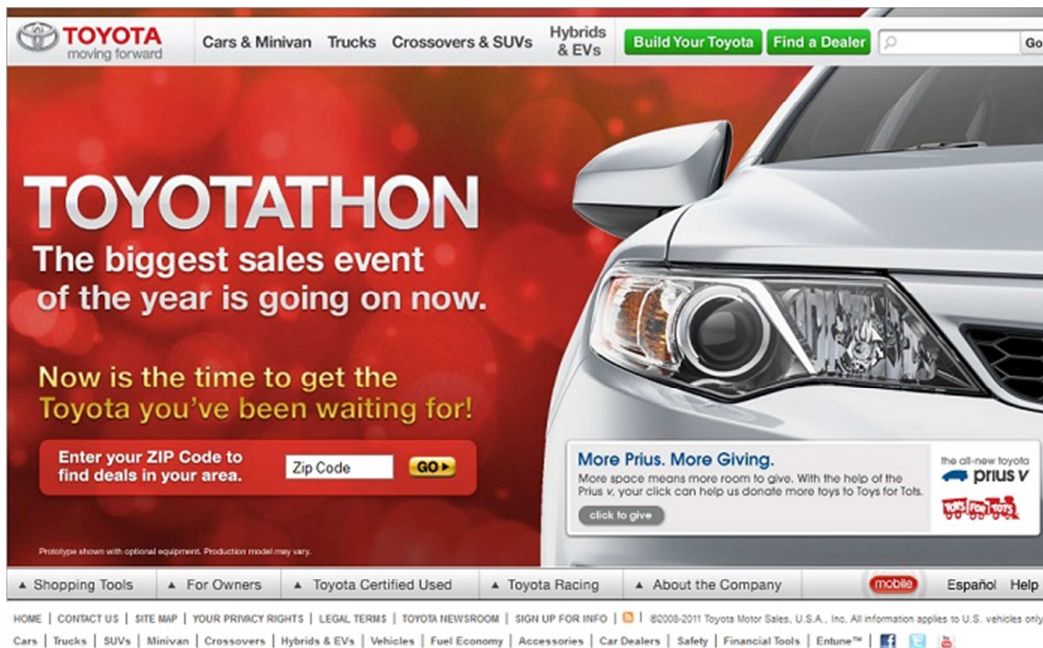


Image 3: Screenshot of www.hyundaiusa.com (2011)

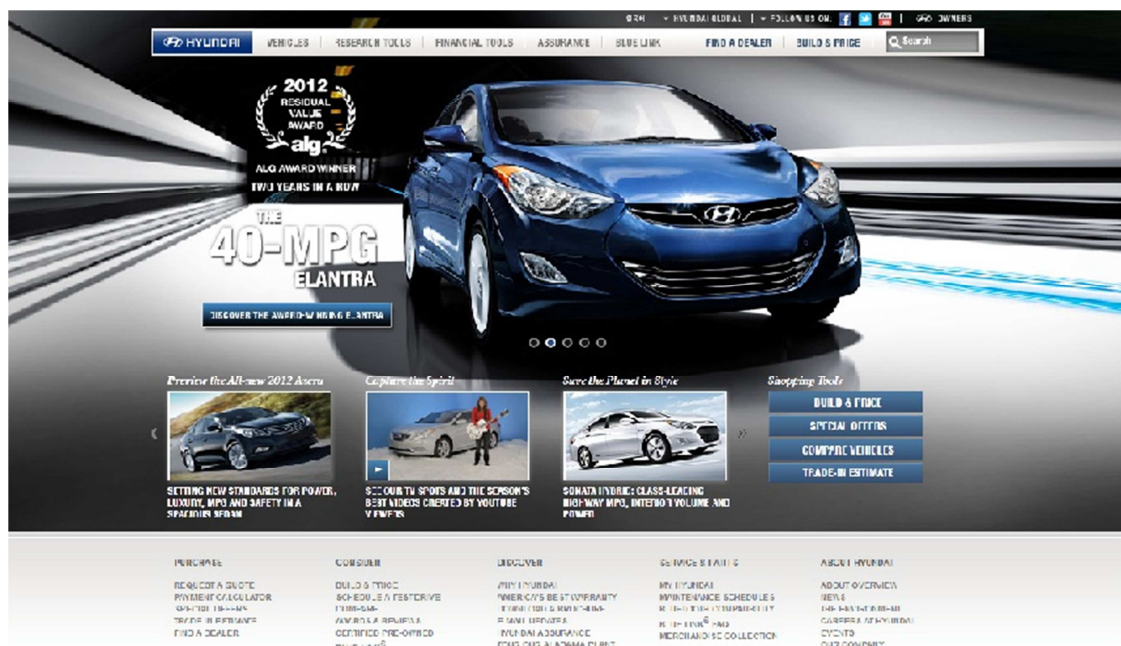
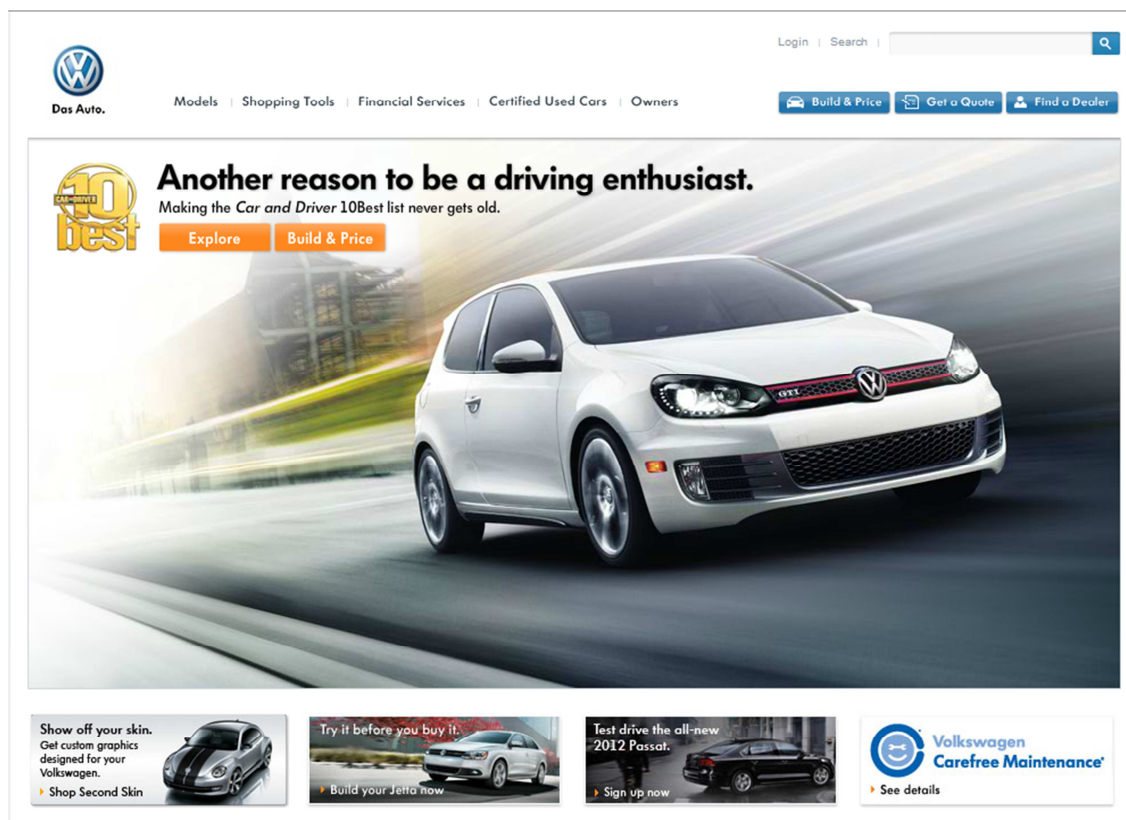


Image 4: Screenshot of www.vw.com (2011)



Appendix B: Interview questions

1. You represent your company/brand in the United States, but where is it from originally?
2. How important is this country of origin of your brand/company for your communication and messaging?
 - What impact does it make? How does it have an impact?
3. Do you have your company's/brand's country of origin on your mind when you communicate with or design communication materials your publics?
 - If so, how does it influence that communication for consumers? For dealers/distributors? For investors? For community members?
4. Is the country of origin of your company/brand mentioned frequently in your communication?
 - Why or why not?
5. Do you have a specific strategy for how you address your company's/brand's country of origin in communication?
 - Probes: For example, do you have a specific wording, or do you mention it only for specific topics, only in connection with other topics, etc.?
 - Are there any policies within your company for how it is addressed?
6. Do you think that some countries have an easier or more difficult time when doing business in the U.S.?
 - If so, where does your own brand fall on this spectrum?
 - Why do you think some have an easier time and some a more difficult time? Can you think of an example?

7. How do you think American consumers respond to the country of origin of your company/brand?
 - Have you seen a change over time? If so, what?
 - Have you noticed a change during the current recession? If so, what?
8. In your communication, do you contemplate or address American patriotism and the possibility that some customers might prefer to buy American?
 - If so, how do you do that?
9. Do you believe that the type of product or service that a brand offers should have an impact on how it communicates about its origin?
 - Why or why not?
 - If yes, how?
10. Are you aware of a marketing theory called “country-of-origin effect”?
 - If so, can you define it?

We’re almost done. I just need to gather a little information about you. And again, this interview is confidential.

11. What is your name and title?
12. Which company or brand do you represent?
13. How long have you worked for this particular company and how long in this particular position?
14. Gender: DON’T ASK, JUST RECORD
15. What level of education have you completed (circle one)?

High School

BA/BS degree

MA/MS/MBA degree

JD

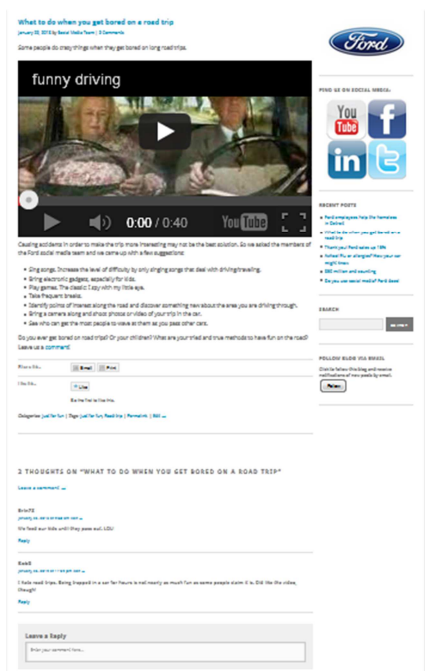
Ph.D.

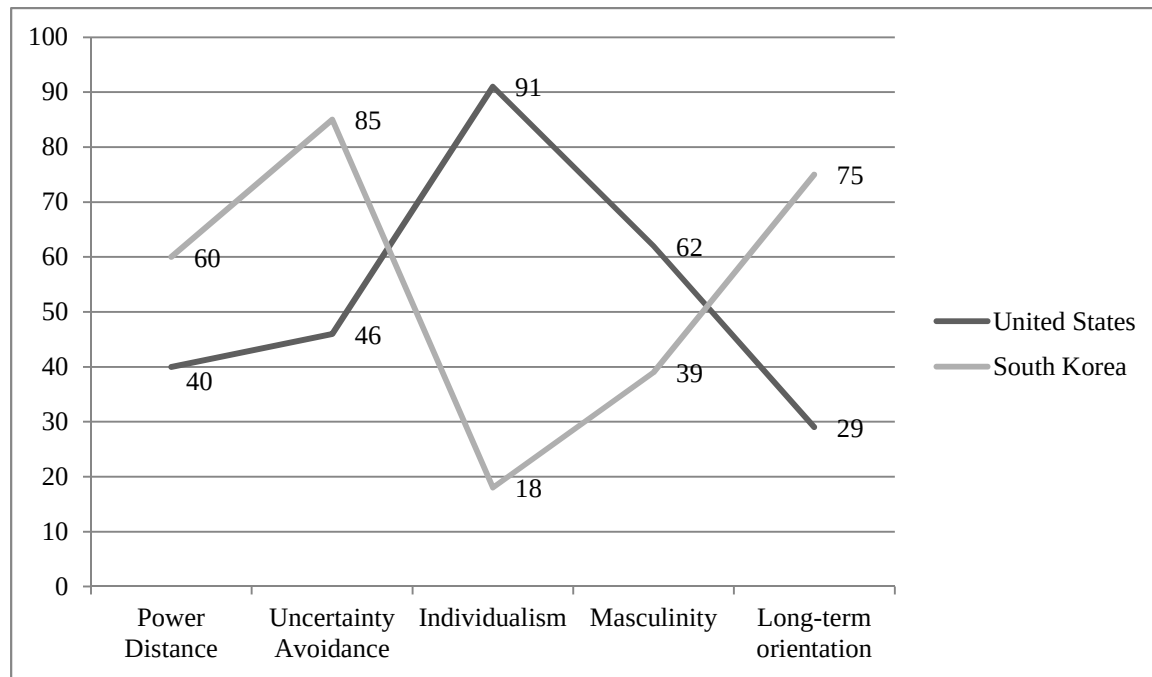
Appendix C: Screenshots of stimuli

Image 1: Top post of blog (Ford, appeals to patriotism, high interactivity)



Image 2: Interactive post: video, links, social media, comments, encouragement of feedback, options for sharing, following, and liking



Appendix D: Hofstede scores United States and South Korea

(Hofstede, 2001)

Appendix E: Pre-test questionnaire

Thank you for participating! Please answer the following questions.

First off, we'd like to ask a few questions about cars.

Have you ever owned a car?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If so, when did you last acquire a car?

____ year(s) ago *(Please drag the cursor to the number that best represents your answer. You may round up or down as appropriate.)*

Do you currently own a car?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If you currently own a car, what brand is it? (If you do not currently own a car, please answer this and the following questions based on the last car you owned.)

Do you know what country that brand is from?

☐ Yes, it's from _____. ☐ No, I don't know.

What is the model year of your car? _____

Who paid for your car?

☐ you yourself
☐ your parents
☐ you and your parents
☐ other (please specify: _____)

Who selected the car?

☐ you yourself
☐ your parents
☐ you and your parents
☐ other (please specify: _____)

What is your overall feeling about driving a car made by Ford? Choose a point on the continuum between the adjectives below that best describes how you feel.

unfavorable	1	2	3	4	5	favorable
bad	1	2	3	4	5	good
foolish	1	2	3	4	5	wise
harmful	1	2	3	4	5	beneficial

What is overall feeling about driving a car made by Hyundai? Choose a point on the continuum between the adjectives below that best describes how you feel.

unfavorable	1	2	3	4	5	favorable
bad	1	2	3	4	5	good

foolish	1	2	3	4	5	wise
harmful	1	2	3	4	5	beneficial

Next, we would like to ask a few questions about blogs.

Do you ever read blogs?

☐ Yes ☐ No

On average, how many minutes per day do you spend reading blogs? *(Move the cursor to the number that best describes your answer.)*

_____ minutes

On average, how many blogs do you visit each day?

_____ blogs

Some blogs are hosted by companies. On average, how many minutes per day do you spend reading company blogs? *(Move the cursor to the number that best describes your answer.)*

_____ minutes

On average, how many company blogs do you visit each day?

_____ blogs

Do you write a blog yourself?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, how many blogs do you have? *(Please enter a number.)*

_____ blog(s)

On average, how many minutes do you spend writing blog posts per day?

_____ minutes

A few demographic questions: What is your...

... gender?

☐ male ☐ female

... year in school?

☐ freshman ☐ sophomore ☐ junior ☐ senior ☐ graduate student

... age in years: _____ *(Please move the cursor to the appropriate value.)*

... nationality?

☐ US-American ☐ Other – please specify: _____

... race?

☐ Caucasian
☐ Black/African American
☐ Hispanic/Latino
☐ Asian

- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Pacific Islander
- ☐ Other – please specify: _____

Please alert the lab attendant that you have completed this section. He/she will pull up a blog for you. Please spend 10 minutes with this blog. Feel free to click on links, watch videos, comment on posts, etc. After 10 minutes, you will be asked to complete the second portion of this questionnaire. Thank you!

Appendix F: Post-test questionnaire

Based on the car company blog you just visited, this company... *(Indicate your agreement with the following items.)*

Indicate your agreement with the following items:

Indicate your agreement with the following items:		Strongly agree			
		Somewhat agree			
		Neutral			
		Somewhat disagree			
	Strongly disagree				
Invites people to conversation	①	②	③	④	⑤
Is open to dialogue.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Uses conversation-style communication.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Tries to communicate in a human voice.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Tries to be interesting in communication.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Uses a sense of humor in communication.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Provides links to competitors.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Attempts to make communication enjoyable.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Would admit a mistake.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Provides prompt feedback addressing criticism with a direct, but uncritical manner.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Treats me and others as human.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Attempts to demonstrate they are committed to maintaining the relationship.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Communicates the organization's desire to continue to maintain and/or build a relationship with me and others.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Stresses commitment to me and others.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Implies that our relationship has a future/is a long-term commitment.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Directly discusses the nature of the organization.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Emphasizes the quality of our relationship.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Performs their organizational responsibilities.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Directly addresses organizational responsibilities.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Does not shirk duties.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Would answer telephone calls from me and others.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Would answer e-mail from me and others.	①	②	③	④	⑤

Is willing to address complaints or queries, rather than taking negative reactions.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Present themselves as cheerful and optimistic regarding the future.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Uses a positive, optimistic tone.	①	②	③	④	⑤

You just viewed a car company blog. What was the company?

- ☐ Ford
- ☐ Chevrolet
- ☐ Toyota
- ☐ Honda
- ☐ Nissan
- ☐ Hyundai
- ☐ Dodge
- ☐ Kia
- ☐ GMC
- ☐ Jeep
- ☐ Subaru
- ☐ Volkswagen
- ☐ Mazda
- ☐ Lexus
- ☐ Mercedes-Benz
- ☐ BMW
- ☐ Ram
- ☐ Chrysler
- ☐ Buick
- ☐ Cadillac
- ☐ Acura
- ☐ Infiniti
- ☐ Audi
- ☐ Mercury
- ☐ Lincoln
- ☐ Mitsubishi
- ☐ Volvo
- ☐ Scion
- ☐ Mini
- ☐ Land Rover
- ☐ Other
- ☐ I don't know.

What country is this brand from originally?

- ☐ USA
- ☐ Japan
- ☐ South Korea
- ☐ Germany
- ☐ Italy
- ☐ France
- ☐ England

- ☐ China
☐ India
☐ Other
☐ I don't know.

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements regarding the company whose blog you just visited, its home country, and the cars it produces on a scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Indicate your agreement with the following items:

Indicate your agreement with the following items:		Somewhat agree			Strongly agree
		Neutral			
		Somewhat disagree			
		Strongly disagree			
The HOME COUNTRY of this company (or its population)...					
...is friendly and likable.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...is artistic and creative.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...is well educated.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...is hard-working.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...has good technical education.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...achieves high standards.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...has raised standards of living.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...has technical skills.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...has similar political views.	①	②	③	④	⑤
.... is economically similar.	①	②	③	④	⑤
... is culturally similar.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...participates in international affairs.	①	②	③	④	⑤
In general, PRODUCTS (not just cars) from the home country of this company...					
...are unreasonably expensive.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...are luxury products.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...have meticulous workmanship.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...are imitations.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...are known mainly for industrial products.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...are sold in many countries.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...are not attractive.	①	②	③	④	⑤

...are intensely advertised.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...have frequent repairs.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...have a wide range of models.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...are long lasting.	①	②	③	④	⑤

Indicate your agreement with the following items:

Indicate your agreement with the following items:					Strongly agree
		Somewhat agree			
		Neutral			
	Somewhat disagree				
	Strongly disagree				
In general, PRODUCTS (not just cars) from the home country of this company...					
...are advertised in an informative way.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...are difficult to service.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...are cheaply put together.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...have high technology.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...have good value.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...are easily available.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...are prestigious.	①	②	③	④	⑤
CARS from the home country of this company...	①	②	③	④	⑤
...have good fuel economy.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...have attractive exterior styling.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...have good workmanship.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...handle well.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...have little maintenance.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...are very comfortable.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...are difficult to get parts for.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...have a quality service.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...are made to last.	①	②	③	④	⑤
...are overall excellent.	①	②	③	④	⑤

A few more questions about the blog:

Please rate the level of American patriotism in the blog you just read. *(Choose the point on the continuum between the adjectives that best describes your impression.)*

Not at all patriotic 1 2 3 4 5 very patriotic

How interactive was the blog you just read? *(Choose the point on the continuum between the adjectives that best describes your impression.)*

Not at all interactive 1 2 3 4 5 very interactive

Which elements were present on the blog? *(Check all that apply.)*

- ☐ Hyperlinks
- ☐ Videos
- ☐ Images
- ☐ Possibility to comment
- ☐ Possibility to “like” posts
- ☐ Possibility to share content
- ☐ Links to social media
- ☐ Downloads
- ☐ Feedback form
- ☐ Contact section
- ☐ Frequent updates
- ☐ Current updates
- ☐ Opportunity for dialogue
- ☐ Images of flags
- ☐ References to the United States
- ☐ References to a country other than the U.S.
- ☐ Mission for U.S. market
- ☐ International mission
- ☐ Support of American economy
- ☐ Support of global economy
- ☐ Support of American citizens
- ☐ Support of people around the world
- ☐ American values

Did you comment on any of the blog posts?

- ☐ yes ☐ no

Finally, please rate your agreement with the following statements on a scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Indicate your agreement with the following items:

Indicate your agreement with the following items:		Strongly agree			
		Somewhat agree			
		Neutral			
	Somewhat disagree				
	Strongly disagree				
American people should always buy American-made products instead of imports.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Only those products that are unavailable in the U.S. should be imported.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Buy American-made products. Keep America working.	①	②	③	④	⑤
American products, first, last, and foremost.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Purchasing foreign-made products is un-American.	①	②	③	④	⑤
It is not right to purchase foreign products, because it puts Americans out of jobs.	①	②	③	④	⑤
A real American should always buy American-made products.	①	②	③	④	⑤
We should purchase products manufactured in America instead of letting other countries get rich off us.	①	②	③	④	⑤
It is always best to purchase American products.	①	②	③	④	⑤
There should be very little trading or purchasing of goods from other countries unless out of necessity.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Americans should not buy foreign products, because this hurts American business and causes unemployment.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Curbs should be put on all imports.	①	②	③	④	⑤
It may cost me in the long run-run but I prefer to support American products.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Foreigners should not be allowed to put their products on our markets.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Foreign products should be taxed heavily to reduce their entry into the U.S.	①	②	③	④	⑤
We should buy from foreign countries only those products that we cannot obtain within our own country.	①	②	③	④	⑤
American consumers who purchase products made in other countries are responsible for putting their fellow Americans out of work.	①	②	③	④	⑤

THANK YOU!

Thank you for participating in this study! If as part of this study you read a blog, this blog was actually written for the purpose of this study, and some of the more specific information that you read about the car company was not factual. If you would like to learn more about the study once it's completed, please send an e-mail to billgen@uga.edu.

Please choose now whether you want to

- ☐ Submit your answers
- ☐ Withdraw from the study and discard your answers

If you have general questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 629 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411, phone: (706) 542-3199, e-mail address: IRB@uga.edu.

We kindly ask you not to talk about this study with any other students because we have scheduled more sessions for students to take it and we don't want them to be influenced. Thank you!

Appendix G: Experiment facilitation guide

Location: Different computer labs on campus (tbd).

Set up

1. Open two tabs in browser: one for the survey in Qualtrics and one for a blog. All participants of the same cell will view the same blog. Log on to the blog before students enter the room.
2. Bring consent forms and distribute.

Facilitating a cell

1. Ask participants to choose a computer.
2. Welcome participants:

“Thank you for considering participating in this study. It should take about 30-40 minutes and everything will be done on the computer. First, I will pass out a consent form. Please read the consent form before you get started on anything else. It will inform you about your rights as a participant and tell you a little bit about what we are going to do. If you agree with everything, please sign the consent form and get started with the actual study. If you do not want to participate, please do not complete a questionnaire.

When you get to the actual study, please start with the questionnaire and follow the directions carefully. There is no right or wrong with these questions. Just mark whatever you feel fits best.

One more thing: Please do not talk while you complete the questionnaire so everyone can concentrate on his or her answers. If you have any questions, please do not ask your fellow participants. Please raise your hand and I will come talk to you individually. When you have completed the first questionnaire, I will show you what to do next.

3. Hand out the consent form.
4. Make sure everyone completes the consent forms first.
5. Make sure all participants start their questionnaires and help if needed.
6. Whenever a student has completed the pre-test, show them where to find the blog.
7. Tell them: “Please spend 10 minutes with this blog. You can read, follow links, post comments, whatever you want. After 10 minutes, I will let you know what to do next.”
8. After 10 minutes, tell the participants to stop viewing the blog. “Please direct your attention toward the second and final part of the questionnaire now. Once the software tells you that you are done, you may leave. Please make sure to leave your consent forms with me.”
9. The debrief will automatically be shown once the post-test is completed.

General rules:

- Do not allow any late arrivals.
- Do not allow participants to discuss the study with one another while they are participating.