

Leveraging Region-of-Origin to Strengthen Fast Moving Consumer Goods Competitiveness in Emerging Markets

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Abstract:

Emerging markets in Asia are home to fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) with deep cultural and regional identities. However, despite their distinctive value propositions, these products are often overshadowed by multinational brands with greater resources, market reach, and strategic visibility. This paper develops a conceptual framework to explain how region-of-origin can strengthen FMCG competitiveness by influencing perceived quality, product evaluation, and purchase intention. By integrating insights from the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, and Suhud's Rhombus model, this framework positions region-of-origin as a primary stimulus that activates both perceived quality and product evaluation, which lead to stronger purchase intention and actual consumer behaviour. Drawing on contemporary literature and market examples from emerging countries, the study argues that a region-of-origin is most effective when embedded in broader brand narratives, supported by credible quality signals, sustainability certifications, and digital engagement strategies. This integration allows the regional products to transcend functional utility and instead deliver symbolic, cultural, and ethical value to the consumers. The framework identifies practical implications for marketers in designing culturally resonant campaigns, for policymakers to create enabling environments through certification schemes and market access initiatives, and for producers in leveraging the narrative branding to strengthen the market positioning. While primarily conceptual, this work offers a robust foundation for empirical research to assess how region-of-origin influences consumer decision-making across product categories, cultural contexts, and income segments in emerging markets, thus translating the cultural heritage into a sustainable competitive advantage.

Keywords: Region-of-Origin, Purchase Behaviour, Purchase Intention, fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), Emerging Markets

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INTRODUCTION

Emerging markets rich in cultural heritage often produce fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) that reflect a deep sense of place, tradition, and identity. These goods are more than just commodities as each one of them tells a story rooted in local practise and sense. Although these products have their own unique cultural backgrounds, they often struggle for visibility in the mainstream retail channels due to structural and market-entry barriers (Edunjobi, 2024; Kumar, 2025; Oyeyemi et al., 2023). Although global interest in authenticity, provenance, and cultural diversity has grown progressively over the years, the regionally grounded FMCG still continues to face major barriers. Fragmented supply chains, limited marketing capabilities, and infrastructural gaps that restrict the distribution efficiency remain as the key hindrances (Fareniuk, 2022). Even though these limitations are structural, they do not reduce the potential value of culturally enshrined consumer products. Rich in narrative and symbolic meaning, such products offer strong possibilities for differentiation, particularly in the niche markets where consumers actively seek alternatives to standardised and globalised goods.

In this context, recent critiques caution against treating the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a single origin because it hides differences in language, belief systems and institutions. ASEAN countries have varied cultural histories, languages, belief systems, and legal frameworks, and none share English as a national language (Rhodes et al., 2025; Smith, 2024). A broad label such as “ASEAN made” oversimplifies these differences because consumers link products to regions differently; advertising appeals succeed only when the regional cue matches the perceived typicality. Thus, using a broad regional cue risks misaligning brand messages with the local consumer values and failing to generate positive attitudes (Wang et al., 2024). A robust framework accounts for these differences by promoting sub-regional analysis and segmentation, allowing marketers to match messaging to local cultural and legal contexts (Smith, 2024).

Further studies on consumers reveal a clear market disconnect. Studies indicate that price sensitivity continues to exert a strong influence on purchasing behaviour in the emerging FMCG markets, where low-income consumers often prioritise affordability and availability over cultural or heritage value (Mamuaya, 2024; Río & Arroyo, 2024). These dynamics point out the importance for region-specific products to be both economically viable and aligned with the consumer budget constraints. In parallel, the research emphasises that product acceptance in this culturally linked FMCG is strongly mediated by the sensory and aesthetic appeal, with evidence showing that factors such as packaging design, texture, flavour, and visual presentation significantly shape the purchase decisions, especially when competing against the mass-market alternatives (Akram et al., 2025; Maheswari & Kannan, 2024). Thus, when these sensory attributes are optimised, they can create a bridge between tradition and modern consumer expectations.

It is clear from the extensive evidence in the studies have found that targeted localisation strategies can strengthen ties between cultural heritage and consumer identity, especially in tourism-driven or community-based markets, through aligning the brand narratives with locally valued traditions and consumer ethnocentrism (Suci et al., 2023). Furthermore, evidence from the cross-cultural FMCG studies indicates that consumers in emerging markets tend to develop stronger brand attitudes when product positioning is combined with the local identity cues, thus enhancing purchase intention and increasing willingness to pay a premium (Dobbelstein et al., 2020; Safeer et al., 2022). Evidence from other studies suggests that traditionsapes illustrate that embedding products in living cultural practices encourages a deep sense of attachment, enabling brands to act as custodians of local heritage while appealing to the modern sensibilities (Dalmoro et al., 2020).

While the symbolic meaning has often been highlighted as a driver of consumer preference; Río and Arroyo (2024) shows that practical considerations such as price stability, packaging, and availability frequently outweigh the pure cultural cues. In highly competitive FMCG environments, this interplay between the cultural resonance and pragmatic needs suggests a dual strategic approach that honours the heritage while optimising commercial viability. It is noted that the available empirical data is still limited, and the gap persists between the cultural richness and commercial competitiveness, as many region-linked narratives remain underutilised in brand communication (Osmanoglu et al., 2024). Activating region-of-origin strategically within a hybrid position balances local authenticity with the broader market appeal can ensure the regional FMCG brands to achieve both differentiation and emotional resonance in the competitive environments (Saqib & Shah, 2022).

This paper focuses on introducing and integrating the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the Stimulus-Organism-Response model, Suhud’s Rhombus model, and the region-of-origin concept into a coherent conceptual framework by considering aspects of how region-of-origin operates as an external stimulus, with perceived quality and product evaluation mediating its effects on purchase intention and actual consumer behaviour. The work presented in this paper is motivated by the fact that in emerging FMCG markets, particularly those marked by cultural diversity, strategically aligning the cultural identity with brand positioning can enhance brand awareness, market competitiveness, and consumer value, thereby repositing the cultural distinctiveness as a tangible strategic advantage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Region-of-Origin

The concept of region-of-origin, pioneered in the early work of Koert van Ittersum (2001) It was established that consumers' evaluations of products are influenced not only by functional attributes but also by symbolic associations that are tied to the specific region's reputation, traditions, and perceived quality. His studies focused on European food products, demonstrated that regional cues could operate as quality heuristics even without the direct product experience; but only by linking place-based identity with consumer trust and authenticity perceptions. Although his work primarily focused on developed markets, it laid the theoretical foundation for contemporary research examining how region-of-origin can function as a strategic differentiator in FMCG within emerging markets, especially when formal certification system is inconsistent, and brand familiarity is limited. In such contexts, the origin often serves as a formal accreditation which signals the credibility and helps the products to stand out in crowded retail spaces (Santeramo et al., 2020; Waehning & Filieri, 2022).

Building on the foundational literature, proximity does not guarantee cultural or institutional similarity. Regions such as ASEAN encompass countries with different languages, religions, and regulatory frameworks (Rhodes et al., 2025; Terpstra-Tong & Ralston, 2025). Consumers may interpret the same regional cue in distinct ways depending on their national context. Treating these diverse markets as a single homogeneous region risks oversimplifying consumer perceptions and misinforming strategy. This paper, therefore, treats region-of-origin as a flexible marker that interacts with national and local contexts rather than as a fixed label.

In countries with strong regulations and enforcement, certifications such as Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) help in connecting the products with their geographic roots. These systems set clear standards that safeguard cultural traditions, protect local environments, and support community-based practices, while offering the producers a formal way to verify authenticity. Originally associated with premium goods such as cheese and wine, the PDO label has recently found its way into the FMCG sector. This shift represents the evolution in consumer values, with the growing interest in the product's origin, production, and authenticity. As Martínez-Salvador and Reyes-Jaime (2022) note, PDOs are more than just official stamps as they embody the principles of environmental protection, community empowerment and cultural preservation, which can add symbolic weight even to mass-produced FMCG. Such a combination of functional and symbolic signals can boost perceived quality and help in the justification for charging at premium prices.

It is worth noting that region-of-origin cues work best when they are woven into credible, engaging narratives rather than presented as standalone claims. For instance, the Indonesian "Local Pride" movement partnered with influencers to deliver ethnocentric messages that help to strengthen purchase intention for domestic FMCG brands (Suseno & Hidayat, 2021). Similar patterns emerge in *Erigo's* marketing strategy, in which cultural storytelling is integrated into digital content and live-streaming campaigns, which have boosted perceptions of prestige and authenticity in Indonesia's highly competitive fashion industry, and in turn, reinforced brand pride and loyalty among younger consumers (Ilmi et al., 2024; Putra et al., 2024; Rizki & Sukaris, 2025). These illustrate that when online stories tap into the emotion and cultural identity, the region-of-origin shifts from being a mere static label to becoming a powerful driver to loyalty. This effect is particularly pronounced in emerging FMCG markets, where a brand's narrative often carries more weight than the product itself.

Despite its strong conceptual roots, the region-of-origin remains underexplored in the FMCG context of emerging markets, particularly regarding the interaction with perceived quality and authenticity cues in price-sensitive consumer segments. In general, most of the literatures still focus on the broader country-of-origin effect, leaving a huge gap in understanding the nuanced, more locally oriented effects of regional specificity. It is suggested that the strength of region-of-origin lies in the connection between symbolic cultural narratives with the functional quality assurances (Brzozowicz et al., 2023; Santeramo et al., 2020; Tarabashkina et al., 2024). This becomes

vital in globalised retail environments that dilute the product distinctiveness, yet where consumers actively seek products that aligned with the local identity and ethical values (Witek-Hajduk & Grudecka, 2023).

Hence, there is a need for FMCG brands in emerging markets to strategically leverage region-of-origin to go beyond the static geographic signalling. It should function as a platform for authentic storytelling, blending heritage, community engagement, and transparent production practices. This dual focus addresses the persistent gap in the literature, thus, the need to explore how these cues interact with perceived quality and price sensitivity to drive purchase intention, especially in product categories where functional parity is high.

Consumer Behaviour Constructs

Purchase Behaviour

Consumer behaviour in the FMCG sector is shaped by the interwoven set of psychological, cultural, and practical considerations. While region-of-origin cues can generate strong initial attraction by sending signals such as authenticity and cultural identity, the influence in emerging markets is oftentimes mediated by more functional drivers such as price fairness, product availability, and trust in quality (Bhattacharya & Sharma, 2022; Casolani et al., 2024; Hassan et al., 2021). In volatile economies, consumers often prioritise tangible assurance of value and reliability over purely symbolic associations with the origin. This occurs because economic uncertainty heightens the perceived risk, causing consumers to be more cautious in evaluating purchase options. In fact, consumers become more evaluative as to whether a regionally labelled FMCG product can deliver measurable functional benefits such as a superior shelf life, verified safety standards, or reliable supply, before allowing cultural or symbolic appeal to influence the final purchase decisions (Damberg et al., 2024; Tripathi, 2024). Thus, in emerging markets, this balancing act between sentiment and pragmatism is particularly pronounced, as household budgets are often tightly managed and purchasing choices are subject to rapid change in response to market fluctuations or supply chain disruptions.

In recent years, there has been renewed interest in relating purchase behaviour to region-of-origin cues, particularly in emerging markets. Studies in Nepal and India's FMCG sector reveal that such cues meaningfully strengthen the purchase intention when backed by trust and satisfaction, as they enhance authenticity and credibility. However, the influence weakens when the product quality and accessibility is uncertain, indicating that while consumer ethnocentrism and origin information can shape attitudes, the purchase decisions depend on the perceived value, reliable supply, and consistent performance (Bhattacharya et al., 2022; Karki & Khadka, 2023). Some other studies in emerging markets presented similar patterns, where region-of-origin functions as a quality signal but have to compete with other tangible attributes such as price competitiveness, and product design in the final decision-making process (Casolani et al., 2024; Feri & Tjandra, 2023).

Within the food and beverage in the FMCG sector, region-of-origin labels such as protected designations and local sourcing claims can elevate the perceived authenticity and trust, particularly when accompanied by visible quality assurance (Dangi et al., 2020; Mohammed, 2021). In India and Saudi Arabia, local origin cues on organic products boosted purchase intention only when tied to credible certification and clear functional benefits. Similar cases were found when Indonesian and Indian consumers were willing to pay a small premium for regionally labelled beverages when the quality perceptions were high, but the effect eroded when the products lacked consistent distribution or tangible quality advantages (Dangi et al., 2020; Oduro et al., 2024). This indicates that region-of-origin cues alone are rarely sufficient in a competitive FMCG environment; thus, they must be embedded within a broader strategy that can ensure tangible, functional value as well as cultural resonance.

Numerous studies have consistently shown that the role of region of origin in influencing FMCG purchase behaviour is contingent on the presence of practical value drivers. While region-of-origin can enhance the perceptions of authenticity and serve as a cultural differentiator, it seldom guarantees sustainable loyalty without the complementary functional benefits (Bhattacharya & Sharma, 2022; Karki & Khadka, 2023). Additionally, most studies focus on higher-involvement categories, such as wine, cheese, and organic food, which leaves a notable gap in the empirical understanding of how the region of origin can influence low-involvement, high-frequency FMCG products in emerging markets. Thus, there is an opportunity to add to this under-researched area by clarifying the extent to which region of origin can be leveraged as part of an integrated value proposition that blends cultural appeal with functional performance to sustain consumer engagement.

Purchase Intention

The purchase intention reflects the likelihood that a consumer will buy a product, and it is considered as primary predictor of market performance, especially in FMCG categories (Ganegoda & Weerasekera, 2024; Pandey et al., 2024). This has been extensively investigated in the literature, and purchase intention is influenced by cognitive, emotional, and contextual factors, including perceived quality, brand trust, price sensitivity, and convenience. In emerging markets, this purchase intention is sensitive towards signals that reduce uncertainty, given variable brand familiarity and inconsistent product quality. The region-of-origin is one such signal which offers a cue of authenticity and reliability in the markets where other brand equity indicators may be weak (Fan & Weiming, 2022). When this cue operates in conjunction with other heuristic triggers, it can provide multiple pathways to influence consumer choice and purchase intention.

There is a large body of literature surrounding the purchase intention, and one of the recent works in the emerging market in Vietnam indicates that purchase intention can be enhanced amid the intense competition, under intense competition; only when it aligns with environmental and cultural values (Vuong et al., 2024). Similar findings were found in digital retail contexts, where heuristic cues such as brand name, product origin, and social proof significantly influence the purchase intention through shaping perceived value and reducing perceived risk (Rosillo-Díaz et al., 2024), while in social media-driven FMCG marketing, brand loyalty and awareness reinforced by regional branding have been shown to mediate the relationship between exposure and purchase intention (Mukherjee et al., 2023). There is several studies have in fact shown that perceived quality and trust are central to driving purchase intention in FMCG; for instance, Dangi et al. (2020) found that trust in product certifications boosts purchase intention even among price-sensitive consumers, while Mamuaya (2024) reported that perceived product quality, competitive pricing, and brand familiarity mutually predict purchase intention in emerging markets.

There is, in fact, evidence to suggest that in emerging markets, purchase intention is rarely the product of a single driver; rather, it emerges from the interaction between functional, emotional, and cultural attributes. Therefore, region-of-origin functions as a high-impact cue when it aligns with the recognised product categories, such as *Gayo* coffee and *Darjeeling* tea and is supported by credible quality claims (Rosillo-Díaz et al., 2024; Yadav et al., 2025). The literature also highlights the need for further research to understand how region-of-origin influences purchase intention in the FMCG sector, particularly within emerging markets, as most studies focus on the broader concept of country-of-origin effects on premium product categories, thereby leaving an empirical gap in mass-consumption goods.

Perceived Quality

Perceived quality plays a decisive role in consumer decision-making for FMCG products, particularly in emerging markets where brand familiarity can be limited and heuristic cues gain greater weight. Among these cues, the region of origin may act as a rapid evaluative shortcut, influencing expectations of product reliability and authenticity prior to consumption. Oftentimes, this has been assumed to have a universally positive

influence, but its actual effect on perceived quality can vary across product categories and is mediated by cultural and market-specific contexts. Dobbstein et al. (2020) have demonstrated that consumers in both developed and emerging economies frequently associate local or regional FMCG brands with higher quality and stronger community ties, but such perceptions are especially pronounced in emerging markets where local provenance may serve as a proxy for trust and value. Similarly, in markets where product category norms are well-established, the perceived brand localness can enhance clarity and consistency, which indirectly boosts perceived quality and influences purchase intention (Vaziri et al., 2025).

More recently, several empirical studies have supported the central role of perceived quality in shaping FMCG consumer choices. Across emerging FMCG markets, perceived quality has consistently predicted purchase intention, as shown in Indonesia, where brand trust serves as a key mediator, particularly in online channels where physical inspection is impossible. Similar case in Pakistan, where pricing, placement, and promotional strategies directly influence quality perceptions, highlighting the need to align provenance cues with broader marketing mix effectiveness (Khalil, 2021). Across both wine and premium FMCG sectors, region-of-origin cues have been shown to shape perceived quality; in fact, the regional labels in wine significantly altered both expected and experienced quality even in blind tastings (Ferreira et al., 2021), while in premium FMCG, the region-specific positioning combined with sustainability certification enhanced trust and reinforced the quality perceptions (Casolani et al., 2024; Chow et al., 2024).

The body of evidence indicates that perceived quality is indeed formed through the interplay of both intrinsic and extrinsic attributes. However, consumers in emerging markets still cannot physically evaluate a product before consumption, especially in online channels, as extrinsic cues carry disproportionate weight. Although the region of origin can serve as a cue, its effectiveness is only when the region is strongly associated with quality in the given product category. There is a notable research gap in exploring how perceived quality is constructed for low-involvement FMCG products in emerging markets, since brand differentiation is minimal and quality evaluation must be made at once. Thus, addressing this gap requires targeted empirical studies that isolate the drivers of perceived quality in emerging market FMCG settings, with specific attention to the relative impact of provenance cues compared to other extrinsic and intrinsic factors.

Product Evaluation

Product evaluation in FMCG markets is a multidimensional process that balances objective factors with subjective perception-based elements such as brand image, packaging appeal, and symbolic associations. However, in emerging markets, this evaluation process is shaped by information asymmetry, where consumers often have limited access to independent product testing or established brand histories, leading them to rely more heavily on heuristic cues and experiential feedback. Studies on product evaluation show that product quality, price sensitivity, and brand reputation remain as the most influential drivers of purchase intentions, with consistent quality serving as the foundation for favourable evaluations (Mamuaya, 2024). Besides, consumers evaluate FMCG products not only on intrinsic merit but also on the broader retail experience through store image and perceived value, which enhances brand loyalty (Islam et al., 2023).

Studies in emerging market shows that consumers weigh functional attributes heavily in their evaluation, but emotional and symbolic factors increasingly play a role in purchase decisions (Kaur, 2024). While region-of-origin can be one of the heuristic cues, its influence needs to operate together with other factors such as certification labels, peer reviews, and perceived value for money. Casolani et al. (2024) posits that provenance indicators, when paired with tangible quality signals, enhance perceived credibility and influence evaluation outcomes even in commoditised sectors. Evidence from packaged goods markets shows that certification labels and verified quality claims can reinforce the positive perceptions, especially where consumers are seeking assurances in low-differentiation categories (Novendra et al., 2025). Furthermore, in the contexts where

emerging market brands operate under a weaker national or regional reputation, third-party certification and store credibility can counteract scepticism, improving both perceived quality and overall brand evaluation (Raji et al., 2025).

Research has consistently shown that FMCG product evaluation is shaped by both tangible performance metrics and intangible brand-related factors. Although the functional benefits remain as the basis for consumer acceptance, the symbolic and emotional cues can serve a greater role in driving differentiation and loyalty. However, the challenge lies for the marketers to find the right balance between these functional and symbolic messages to ensure that they resonate with the target audience while being authentic. For brands in emerging markets, the adoption of a layered strategy that integrates both dimensions enhances the product evaluations, competitive differentiation, and builds lasting consumer loyalty.

UNDERPINNING THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

This section lays the theoretical groundwork for the proposed framework, outlining the core concepts and relevance. Focusing on the dynamics of FMCG in emerging markets, it evaluates the capacity of different theoretical models in explaining how the product's region-of-origin influences consumer behaviour. By establishing the connection between behavioural theories with specific regional contexts, this review offers a structured basis for understanding on how cultural and contextual factors shape consumer decision-making.

Theory of Planned Behaviour

Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) proposes that there are three (3) factors that shape behavioural intentions: (i) attitude toward the behaviour which reflect an individual's personal evaluation of an action; (ii) subjective norms, representing the perceived social pressure to perform or avoid the behaviour; and (iii) perceived behavioural control that denotes the individual's belief in the ability to carry out the action. These intentions are considered as the most direct predictors of actual behaviour. There exists a very extensive literature to confirm TPB's relevance in consumer research, particularly in contexts where purchase decisions are influenced by complex cultural and market environments (Gul & Ahmed, 2024; Magwegwe & Shaik, 2024).

In fact, the structure of the TPB and strong psychological groundwork make it a robust framework to analyse how beliefs can be translated into intentions and consumer actions. This has been shown in Wicaksono et al. (2024) that subjective norms and perceived behavioural control exert a strong influence on purchase intention in the second-hand fashion industry, which shares behavioural traits with FMCG markets such as frequent purchase and value-driven decision-making. Similar findings were found in sustainable apparel and slow fashion, which highlight that perceived control and social expectations can shape ethical consumption choices (Gul & Ahmed, 2024; Lira & Costa, 2022). Applied to region-of-origin, TPB reveals how identity, community dynamics, and perceived control converge to drive decisions, underscoring its relevance in markets where social influence and personal values matter as much as product features.

The TPB has long been a useful behavioural model that has triggered several extended versions, such as the Decomposed Theory of Planned Behaviour (DTPB). This DTPB enhances the framework by separating broad constructs such as attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control into more defined elements such as perceived usefulness, ease of use, and peer influence. This structure allows for a more focused approach to what drives consumers' individual decisions in specific contexts. In a study on mobile payment adoption, Giovanis et al. (2020) found that service compatibility, ease of use, and social support played the main role in shaping the user intention. Among these, the interpersonal influence and supportive external conditions had a greater impact than personal attitudes, which suggests that the surrounding social environment can be stronger than internal preferences. Similarly, Shaikh et al. (2022) used DTPB to explore the adoption of Islamic mortgage decisions in

Malaysia and Pakistan, showing the model's significant ability to predict adoption through peer influence, compatibility with personal values, and self-efficacy in the contexts where cultural and religious values can guide financial behaviour.

While TPB has evolved through frameworks such as Reasoned Action Approach (RAA), which distinguishes between the experiential and instrumental attitudes or between injunctive and descriptive norms, TPB remains highly relevant to study the region-of-origin and consumer behaviour in FMCG, particularly in emerging markets. This is because TPB is designed to be structured yet flexible, enabling it to accommodate culturally rooted, symbolic, and deliberative behaviours that often intersect in emerging economies. The application of TPB in the studies of food and FMCG contexts shows that consumer behaviour is shaped not merely by individual attitudes but also influenced by the social norms and perceived behavioural control. In a study by Miguel et al. (2022) on domestic food purchase in Portugal, the TPB is applicable in determining the consumers' intention in which ethnocentrism and national identity significantly influence consumers' preferences for local fruits and vegetables. Similarly, Pratama and Yuliati (2021) found that TPB's adaptability to various low-involvement settings, including emotional and cultural undercurrents, influences the consumers' purchase intention for pet food in Indonesia. Further support comes from China's organic food sector, where TPB successfully captured how emerging middle-class values, food safety concerns, and socio-cultural perceptions influence consumer intent in new product categories (Wang et al., 2020).

The TPB's ability to incorporate both rational and normative components through its powerful constructs make it particularly useful for studying products linked to origin-based symbolism and national pride. In fact, studies such as Mishra and Kaur (2025), and Musa et al. (2024) have long echoed in applications to green consumption and financial inclusion in emerging markets such as India and Nigeria, where attitudes and normative cues intersect with cultural values and structural constraints. The interdisciplinary applicability of the TPB across various contexts is evidence of its strength, relevance, theoretical rigour, and operational efficiencies. Thus, it offers a reliable framework for understanding the consumer responses in the FMCG sector in emerging markets where behaviour is usually driven by both rational evaluation and culturally embedded motivations.

Stimulus-Organism-Response Model

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model was first introduced by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) to explain how external stimuli (S) influence internal emotional and cognitive states (O), which subsequently shape behavioural responses (R). In consumer behaviour research, the model has regained prominence, particularly in FMCG contexts where decisions are rapid yet emotionally charged. The ability to account for both rational evaluations and emotional engagement make it well-suited to examine symbolic or identity-driven purchase decisions.

The growing body of evidence supports the application of the S-O-R model to region-of-origin cues, especially in emerging markets. For example, Xiang and Liu (2024) demonstrated how origin cues trigger trust-based internal states that lead to favourable behaviour. By disclosing environmental origin information for green agricultural products, it helps to increase consumer trust, which leads to boosted purchase intention. In a similar case, Hien et al. (2024) found that country-of-brand image shaped perceptions of corporate social responsibility and thrust, driving brand loyalty in Vietnam's automotive industry. Regardless of the sectoral differences, these findings emphasise the consistent role of origin cues in activating psychological mechanisms in influencing consumer behaviour.

Additional research further illustrates the model's explanatory power. Kıymalıoğlu et al. (2024) reported that the sustainable packaging features regional or ethical cues influenced both emotional and cognitive evaluations, encouraging the prosocial consumption. In other studies, Tan (2020) found that narrative and visual stimuli tied

to the place identity can enhance brand image and trust, thereby increasing purchase intention. As for digital contexts, Naqvi et al. (2020) confirmed that regional identity within the e-brand communities can foster emotional engagement and loyalty. Such findings underscore the versatility of the S-O-R model in decoding the psychological and emotional processes through which origin-related stimuli shape consumer responses across both physical and digital retail environments.

It is clear from the extensive findings in the literature that the S-O-R model effectively captures the mechanisms through which the region-of-origin cues influence consumer behaviour in emerging markets. The emphasis on the organism enables a nuanced understanding of how emotional resonance, pride, trust, and perceived authenticity are triggered by place-based stimuli. Furthermore, the S-O-R model has higher adaptability to both traditional and digital retail channels, which enhances the utility in analysing modern FMCG consumer patterns. The similarities in findings suggest that the S-O-R model can be a guiding model to understand consumer response to region-of-origin cues in emerging FMCG markets. This is because it bridges the emotional and cognitive domains, which accommodates the complexity of cultures, and aligns with the speed and symbolism embedded in everyday purchase behaviour.

Suhud's Rhombus Model

The Suhud's Rhombus model offers a flexible, context-sensitive framework for understanding consumer decision-making, built on the interaction between perceived quality, perceived price, brand image, and purchase intention (Suhud et al., 2022). Unlike linear behavioural models, the Rhombus model recognises these constructs as interchangeable and interactively dynamic, allowing for the simultaneous influence of both emotional and functional drivers. Furthermore, some unique features of this model make it applicable for FMCG markets in emerging economies, where purchase behaviour oftentimes needs to be balanced between regional and cultural symbolic attachment with pragmatic concerns such as affordability. Its non-hierarchical nature also complements the S-O-R model, which emphasises affective and cognitive states triggered by stimuli, and the TPB that links attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control to behavioural intentions.

Empirical studies have demonstrated that the Rhombus model's predictive capability in contexts where perceived values are actively negotiated. Moreover, Suhud et al. (2022) found that the consumers in Indonesia's smartphone market often prioritised trade-offs between perceived price for higher perceived quality or for a stronger brand image, depending on the situational priorities. An alternative explanation for this can be found in Anwar et al. (2022), as similar findings in Yogyakarta's thrift fashion sector, where quality, price, and brand image operated simultaneously rather than sequentially in shaping the purchase intention. Extending this to the region-of-origin, Fan and Weiming (2022) showed that the regional image of agricultural products in China has significantly improved perceived quality, which leads to an increase in purchase intention. This suggests that the possibility of directly linking region-of-origin cues with the Rhombus model's quality-intention pathway.

In region-of-origin focused FMCG contexts, the four (4) constructs of Suhud's Rhombus model map neatly onto the real consumer behaviours while intersecting with pathways described in both the S-O-R model and the TPB. This region-of-origin cues often evoke strong quality associations tied to the heritage, climate, and craftsmanship, reflecting the link between S-O-R's stimulus and cognitive organism (Xiang & Liu, 2024), as well as the TPB's emphasis on attitudes towards behaviour (Miguel et al., 2022). Thus, in price-sensitive emerging markets, consumers may accept a moderate premium for regional-branded products when the authenticity and local pride outweigh the cost concerns; a process that reflects the TPB's interaction between attitudes and perceived behavioural control, and the S-O-R's evaluative processes (Mkedder et al., 2021). In addition, the purchase intention, in the Rhombus model, arises from the simultaneous influence of these interdependent factors rather than a fixed causal relationship, thus aligning with the S-O-R's concurrent organismic responses, and the TPB's combined pathways (Suhud et al., 2022). These connections show how Suhud's Rhombus model accommodates

the region-of-origin's multidimensional impact while complementing the emotional depths of S-O-R and the structured predictive capability of TPB.

As for region-of-origin research in emerging FMCG markets, Suhud's Rhombus model indeed offers a real-world scenario that captures the interplay between symbolic, emotional, as well as pragmatic purchase drivers. The integration insights from the S-O-R and TPB ensure that researchers can achieve a holistic understanding on how the S-O-R enriches the organism layer through the capture of affective and cognitive reactions to origin cues, while TPB structures the attitudinal and normative influences, and the Suhud's Rhombus model maps these influences into a dynamic, reciprocal relationships between quality, price, brand image, and intention. Drawing from this multi-model perspective is particularly relevant for culturally embedded FMCG markets, where consumer responses are shaped by both heritage and value-for-money considerations.

INTEGRATION OF FRAMEWORKS

Figure 1 presents the synthesised conceptual framework designed to explain the influence of region-of-origin on consumer behaviour within emerging FMCG markets. By integrating the explanatory strength of the S-O-R model, the structured predictive capacity of TPB, the value-focused dynamics of Suhud's Rhombus Model, and the cultural echo rooted in the region-of-origin concept, the model explains how regional branding works in the context of different and dynamic environments.

The framework features region-of-origin as the initiating stimulus, followed by two (2) sequential processing stages: internal perception via Perceived Quality and Product Evaluation, and the emergence of Purchase Intention and Purchase Behaviour. The arrows in the model indicate hypothesised causal pathways reflecting both affective and cognitive processes, as emotion and reasoning both play a role in determining consumer behaviour, especially in domains where cultural cues compete with pragmatic factors. The visual exposition constitutes a foundational schema for investigating region-of-origin effects on consumer behaviour in emerging markets, thereby guiding empirical inquiry and informing future research. The model that has been proposed provides a disciplined and yet flexible framework for understanding the complex interdependence of identity, perception, and decision-making. Consequently, it constitutes an indispensable conceptual instrument for scholars and practitioners whose objective is to comprehend and fortify the competitive standing of regionally grounded FMCG brands.

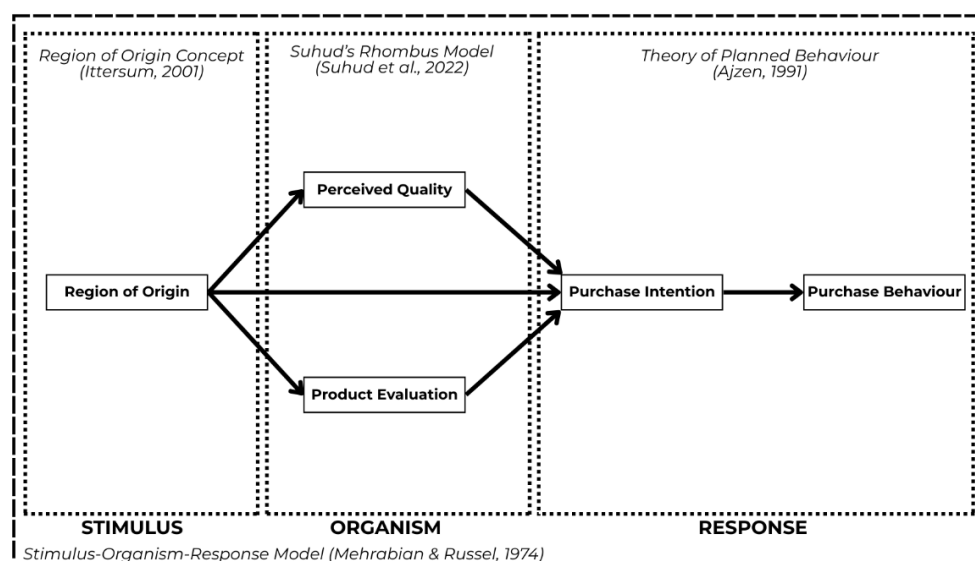


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework

Region-of-Origin as Primary Stimulus

The concept of region-of-origin is hereby treated as the principal stimulus. It involves not just the material dimension, which is the source of the ingredients, but also the symbolic dimension, which is the cultural stories that constitute heritage and identity, as the rules of regional branding stipulate. These aspects are both cognitive and emotional cues and initiate the internal processing phase that is referred to in the S-O-R model as the organism phase. Despite this integrated processing, the stimulus does not operate uniformly across countries within a region. Differences in language, religion and regulatory structures mean that consumers in each country may react differently (Rhodes et al., 2025; Smith, 2024). There is a need to identify these differences and adjust the messaging to fit local contexts. The framework explains how consumers process products: synthesising factual awareness with culturally loaded experience. It is this integrated interaction that activates perception and begins the evaluative process.

Evidence suggests that in fast-paced, low-involvement FMCG environments, the influence of region-of-origin often stems from implicit, nuanced cues rather than explicit geographic labelling. Brand storytelling, sensory design, and symbolic references are some of the factors that have a more significant impact on consumers compared to formal indicators (Wang et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2022). It implies that consumers are sensitive to affective cues rather than official or regulatory source information. These stimuli are interpreted through emotional and logical pathways, and this helps to confirm the intuitive aspect of daily buying behaviour. Elements such as familiar visual design, culturally relevant language, and symbolic references can evoke recognition and emotional alignment without requiring detailed explanation.

Authentic storytelling is also present in transparent sourcing, and coded messages to provide regional identity, and by extension, consumer trust, and resonance (Hamby & Escalas, 2024). These methods allow brands to embed cultural meaning into their offerings while reassuring consumers about product legitimacy. Within FMCG markets, the influence of region-of-origin hinges on its capacity to express values that resonate culturally and emotionally. The deeper the product is situated within its regional context, the more likely it is to establish a meaningful consumer connection. Thus, the more regional a product is, the more likely it is to influence the consumer on a personal level, although it may be different according to such variables as price sensitivity or brand awareness (Tripathi, 2024). This highlights the need to interpret region-of-origin cues within a broader constellation of consumer factors.

Internal Consumer Processing (Organism Phase): Perceived Quality and Product Evaluation

In the S-O-R model, the organism stage of internal processing of the consumer is mediated by two key constructs, that is, Perceived Quality and Product Evaluation. These cognitive and affective mechanisms function simultaneously as filtration devices through which the region-of-origin stimulus is decoded. Suhud's Rhombus Model places these constructs at the intersection of external indications and behavioural intent, hence serving as a mechanism of evaluation between symbolic indicators and ensuing action. It is by focusing on how perceived quality interacts with other complementary values that the model specifies the cognitive and emotional factors that inform the consumer to determine the product excellence and emotional appeal (Suhud et al., 2022). This, therefore, provides a complex understanding of the construction of value in the mind of the consumer.

The present investigation aims to substantiate Suhud's Rhombus Model and to advance the proposition that perceptions of product quality and consumer evaluations operate as intermediaries in the relationship between region-of-origin and purchase intention. Therefore, the study suggests that the heritage-based cues do not trigger immediate behavioural responses; rather, they must pass through internal cognitive evaluations of the quality, price, and brand image before the behavioural consequences are triggered. This fluid form also brings out a substitutability of the corners of the Rhombus model: consumers are comparing all three simultaneously and adjusting all three to encompass category expectations of products and individual needs. Such types of insights

into the decision-making process provide a more in-depth depiction of consumer behaviour within the FMCG industry, where value perception is king and not just a knee-jerk reaction to heritage cues.

In the context of FMCG, consumer choice is not a passive reaction to regional identity, but a dynamic evaluation of perceived value. For heritage cues to influence behaviour, they must convey relevance, emotional appeal, and reliability. To successfully leverage region-of-origin, brands must ensure that their cultural associations contribute meaningfully to perceived quality and align with the consumer's overarching value framework. The response of the consumer is massive in terms of the price of cultural attraction versus economic viability. The value equation in this context is a complex construct that includes the price, quality, and cultural resonance dimensions, which makes it necessary to enhance the theoretical framework in this regard. These insights point to the importance of a holistic marketing approach, one that embeds region-of-origin into product design, pricing structures, and brand narratives. When strategically aligned, regional identity does not stand in opposition to value perception; rather, it enhances it, offering brands a competitive advantage in the fast-evolving FMCG sector (Hajduk et al., 2024). Through this, brands can ensure that regional identity supports rather than competing with value perception in highly competitive FMCG arenas.

Response Phase: Purchase Intention and Purchase Behaviour

The proposed model uses the TPB to explain the response phase, where the intrapersonal evaluation of the considered behaviour eventually leads to a purchase intention and consequently to actual purchasing behaviour. This developmental process is the shift between perception and action and is consistent with the postulation by Ajzen that intention is the closest predictor of actual behaviour, which is modulated by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Shanbhag et al., 2023). All these constructs define the decision threshold, which implies the intersection between psychological and social aspects that contribute towards consumer behaviour.

The concept of partial mediation implies that the relationship between purchase intention and purchase behaviour is subject to influences by both habit formation and situational factors. This nuance reflects the practical reality of consumer behaviour, where even strong intentions can be altered by situational constraints or habitual preferences. This is supported by findings that highlight how the country-of-origin image, functioning as a regional indication, impacts perceived quality and price, which in turn influence purchase intention (Merabet, 2020). Therefore, even though regional branding continues to have its influence, the process is mediated in a way that highlights the explanatory power of the concept, as opposed to the direct relationship.

The use of TPB in this phase accentuates the significance of linking cognitive evaluations to behavioural outcomes, especially in emerging FMCG markets where cultural identity intersects with accessibility and trust. Therefore, the likelihood of a consumer acting on intention depends not only on the favourable perceptions but also on the contextual salient factors, which include affordability, brand availability, and peer endorsement. This integrative framework thus affirms the robustness of TPB in explaining how region-of-origin cues, when aligned with internal and external motivators, ultimately guide consumer purchase behaviour.

IMPLICATIONS

Implications for Policymakers

Policymakers hold a vital role in championing regionally rooted FMCG products in emerging markets. Through subsidies and specific fiscal incentives, regional branding programs, and quality-authenticity certifications, the governing structures can directly jumpstart the growth patterns of local producers. Empirical studies have shown that region-of-origin labels that are synonymous with authenticity have a positive impact on purchase intention and the willingness to pay a premium price (Ho et al., 2024). This suggests that formal recognition schemes can

boost regional products by way of an increase in their cultural and symbolic value. Nevertheless, the success of the certification schemes depends on the outreach and public education campaigns to raise consumer awareness and thus increase the relative significance of such signals. At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen the MSMEs' digital preparedness and market access through the support of logistics and e-commerce to compete in the growing digital marketplaces (Thuy & Dat, 2024). Regional goods can be further promoted by aligning them with cultural heritage and tourism in promotional campaigns and thus build local pride and international attraction. Such strategies position regionally rooted FMCG as both commercially viable and culturally consequential, thereby enhancing their visibility and relevance within competitive market contexts.

Implications for Marketers

Marketers should integrate the region-of-origin into vibrant narratives that emphasise authenticity, culture, and sustainability rather than just employing it merely as a label. Campaigns that promote indigenous heritage, traditional craftsmanship, and the community impact can resonate deeply with consumers, especially those who are seeking emotional and cultural attachment. Some findings from the European agricultural marketing show that the narrative-based branding can strengthen credibility by linking products to place and tradition (Castelló, 2020). In emerging economies, marketers can similarly apply this to boost product appeal through using convincing and authentic local narratives.

Research also confirms that extrinsic elements, such as packaging designs featuring the traditional elements and culturally rooted stories, can significantly enhance perceived quality and brand trust (Harun et al., 2023; Shukla et al., 2023). This suggests that visuals are not just for decorative purposes but also serve as authenticity and origin cues. Furthermore, the distinctive design strategies, particularly those aligned with cultural narratives, can help the regional FMCG brands to penetrate the competitive markets. Kaur (2024) found that in Punjab's FMCG sector, the transparency, cultural relevance, and consistent storytelling clearly strengthen consumer trust and loyalty.

Other studies, such as Fitri et al. (2022) demonstrate that short brand stories on packaging can boost perceived brand quality and authenticity, which further influences purchase intention. When marketers weave cultural storytelling with consistent product quality and ethical practices, the region-of-origin shifts from a supporting cue to a core strategic pillar for building sustainable consumer relationships. In this role, it differentiates the brand in crowded FMCG markets and reinforces long-lasting loyalty through the alignment with the consumers' values, emotional connections, and trust in both the origin and the producer. This integration ensures that the brand's identity is perceived as authentic, culturally grounded, and socially responsible which lead to increasingly prioritised in purchase decisions.

Implications for Local Producers

The product's region-of-origin in emerging markets needs to form a core part of its brand identity, which directly connects cultural heritage with current quality demands. While nostalgia can initially attract consumer interest, it rarely maintains brand loyalty long-term. Verified certificates, coordinated packaging, and clear labelling are thus essential to prove authenticity and stay competitive (Molleví et al., 2020). These tools help in managing the tension in balancing cultural identity against shifting the complexity of consumer tastes. Furthermore, the products can become more desirable when tied to a wider regional story, especially through partnerships with the tourism agencies. When consumers actively join this narrative, uphold traditions, and directly engage with the product, their action extends beyond just a mere purchase (Vela et al., 2023). In fact, this strategy does more than boost traditional marketing as it embeds the product within a richer cultural context, attracting consumers who seek genuine connections. Most importantly, such collaborations also empower MSMEs, letting them compete more effectively by anchoring their identity in regional roots and demonstrating consistent quality and trustworthiness. As a result, producers emerge not just as local alternatives but as unique players in the global FMCG market, combining cultural identity with responsiveness to modern consumers.

Implications for Academic Researchers

The present framework contributes to the growing body of research on regional cues in low-involvement FMCG sectors, drawing together perspectives from marketing, psychology, and regional studies. As Ardisa et al. (2022) revealed, the perceived quality mediates the associations between consumer ethnocentrism and purchase intention in emerging markets. The framework raises a strong research question: how do regional cues influence consumer behaviour through perceived value? It is not merely a branding problem, but a matter of the importance of place-based product meanings, as the consumer perceives them. Digital interaction and qualifications become moderating variables that enhance the explanatory potential of this cross-disciplinary approach (Abdurrahman et al., 2023). These factors complicate the analysis while clarifying how digital technologies affect trust and regional branding. Such interactions matter, particularly as online platforms become increasingly dominant in shaping purchasing experiences. Comparative studies across emerging markets hold promise for testing the generalisability of region-of-origin. Patterns will no doubt emerge, but so will divergences, which are rooted in distinct socio-economic and cultural contexts. At the same time, longitudinal modelling that takes a more culturally imaginative approach may reveal the deeper socio-cultural forces sustaining consumer loyalty to regional products over time (Kinawy, 2025). What is called for is a deeper academic commitment to understanding how regional branding functions is not just as a marketing tactic, but as a reflection of place, culture, and behavioural continuity. In pushing this research further, scholars can help bridge theoretical development with practice, offering more grounded insights for brands operating in increasingly complex and culturally rich FMCG environments.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The literature on region-of-origin in FMCG markets, particularly in emerging regions, exhibits significant potentials, but is limited by conceptual and methodological limitations. Current studies often rely on cross-sectional designs and focus on urban consumers, thereby limiting insights into longitudinal trends and overlooking rural or low-income groups. This reduces the external validity of existing evidence while highlighting the under-explored potential of studying a wider range of socio-economic contexts. These gaps present valuable avenues for future research to enhance the strategic use of the region of origin.

A key limitation is the geographical and demographic narrowness. Studies that are carried out in specific regions often capture rich socio-cultural processes, such as ethnic pride and place-based attachment, yet their applicability to other contexts remains uncertain (Rialisnawati et al., 2024). This suggests that brands in emerging markets can benefit from research that explores the functioning of regional identities within different types of cultural and market settings. Future research is recommended to include multi-regional or cross-cultural comparisons, which can help separate context-specific effects from universal region-of-origin influences. Further enhancement of consumer segmentation may be made with the help of psychographic analyses, such as cosmopolitan orientation and cultural embeddedness (Miocevic et al., 2022). These approaches can assist producers in shaping a more effective manner for both domestic and international consumers.

Another challenge lies in the reliance on cross-sectional designs, which cannot demonstrate how perceptions of region of origin change over time. Longitudinal designs would provide better foresight into the durability of brand loyalty versus short-term sentiment, especially in dynamic socio-cultural environments (Chintagunta & Labroo, 2020). Time-series or panel-based methods are consequently fundamental to infer how regional distinction can be utilised to foster long-term consumer engagement. Additionally, market variables such as pricing and distribution, often treated as secondary considerations, can significantly modulate region-of-origin effects. In premium categories, regional indications may justify higher price points; in contrast, price sensitivity in budget segments can weaken the authenticity signal if not managed carefully (Tarabashkina et al., 2024). This suggests producers need to balance regional storytelling and market competitive rates. In the future, therefore, field experiments and simulation-based modelling strategies should be combined to better reflect the real world in terms of purchasing conditions and trade-offs among consumers.

The focus on food and beverage categories within FMCG overlooks symbolic or identity-driven products like crafts or fashion, where regional identity may resonate more strongly (Kotradyová et al., 2020). Such an oversight is a lost opportunity since these products often have stronger cultural stories that significantly influence consumer perception and emotional connection. Further research into these categories would thus enhance the strategic positioning of culturally rich offerings in emerging markets. Similarly, although certification schemes are often assumed to be effective in signalling authenticity, their impact on behaviour in low-trust or visually saturated markets remains ambiguous. Symbolic cues, such as culturally specific design features and heritage-related visuals, may, in fact, outperform technical labels in capturing consumer attention and trust (Waehning & Filieri, 2022). The isolated and measured effects of such indications in online marketplaces can be determined through experimental designs, as proposed by Holtz et al. (2020), offering more specific advice on digital branding choices.

The rise of digital platforms has reshaped region-of-origin perceptions; however, the boundary between authentic storytelling and performative regionalism remains unclear. In digital spaces, emotional loyalty and perceived authenticity are increasingly driven by symbolic storytelling rather than factual claims (Fernández-Ferrín et al., 2021). This pattern suggests that brands in emerging markets can strategically utilise digital storytelling to enhance regional popularity, particularly among younger or experience-seeking consumers. Therefore, future research should explore how platforms not only distribute but also recreate regional content, defining and homogenising cultural messaging.

Finally, post-purchase dynamics, especially the interplay between consumer loyalty and the potential dissatisfaction with regional expectations, are still under-explored (Abdelwahab et al., 2023). Where origin indications create high expectations, there are high chances of unmet expectations, which expose consumers to disappointment. A systematic study of these dynamics can help producers ensure congruence between the regionally oriented promotion practices and the actual product offered. Future studies should test whether region-of-origin fosters deeper brand attachment or risks heightened disappointment, providing actionable insights for long-term consumer satisfaction and market resilience.

CONCLUSION

This study places the region-of-origin as a central strategic tool in creating competitiveness in the FMCG markets of emerging economies. Through the TPB, the S-O-R model, and Suhud's Rhombus model, the proposed conceptual framework identifies region-of-origin as a salient stimulus that has the potential to introduce both cognitive and emotional responses. These responses are expressed through perceived quality and product evaluation, which in turn shape purchase intention and actual consumer behaviour. Such a comprehensive attitude explains why local relevance helps determine the influence of subtle forms of place-related signification over decision-making processes by diminishing the predominance of mass-produced global options.

At the same time, no single regional label captures the diversity within groups of countries. Each market has its own language, customs and institutions. Using a broad regional cue overlooks these differences and misaligns products with local values. Applications of the region-of-origin approach must therefore adapt to specific country contexts and be informed by local research.

The framework has practical implications for a wide range of stakeholders. Policymakers have an opportunity to enhance product visibility through streamlining the certification systems and implementing promotional strategies that can be tailored to culturally accustomed situations. Narrative construction, messages of sustainability, and authenticity are just some ways in which marketers can use to develop perceived value and emotional interaction. Local producers are encouraged to embed regional identity within their brand strategies while maintaining the standards of quality that may lead to the attainment of such long-term consumer confidence. For academic researchers, this framework provides a foundation for future empirical investigations into the intersections of culture, consumer psychology, and market strategy.

Altogether, these pathways support the empowerment of MSMEs by narrowing the persistent gap between cultural value and market recognition. Although conceptual in nature, the model establishes a strong theoretical base for subsequent research. Future studies should test its relevance across varied demographic groups and product categories to further explore the role of region-of-origin in shaping consumer preference and competitive positioning in emerging FMCG markets.

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