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Influence of Country of Origin on Brand Evangelism (E-WOM): The Mediating Role of Consumer Engagement in an Emerging Market

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of country of origin (COO) on consumer attitudes and brand evangelism in Ghana's telecommunications industry. The research uses a multi-study approach, examining three telecom brands (A, B, and C) in Ghana. The data was collected online and offline, with a month delay to reduce method bias. The study found that the COO significantly influences consumers' affective and cognitive engagements with telecom brands A and B, but does not directly impact behavioral engagement of any of the brands. The study emphasizes the importance of emotional and cognitive connections in driving brand evangelism as behavioral engagement alone may not translate into evangelism. The findings suggest that telecom brands can leverage their COO to enhance consumer engagement and foster brand evangelism by emphasizing positive associations with their origin. This research fills a gap in the literature by exploring the COO effect on telecom brands' consumer engagement and brand evangelism. However, limitations include the focus on Ghanaian consumers and the use of PLS-SEM analysis, suggesting opportunities for further research in different cultural contexts and alternative methodologies.

KEYWORDS

Country of origin (COO);
consumer engagement; brand
evangelism; telecom brands

Introduction

In an era characterized by unprecedented connectivity and technological advancement, the telecom industry stands as a global juggernaut, interconnecting individuals, communities, and nations in a complex web of communication. The proliferation of smartphones, internet access, and the ever-expanding range of telecommunication services has vastly expanded consumer options (Heno Colorado and Tavera Mesías 2022). In this contemporary world where connectivity defines modern life (Behl et al. 2023), telecom companies have become pivotal forces (Leckie, Nyadzayo, and Johnson 2016), not only in facilitating communication but also in molding consumer perceptions and attitudinal engagement with their offerings. Within this dynamic landscape, the influence of the country of origin (COO) emerges as a pivotal and influential

phenomenon shaping consumer attitudinal engagement (Sobolev and Nelson 2020) toward telecom brands (Leckie, Nyadzayo, and Johnson 2016). In the telecommunications industry in Ghana, where global giants vie for customers' loyalty, the COO effect therefore is expected to assume a captivating role.

For network subscribers in Ghana, these mobile network providers, who are known to have hail from diverse countries, are fiercely competing for consumers' loyalty. Despite their global presence, these telecom giants maintain their distinct origins—each originating from a different corner of the world. These telecom brands transcend their role as mere providers of communication services; they stand as symbols of connectivity, reliability, and progress. Within this context, we embark on a captivating inquiry: Does a telecom brand's country of origin significantly shape consumer attitudinal engagement toward it? In other

words, does the COO of telecom brands significantly shape consumers' cognitive attitudes toward these brands? Can the COO exert a substantial influence on consumers' affective attitudes toward these telecom giants? Does the COO play a pivotal role in determining the conative attitudes consumers express toward these brands? Furthermore, are these attitudinal engagements—whether cognitive, affective, or conative—predictive of brand evangelism, characterized by passionate advocacy and endorsement? Does the influence of COO on Brand Evangelism operate through the mediation of cognitive, affective, or conative attitudes?

An extensive search on the country of origin literature exposes a gap in the literature regarding how the country of origin effect operates in the context of modern telecommunications services and digital platforms (Brand and Baier 2022). Most of the literature also focusses on the COO effect on products rather than services (Sobolev and Nelson 2020; Hsu, Chang, and Yansritakul 2017; Chen, Wang, and Huang 2020; Brand and Baier 2022). While brand evangelism literature is still growing (Sashittal, Jassawalla, and Sachdeva 2023) the literature has also not covered the concept of brand evangelism in the context of the country of origin effect. For example, no study has modeled COO on brand evangelism, and obviously, none has attempted to mediate the COO effect on brand evangelism with the dimensions of consumer attitudinal engagement. While limited studies (Majid et al. 2019) examined consumer attitudinal engagements on brand evangelism or brand loyalty in the telecommunications industry (Leckie, Nyadzayo, and Johnson 2016), very few have been on COO and attitudinal engagements on evangelism in the telecommunications industry. Understanding how COO influences brand evangelism, and how the cognitive, affective, and conative attitudes mediate this relationship could provide valuable insights. This study seeks to fill this literature gap.

The central research question addressed in this study is whether consumers' attitudes toward telecom brands in Ghana's fast-paced market are affected by the companies' countries of origin. The study traverses the cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions of consumer attitudinal

engagement, unveiling the intricate interplay between a brand's place of origin and the dynamics of consumer attitudinal engagement. The inquiry into the Ghanaian telecoms market aims not only to unlock the mysteries of consumer loyalty but also to provide invaluable insights for businesses seeking to thrive in an interconnected world. In an era marked by globalization, where borders blur and international markets intertwine, comprehending the pivotal role of the country of origin in influencing consumer behavior takes on paramount importance. This study posits a series of hypotheses that shed light on these complex relationships between COO, consumer attitudes, and one of the most fervent expressions of brand loyalty: Brand Evangelism. We hypothesize that the COO significantly impacts consumers' cognitive attitudinal engagements, affective attachments, and conative behaviors toward telecom brands in Ghana. Additionally, we delve into the role of these attitudes as potential drivers of Brand Evangelism—the fervent advocacy and loyalty exhibited by consumers toward their chosen brands. Can the place of origin truly influence not just what we think and feel about a brand but also how ardently we champion it to others? Through rigorous analysis, we aim to illuminate the pathways by which the COO exerts its influence on brand evangelism, providing valuable insights for both academia and the telecom industry.

Literature review

Country of origin (COO) effect

In the realm of global commerce, where products traverse borders and consumers encounter an ever-expanding array of choices, the country of origin emerges as a seminal factor that decisively shapes consumer perceptions and behaviors (Diamantopoulos et al. 2021; Tosun and Köylüoğlu 2023). As a phenomenon deeply rooted in consumer psychology, the origin of a product can convey a multitude of meanings that the COO effect transcends mere geographical origins—it embodies the intricate interplay between culture, perception, and decision-making (Septianto et al. 2022).

At its essence, the COO effect denotes the phenomenon where consumers form judgements and attitudes about a product or brand based on its place of origin (Diamantopoulos et al. 2021; Leckie, Nyadzayo, and Johnson 2016). It extends beyond mere geographical boundaries, encapsulating a rich tapestry of cultural associations, perceptions, and expectations that consumers associate with a particular origin (Hsu, Chang, and Yansritakul 2017; Brand and Baier 2022), including economic attributes associated with that place of origin (Moriuchi 2021). The “Made in” label associated with COO is a succinct indicator that conveys a wealth of information to consumers (Chen, Wang, and Huang 2020; Chen et al. 2021). It serves as a cognitive cue that triggers perceptions about quality, authenticity, and reliability (Freundt and Bortoluzzo 2023; Rodrigo, Khan, and Valaei 2023; Chen et al. 2021).

The COO effect exerts a profound influence on consumer perceptions across multiple dimensions. Consumers often associate certain countries with high-quality production (Chen et al. 2021). For instance, Swiss watches and German engineering are renowned for their quality. The COO also contributes to a brand’s image, such that brands may strategically leverage their COO to evoke specific associations and emotions (Zolfagharian, Saldivar, and Williams 2020). For instance, Italian fashion brands emphasize style and craftsmanship, while French fashion brands evoke notions of elegance and style. Through COO effects, products aligned with the cultural values, norms, and stereotypes of consumers are more likely to be expressed (Freundt and Bortoluzzo 2023; Ho et al. 2022). Example: Ghana’s Kente fabric evokes cultural values. COO triggers stereotypes, both positive and negative, that influence consumer perceptions (Chen et al. 2021). For example, products from certain countries may be stereotyped as exotic or reliable. Finally, the COO has expanded to encompass ethical and environmental considerations (Gaganis et al. 2023). Consumers increasingly scrutinize the COO for ethical practices and sustainability of various countries and their multinationals.

The COO effect is not confined to perceptions but extends to consumer behaviors such as purchase intentions (Hsu, Chang, and Yansritakul

2017), brand choice, brand loyalty (Leckie, Nyadzayo, and Johnson 2016), and potentially brand advocacy and evangelism. Consumers are likely to be more inclined to buy products with a COO they perceive positively (Tosun and Köylüoğlu 2023), more likely to remain loyal to the brand, and become price-insensitive.

Consumer attitudes

Consumer attitudinal engagements represent a cornerstone of consumer behavior, serving as the nexus where psychology, cognition, and behavior converge (Rezaee Vessal et al. 2023). Thus, attitudinal engagement encompasses cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions (Agyeiwaah et al. 2021; Rezaee Vessal et al. 2023), shedding light on the intricate processes that underpin consumer choices and actions. Cognitive attitudes reflect the beliefs and perceptions consumers hold about a product, brand, or service (Agyeiwaah et al. 2021) and are grounded in factual information and represent the rational dimension of attitudes. Affective attitudes delve into the emotional aspect of consumer perception, encompassing feelings, emotions, and sentiments associated with a product or brand, often evoking joy, trust, excitement, or other emotional responses (Agyeiwaah et al. 2021). Conative attitudes are action-orientated, representing the intention or predisposition to act in a certain way regarding a product or brand. This captures the behavioral aspect of attitudes, encompassing actions like purchase, recommendation, or loyalty (Agyeiwaah et al. 2021).

Consumer attitudinal engagements are not static but evolve through a complex interplay of various factors, such as information processing patterns, where consumers gather information, evaluate it, and form beliefs and emotions about a product or brand. Attitudes are also formed through social influence, where social interactions, peer recommendations, and societal norms play a pivotal role in shaping attitudes (López-Lomelí, Alarcón-del-Amo, and Llonch-Andreu 2019; Agyeiwaah et al. 2021). Consumers therefore often align their attitudinal engagements with those of their social networks. Furthermore, cultural and environmental factors also shape attitudinal

engagements through cultural values, traditions, and the environment in which consumers operate (Kim and Yim 2022). Thus, attitudinal engagements are heavily influenced by cultural contexts, particularly toward foreign brands (Kara, Prasad, and Spillan 2024).

Consumer attitudinal engagements also wield substantial influence over consumer behavior. This includes purchase intentions, brand loyalty, and word of mouth (Agyeiwaah et al. 2021). Studies have shown that positive cognitive and affective attitudinal engagements are often precursors to purchase intentions (Agyeiwaah et al. 2021), while conative attitudinal engagements, particularly loyalty intentions, lead to repeat purchases and brand loyalty (Kim and Yim 2022). Consumers who hold strong conative attitudinal engagements are more likely to exhibit brand loyalty behaviors (Hussain et al. 2023). Positive affective attitudinal engagements can also drive consumers to become brand advocates, leading to word-of-mouth marketing and recommendations (Berger, Rocklage, and Packard 2022). In this study, we posit that brand evangelism, a higher dimension of loyalty and word of mouth, is likely to be a consequence of consumer attitudinal engagements.

Brand evangelism: EWOM

The concept of Brand Evangelism is a beacon of unwavering loyalty and passionate advocacy. Beyond conventional brand loyalty, Brand Evangelism represents a profound level of commitment and fervor exhibited by consumers who not only embrace a brand but also actively champion it (Freundt and Bortoluzzo 2023; Sashittal, Jassawalla, and Sachdeva 2023). It stands as the pinnacle of brand loyalty, characterized by consumers who not only repeatedly purchase and use a brand's products or services but also become its ardent advocates (Mansoor and Paul 2022). Brand Evangelism transcends transactional relationships, evolving into an emotional bond where consumers fervently promote, defend, and identify with a brand (Parry, Yang, and Takemura 2021; Sashittal, Jassawalla, and Sachdeva 2023).

Brand Evangelism differs from traditional brand loyalty in several ways. Brand Evangelism

involves proactive, passionate advocacy where brand evangelists exhibit an unparalleled zeal for the brand, willingly sharing their positive experiences and advocating for it among their social circles (Parry, Yang, and Takemura 2021; Sharma et al. 2022; Mansoor and Paul 2022), whereas traditional loyalty may manifest as repeat purchases without active promotion (Freundt and Bortoluzzo 2023; Mansoor and Paul 2022). Evangelists exhibit a deep emotional connection where consumers develop a sense of belonging and attachment to the brand's values and mission (Mansoor and Paul 2022), while traditional loyalty may be more transactional (Sharma et al. 2022). Brand Evangelism also involves willingly and voluntarily promoting and spreading the word about the brand, often without incentives or coercion (Parry, Yang, and Takemura 2021; Mansoor and Paul 2022), while traditional loyalty may rely on loyalty programs or discounts. Finally, brand evangelists remain resiliently loyal even in the face of brand adversity or negative brand image (Sharma et al. 2022), whereas traditional loyalty may be more susceptible to competitive offers.

Several factors contribute to the transformation of consumers into brand advocates. These include consistent delivery of exceptional product or service quality (Mansoor and Paul 2022), unique brand identity with a distinctive image (Cho and Hwang 2020), purpose, or mission, some exceptional customer experiences and memorable interactions that create emotional bonds (Sharma et al. 2022), engaging content and of brand communities, and maintenance of brand innovation and authenticity (Harrigan, Roy, and Chen 2021).

Theoretical underpinning and hypothesis development

The Cue Utilization Theory posits that people rely on various cues or pieces of information in their environment to simplify complex decision-making processes (Olson and Jacoby 1972). These cues serve as mental shortcuts that help individuals assess and make judgements about a situation, service, or product. Through the lenses of this theory, consumers use cognitive heuristics, or mental shortcuts, rather than exhaustively analyzing all available data to make judgements and

decisions (Kakaria, Simonetti, and Bigne 2023). The specific cues are based on their relevance to the decision at hand and can be physical attributes, contextual information, or prior knowledge (Li et al. 2020; Kakaria, Simonetti, and Bigne 2023). The importance and impact of each cue can vary depending on its perceived relevance and the individual's cognitive processing style (Kakaria, Simonetti, and Bigne 2023). Cue Utilization Theory has applications in various fields, including marketing and consumer behavior. Marketers often design products, advertisements, and packaging to include cues that are likely to be utilized by consumers in forming perceptions and making purchasing decisions (Li et al. 2020; Kakaria, Simonetti, and Bigne 2023).

In the context of country of origin dynamics, the Cue Utilization Theory suggests that consumers will rely on COO as a heuristic to simplify complex decision-making processes. This theory elucidates how COO serves as a mental shortcut for consumers, particularly in the absence of comprehensive information about a product. Therefore, through the Cue Utilization Theory, consumers can utilize the COO as cue to form attitudinal engagements—cognitive, affective, and conative.

Affective attitudinal engagements

The COO could evoke specific emotions or sentiments (Zolfagharian, Saldivar, and Williams 2020). Consumers may associate positive emotions, such as trust or admiration, with brands from countries known for quality and expertise. Conversely, they may experience negative emotions if a product's COO is associated with quality issues. Cultural cues embedded in the COO, for instance, can shape affective attitudinal engagements. We argue that these associations can elicit feelings of pride or nostalgia, influencing affective attitudinal engagements.

Conative attitudinal engagements

The COO cue can influence conative attitudinal engagements by prompting specific behavioral intentions. Consumers may be more inclined to purchase products from countries they perceive

positively or to support brands associated with countries they admire. We argue that conative attitudinal engagements can manifest in the form of purchase intentions driven by the COO effect. For example, a consumer with a favorable conative attitudinal engagement toward British products may be more likely to intend to purchase a British-brand telecom service.

Conative attitudinal engagements

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H1a: The country of origin (COO) of telecommunication brands A significantly influences (i) affective, (ii) behavioral, and (iii) cognitive engagements of these brands.

H1b: The country of origin (COO) of telecommunication brands B significantly influences (i) affective, (ii) behavioral, and (iii) cognitive engagements of these brands.

H1c: The country of origin (COO) of telecommunication brands C significantly influences (i) affective, (ii) behavioral, and (iii) cognitive engagements of these brands.

Brand evangelism

While the effect of brand attitudinal engagement on brand loyalty is determined (Leckie, Nyadzayo, and Johnson 2016), its effect on brand evangelism is untested. Using the cue utilization theory, we argue that consumers who have strong cognitive, affective, and conative attitudinal engagements toward a telecommunications brand, shaped by positive COO cues, may become brand advocates, actively recommending products or brands from certain countries to their social

networks. Brand and Baier (2022) had called for the mediating role of factors such as attitudinal engagement on the relationship between COO and other constructs. This can offer a deeper understanding of how the COO effect cascades through the consumer's psyche to shape brand evangelism. Following H1, which seeks to test the effect of COO on all three components of attitudinal engagements, we test the mediation effect of attitudinal engagements on COO and brand evangelism by arguing that cognitive, affective, and conative attitudinal engagements would lead to brand evangelism. Therefore, we hypothesize that affective engagements, conative engagements, and cognitive engagements would lead to brand evangelism of all three brands. This overarching hypothesis is unraveled as follows:

H2a: Affective engagements toward telecommunication brands A significantly influences Brand Evangelism.

H2b: Affective engagements toward telecommunication brands B significantly influence Brand Evangelism.

H2c: Affective engagements toward telecommunication brands C significantly influence Brand Evangelism.

In this study, conative attitude is represented as the overt behavioral engagements of purchase and physical actions. Therefore:

H3a: Behavioral engagements toward telecommunication brands A significantly influences Brand Evangelism.

H3b: Behavioral engagements toward telecommunication brands B significantly influence Brand Evangelism.

H3c: Behavioral engagements toward telecommunication brands C significantly influence Brand Evangelism.

Following our proposition regarding H2 and H3, we further hypothesize that:

H4a: Cognitive engagements toward telecommunication brands A significantly influences Brand Evangelism.

H4b: Cognitive engagements toward telecommunication brands B significantly influence Brand Evangelism.

H4c: Cognitive engagements toward telecommunication brands C significantly influences Brand Evangelism.

Methodology

To test the conceptual framework, the study tested three samples across customers of

telecommunication companies from 4 countries operating in Ghana. In study 1, the study tested the country of origin of a South African telecommunication company (Brand A). Study 2 tested the country of origin of a United Kingdom telecommunication company (Brand B), and Study 3 tested an Indian/Swedish telecommunication company (Brand C). The study was conducted across three regions of Ghana (i.e., Accra, Kumasi, and Koforidua). These responses were part of a broader data collection effort by the researchers. The responses were recruited from both online and offline. The study employed a month delay in collecting data from each region to reduce method bias (Podsakoff et al. 2012). Also, the study added an attention check (for example, "Please answer strongly disagree"). Those who missed such an item were automatically not part of the survey (e.g., Meade and Craig, 2012).

725 respondents started both the online and offline surveys. However, 55 were not able to complete the offline survey, and 69 were removed from the online survey for failing the attention check item and were not allowed to continue with the offline and online surveys. This resulted in using 601 respondents for studies 1–3. The details of the demographic characteristics of respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic details of respondents of all three brands.

Background characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Preferred Brand		
Brand A	226	37.6
Brand B	201	33.4
Brand C	174	29
Total	601	100.0
Gender		
Male	355	59.1
Female	246	40.9
Total	601	100.0
Educational level of respondent		
Master's degree	54	9.0
Bachelor's degree	356	59.2
Professional	71	11.8
Diploma	90	15.0
Other	30	5.0
Total	601	100.0
Number of years of using the Brand		
Less than 10 years	152	25.3
11–15 years	103	17.1
16–20 years	100	16.6
21 years and above	246	40.9
Total	601	100.0

Sample A measures

All items were rated using a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). All the items used to measure the constructs have been validated from previous studies.

Cognitive engagement

Respondents rated their cognitive engagement with brands A to C using 3 item measures adapted from Rather et al. (2022). A sample item is “My service provider gets me to think about it.”

Affective engagement

Respondents rated their affective engagement with brands A to C using 4 item measures adapted from Li (2021) and Rather et al. (2022). A sample item is “I feel very positive when I use the services of my provider.”

Behavioral engagement

Respondents rated their affective engagement with brands A to C using 4 item measures adapted from Li (2021) and Rather et al. (2022). A sample item is “I spend much time using my service provider brand compared with other telecommunication brands.”

WOM

Respondents rated their affective engagement with brands in study A to C using 4 item measures adapted from Abbasi et al. (2023). A sample item is “I have written positive comments about my service provider on social media.”

Country of origin

Respondents rated their affective engagement with brands in study A to C using 4 item measures adapted from Qu et al. (2021). A sample item is “I prefer my service provider because it originates from a country that maintains a high level of quality.”

Brand evangelism

Respondents rated their affective engagement with brands in studies A to C using 4 item measures adapted from Mansoor and Paul (2022). A sample item is “I have actively shared my enthusiasm for the brand’s purpose with several of my friends, encouraging them to join me in supporting it.”

Findings

Measurement model assessment

In this study, the reliability of the measurements was evaluated using composite reliability (CR). Convergent and discriminant validity were utilized to evaluate the measurement model’s validity. According to the CR requirement threshold, readings cannot be less than 0.70 in order for measurements to be considered reliable. Likewise, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values must not go below 0.50 in order to maintain convergent validity (Acquah et al. 2021). Given that the values of CR and AVE were higher than the predetermined thresholds, the results clarified that the measurement model satisfied all requirements for reliability and convergent validity. To evaluate discriminant validity, the HTMT ratio and the Fornell-Larcker criterion were utilized. According to the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), the square roots of the AVEs of the constructs should be much larger than the correlations between the constructs. Table 2 findings indicate that the study achieved discriminant validity because the square roots of the AVEs, which are indicated in italics, were in fact higher than the correlations between the components. Furthermore, as shown by Table 3’s HTMT values, which were all less than 0.90, discriminant validity was further confirmed. (Hair et al. 2019; Acquah et al. 2021).

Structural model assessment

In this study, we examined the relevance of path coefficients based on bootstrapping results, as well as the f^2 and R^2 values of brand evangelism. Except for hypotheses H1a(i), H3a, H1b(ii),

Table 2. Reliability and validity.

Criteria	Cronbach's Alpha	Rho_A	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Brand A-Study 1				
Affective engagement	0.828	1.023	0.877	0.644
Behavioral engagement	0.770	0.825	0.845	0.579
Brand evangelism	0.780	0.801	0.856	0.598
Cognitive engagement	0.629	0.679	0.795	0.565
Country of Origin	0.702	0.723	0.817	0.530
Brand B-Study 2				
Affective engagement	0.718	0.717	0.825	0.541
Behavioral engagement	0.618	0.662	0.767	0.536
Brand evangelism	0.700	0.708	0.816	0.526
Cognitive engagement	0.416	0.422	0.773	0.630
Country of Origin	0.607	0.608	0.793	0.561
Brand C-Study 3				
Affective engagement	0.802	0.824	0.870	0.627
Behavioral engagement	0.704	0.719	0.810	0.524
Brand evangelism	0.862	0.889	0.905	0.705
Cognitive engagement	0.329	0.483	0.719	0.579
Country of Origin	0.620	0.674	0.780	0.545

H1c(ii) H2c, H3c, and H4c, all the path coefficients of the remaining hypotheses were significant ($p > .05$), confirming the hypotheses. The effect sizes of the remaining relationships ranged from weak to moderate, with 0.014 being the weakest. An R² value of 0.133 indicates that the independent factors accounted for 13.3% of the variance in brand evangelism. The Q² score of 0.074 was also acceptable, showing that the model is predictive. We then used the PLSpredict procedure to test the model's predictive power and found that the PLS model outperformed the linear model, with Q² predict values greater than zero for all brand evangelism variables. Finally, we looked at the RMSE, MAE, and MAPE values for the PLS and linear models and discovered that the PLS model predicted the brand evangelism construct better (Tables 4–7).

Discussion of results

The study examined the influence of country of origin on affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagement of three telecommunication brands in Ghana in three different studies. Thus, study 1 is brand A, study 2 is brand B, and study 3 is brand C. Further, the study investigated the affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagement of these brands (i.e., A–C) in studies 1–3 on customer evangelism of these brands.

The result of study 1 brand A shows that the country of origin significantly influences this

brand's affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagements. Thus, confirming H1a. The implications of this finding for Brand A are that it highlights the significant influence of the country of origin on various dimensions of consumer engagement with the brand (Sashittal, Jassawalla, and Sachdeva 2023). Firstly, the finding suggests that the country of origin plays a crucial role in shaping consumers' affective engagement with Brand A, indicating that consumers may have strong emotional connections or associations with products or services originating from the country of origin of Brand A. Secondly, the finding that country of origin influences consumers' behavioral engagement with Brand A implies that consumers may exhibit specific purchasing behaviors or brand interactions based on their perceptions of the brand's origin (Tosun and Köylüoğlu 2023). Lastly, the finding indicates that the country of origin also influences consumers' cognitive engagement with Brand A, suggesting that consumers may form specific beliefs, attitudes, or perceptions about the brand based on its origin (Agyeiwaah et al. 2021; Tosun and Köylüoğlu 2023).

The study also hypothesized that affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagements toward brand A significantly influence brand evangelism. The result confirms the relationship between affective and cognitive engagement and brand evangelism of brand A. Thus confirm H2a and H4a. These findings suggest the importance of brands developing and nurturing emotional and cognitive connections with consumers, as they are closely linked to fostering brand advocacy and evangelism (Sharma et al. 2022; Mansoor and Paul 2022). The result, however, did not confirm the relationship between behavioral engagement and brand evangelism of brand A. Hence, H3a was not confirmed. This means that although consumers may engage behaviorally with the brand, such as through purchases or interacting with its products or services, it does not necessarily translate into active advocacy or evangelism. This finding highlights the need for Brand A to reevaluate its strategies for fostering brand evangelism and consider alternative approaches that focus on building emotional and cognitive connections with consumers, as these factors have been shown to have a stronger influence on

Table 3. Cross loadings.

	Affective engagement	Behavioral engagement	Cognitive engagement	Country of Origin	Brand Evangelism
Brand A-Study 1					
AFF1	0.783	-0.204	-0.009	-0.132	-0.144
AFF2	0.918	-0.239	-0.034	-0.122	-0.317
AFF3	0.774	-0.103	-0.086	-0.033	-0.158
AFF4	0.721	-0.091	0.069	-0.042	-0.083
BEH1	-0.183	0.707	0.161	0.224	0.109
BEH2	-0.188	0.848	0.178	0.235	0.253
BEH3	-0.185	0.795	0.127	0.134	0.183
BEH4	-0.085	0.683	0.128	0.117	0.048
COG1	-0.033	0.161	0.844	0.201	0.238
COG2	0.019	0.100	0.669	0.089	0.141
COG3	-0.045	0.181	0.733	0.140	0.173
COO1	-0.063	0.219	0.058	0.607	0.089
COO2	-0.047	0.183	0.119	0.731	0.209
COO3	-0.120	0.199	0.201	0.814	0.234
COO4	-0.095	0.122	0.189	0.746	0.222
EWO1	-0.242	0.155	0.197	0.273	0.776
EWO2	-0.170	0.258	0.276	0.224	0.834
EWO3	-0.218	0.127	0.178	0.155	0.754
EWO4	-0.169	0.111	0.081	0.135	0.726
Brand B-Study 2					
AFF1	0.716	-0.016	-0.050	-0.169	-0.272
AFF2	0.760	-0.141	0.045	-0.237	-0.183
AFF3	0.733	0.081	0.132	-0.271	-0.145
AFF4	0.734	-0.110	0.097	-0.181	-0.280
BEH1	-0.054	0.493	0.040	-0.050	0.068
BEH2	-0.052	0.876	0.043	0.084	0.172
BEH3	-0.053	0.772	0.136	0.128	0.094
COG1	-0.064	-0.054	0.756	0.128	0.121
COG2	0.166	0.194	0.830	0.025	0.198
COO2	-0.239	0.077	0.046	0.744	0.227
COO3	-0.226	0.040	0.085	0.793	0.285
COO4	-0.182	0.140	0.074	0.708	0.179
EWO1	-0.269	0.149	0.131	0.302	0.776
EWO2	-0.275	0.096	0.098	0.265	0.738
EWO3	-0.192	0.017	0.667	0.208	0.667
EWO4	-0.126	0.205	0.715	0.101	0.715
Brand C-Study 3					
AFF1	0.719	-0.273	-0.218	-0.356	-0.218
AFF2	0.860	-0.197	-0.378	-0.222	-0.378
AFF3	0.859	-0.095	-0.259	-0.395	-0.259
AFF4	0.717	-0.108	-0.196	-0.177	-0.196
BEH1	-0.282	0.627	0.155	0.380	0.155
BEH2	-0.169	0.841	0.244	0.253	0.244
BEH3	-0.108	0.829	0.393	0.187	0.393
BEH4	0.088	0.555	0.157	-0.012	0.157
COG1	-0.175	0.330	0.283	0.330	0.283
COG2	0.027	0.004	0.084	0.167	0.084
COO2	-0.213	0.065	0.101	0.648	0.101
COO3	-0.208	0.190	0.184	0.725	0.184
COO4	-0.368	0.368	0.269	0.829	0.269
EWO1	-0.319	0.392	0.862	0.276	0.862
EWO2	-0.281	0.297	0.884	0.247	0.884
EWO3	-0.239	0.224	0.814	0.154	0.814
EWO4	-0.281	0.206	0.795	0.216	0.795

brand evangelism (Sharma et al. 2022; Mansoor and Paul 2022).

The result of study 2 for brand B shows that the country of origin significantly influences brand B's affective and cognitive engagements. The finding implies that the country of origin of brand B has significantly impacted both affective and cognitive engagements with the brand. This means that Brand B could leverage its country of origin in its branding strategies to connect with

consumers effectively on emotional and cognitive levels (Agyeiwaah et al. 2021; Rezaee Vessal et al. 2023). This also means that brands need to capitalize on their origin's positive associations or perceptions to enhance consumer engagement and develop deeper brand loyalty (Aljuhmani et al. 2023; Meyer-Waarden, Bruwer, and Galan 2023). This finding also highlights the potential for brands to differentiate themselves in the market by emphasizing their country of origin as a unique

Table 4. Fornell-Larcker Criterion.

	Affective engagement	Behavioral engagement	Brand evangelism	Cognitive engagement	Country of Origin
Brand A-Study 1					
Affective engagement	0.802				
Behavioral engagement	-0.222	0.761			
Brand evangelism	-0.258	0.222	0.774		
Cognitive engagement	-0.032	0.200	0.253	0.752	
Country of Origin	-0.116	0.248	0.264	0.202	0.728
Brand B-Study 2					
Affective engagement	0.736				
Behavioral engagement	-0.065	0.732			
Brand evangelism	-0.302	0.165	0.725		
Cognitive engagement	0.076	0.100	0.204	0.794	
Country of Origin	-0.289	0.114	0.308	0.091	0.749
Brand C-Study 3					
Affective engagement	0.792				
Behavioral engagement	-0.215	0.724			
Brand evangelism	-0.337	0.347	0.839		
Cognitive engagement	-0.141	0.287	0.275	0.761	
Country of Origin	-0.378	0.329	0.274	0.345	0.738

Table 5. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT).

	Affective engagement	Behavioral engagement	Brand evangelism	Cognitive engagement	Country of Origin
Brand A-Study 1					
Affective engagement					
Behavioral engagement	0.234				
Brand evangelism	0.268	0.254			
Cognitive engagement	0.097	0.271	0.321		
Country of Origin	0.147	0.317	0.338	0.275	
Brand B-Study 2					
Affective engagement					
Behavioral engagement	0.186				
Brand evangelism	0.415	0.246			
Cognitive engagement	0.288	0.381	0.379		
Country of Origin	0.440	0.191	0.462	0.206	
Brand C-Study 3					
Affective engagement					
Behavioral engagement	0.298				
Brand evangelism	0.393	0.401			
Cognitive engagement	0.400	0.521	0.430		
Country of Origin	0.477	0.444	0.326	0.663	

selling proposition, thus strengthening their brand identity and market position (Sashittal, Jassawalla, and Sachdeva 2023). While the brand's origin significantly influences affective and cognitive engagements of all brands, the country of origin, however, did not influence the behavioral engagement of brand B. This finding suggests that consumer actions and interactions with the brand are not directly impacted by its country of origin. This means that brands need to focus on other factors beyond their origin to drive consumer behaviors and interactions, such as product quality, pricing strategies, and marketing initiatives (Dineva et al. 2023). By understanding the limitations of the country of origin in influencing behavioral engagement, brands can tailor their strategies to effectively engage consumers and drive desired actions that align with their brands.

The study also hypothesized that brand B's affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagements significantly influence brand evangelism. The result confirms a significant relationship between affective and cognitive engagement and brand evangelism of brand B. Thus, confirming H2b and H4b. Related to the findings of Brand A, brands need to pay attention to emotional connections and cognitive associations with consumers, as these factors significantly influence their likelihood to engage in brand evangelism. Brands need to develop strategies that enhance affective and cognitive engagement, such as delivering memorable experiences and communicating brand values effectively, which stimulate and amplify consumer-driven brand evangelism (Sharma 2023). However, the empirical result did not confirm the influence of behavioral

Table 6. PLSpredict.

	Brand A-Study 1 Country of Origin							
	RMSE		MAE		MAPE		Q ² _predict	
	PLS-M	LR-M	PLS-M	LR-M	PLS-M	LR-M	PLS-M	LR-M
AFF1	1.191	1.197	0.986	0.988	48.850	48.677	0.010	-0.001
AFF2	1.261	1.276	1.034	1.044	54.082	54.565	0.005	-0.019
AFF3	1.134	1.133	0.924	0.919	42.640	42.452	-0.009	-0.006
AFF4	1.137	1.140	0.929	0.922	44.313	44.314	-0.007	-0.013
BEH1	0.964	0.960	0.785	0.772	28.726	28.193	0.041	0.049
BEH2	0.912	0.920	0.742	0.747	24.695	24.845	0.046	0.030
BEH3	0.912	0.916	0.716	0.719	24.530	24.687	0.005	-0.004
BEH4	0.814	0.815	0.577	0.588	18.346	18.613	0.004	0.004
EW01	0.855	0.852	0.662	0.661	21.138	21.103	0.036	0.040
EW02	0.902	0.899	0.677	0.685	22.922	23.017	0.031	0.036
EW03	0.912	0.922	0.664	0.679	23.493	24.038	0.017	-0.005
EW04	0.893	0.902	0.669	0.681	22.479	22.806	0.014	-0.007
COG1	0.747	0.746	0.565	0.570	16.978	17.078	0.029	0.029
COG2	0.812	0.817	0.618	0.622	22.264	22.416	-0.002	-0.014
COG3	0.870	0.878	0.660	0.666	22.656	22.827	0.011	-0.007
Brand B-Study 2-Country of Origin								
AFF1	0.924	0.932	0.732	0.740	27.338	27.693	0.012	-0.004
AFF2	0.956	0.964	0.698	0.699	29.686	29.697	0.041	0.025
AFF3	0.868	0.874	0.681	0.679	27.117	26.856	0.058	0.046
AFF4	0.863	0.868	0.687	0.689	26.010	26.227	0.022	0.013
BEH1	0.742	0.745	0.646	0.652	20.689	20.815	-0.016	-0.025
BEH2	0.857	0.862	0.725	0.726	23.916	23.966	-0.007	-0.018
BEH3	0.813	0.817	0.668	0.666	21.676	21.648	0.001	-0.009
EW01	0.774	0.771	0.644	0.628	19.817	19.280	0.045	0.053
EW02	0.769	0.766	0.635	0.630	19.067	18.828	0.039	0.047
EW03	0.761	0.767	0.563	0.579	17.364	17.750	0.029	0.014
EW04	0.759	0.753	0.565	0.566	17.255	17.234	0.008	0.026
COG1	0.661	0.665	0.523	0.523	16.790	16.823	0.000	-0.012
COG2	0.788	0.794	0.583	0.588	19.861	19.969	-0.011	-0.027
Brand C-Study 3-Country of Origin								
AFF1	1.043	1.073	0.825	0.847	38.835	39.886	0.102	0.049
AFF4	1.144	1.161	0.913	0.928	41.751	43.043	0.002	-0.027
AFF2	1.282	1.313	1.016	1.039	50.713	52.892	0.008	-0.041
AFF3	1.059	1.056	0.830	0.788	37.085	35.052	0.125	0.130
BEH1	0.794	0.808	0.667	0.654	20.285	19.762	0.090	0.057
BEH2	0.886	0.879	0.700	0.698	22.829	22.350	0.037	0.052
BEH4	0.828	0.859	0.549	0.547	19.746	19.713	-0.046	-0.126
BEH3	0.909	0.905	0.687	0.695	25.791	25.817	0.005	0.014
EW01	0.885	0.926	0.702	0.736	23.223	24.167	0.060	-0.029
EW03	0.859	0.903	0.625	0.658	20.551	21.498	0.020	-0.082
EW04	0.850	0.858	0.637	0.657	21.221	21.802	0.038	0.020
EW02	0.866	0.891	0.687	0.718	21.890	22.858	0.052	-0.004
COG2	0.732	0.741	0.593	0.615	16.175	16.789	-0.009	-0.035
COG1	0.657	0.688	0.481	0.501	13.897	14.580	0.063	-0.028

engagement on brand evangelism. Therefore, H3b was not confirmed. This finding suggests that although consumers may engage behaviorally with the brand, such actions do not necessarily translate into active advocacy or evangelism. Consequently, brands may need to reassess their strategies for developing brand evangelism and explore alternative approaches that focus on building emotional and cognitive connections with consumers, as these factors have been shown to have a stronger influence on brand evangelism.

In study 3: Brand C shows that the country of origin significantly influences Brand C's affective and cognitive engagements. This finding is similar to the results of the country of origin of

brands A and B. This aligns with similar results observed for the country-of-origin effects on Brands A and B, indicating a consistent brand pattern. This consistency underlines the importance of the enduring impact of the country of origin on consumer perceptions and connections with brands. The study sought evidence of how affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagement influence brand evangelism. The empirical results of Brand C did not obtain support for all the hypotheses tested. Thus, the empirical results did not confirm H2c, H3c, and H4c. Thus, affective, cognitive, and behavioral engagement did not influence brand evangelism in the case of Brand C. This result means that despite consumers'

Table 7. Structural model assessment.

Hypothesis and Structural Path	Beta	Mean	SD	T-stats	p-value	Decision	f ²	VIF
Brand A-Study 1								
H1a(i) Country of Origin -> Affective engagement	-0.116	-0.125	0.064	1.810	.070	x	0.014	1.000
H1a(ii) Country of Origin -> Behavioral engagement	0.248	0.263	0.054	4.564	.000	√	0.065	1.000
H1a(iii) Country of Origin -> Cognitive engagement	0.202	0.211	0.070	2.900	.004	√	0.043	1.000
H2a Affective engagement -> Brand evangelism	-0.223	-0.234	0.059	3.791	.000	√	0.055	1.052
H3a Behavioral engagement -> Brand evangelism	0.128	0.134	0.080	1.598	.110	x	0.017	1.095
H4a Cognitive engagement -> Brand evangelism	0.221	0.231	0.058	3.794	.000	√	0.054	1.042
Brand B-Study2								
H1b(i) Country of Origin -> Affective engagement	-0.289	-0.303	0.082	3.525	.000	√	0.091	1.000
H1b(ii) Country of Origin -> Behavioral engagement	0.114	0.112	0.133	0.852	.394	x	0.013	1.000
H1b(iii) Country of Origin -> Cognitive engagement	0.091	0.104	0.108	0.842	.400	√	0.008	1.000
H2b Affective engagement -> Brand evangelism	-0.310	-0.317	0.078	3.969	.000	√	0.113	1.011
H3b Behavioral engagement -> Brand evangelism	0.123	0.126	0.083	1.478	.139	x	0.018	1.016
H4b Cognitive engagement -> Brand evangelism	0.215	0.222	0.082	2.625	.009	√	0.054	1.017
Brand C-Study 3								
H1c(i) Country of Origin -> Affective engagement	-0.378	-0.404	0.097	3.911	.000	√	0.166	1.000
H1c(ii) Country of Origin -> Behavioral engagement	0.329	0.310	0.216	1.523	.128	x	0.122	1.000
H1c(iii) Country of Origin -> Cognitive engagement	0.345	0.377	0.118	2.918	.004	√	0.135	1.000
H2c Affective engagement -> Brand evangelism	-0.261	-0.292	0.163	1.602	.109	x	0.083	1.056
H3c Behavioral engagement -> Brand evangelism	0.243	0.259	0.191	1.271	.204	x	0.067	1.127
H4c Cognitive engagement -> Brand evangelism	0.169	0.187	0.133	1.268	.205	x	0.033	1.097
						R ²	R ² Adjusted	Q ²
Brand A Study1								
Affective engagement						0.013	0.010	0.006
Behavioral engagement						0.061	0.058	0.028
Brand evangelism						0.142	0.133	0.074
Cognitive engagement						0.041	0.038	0.018
Brand B Study2								
Affective engagement						0.084	0.080	0.041
Behavioral engagement						0.013	0.009	-0.003
Brand evangelism						0.158	0.146	0.074
Cognitive engagement						0.008	0.004	0.000
Brand C Study3								
Affective engagement						0.143	0.130	0.074
Behavioral engagement						0.109	0.095	0.036
Brand evangelism						0.219	0.183	0.115
Cognitive engagement						0.119	0.106	0.033

emotional, cognitive, and behavioral interactions with the brand, these factors did not directly translate into active evangelism. For Brand C, this suggests the need to reconsider their marketing strategies in developing and improving brand evangelism by exploring alternative approaches that may better resonate with consumers.

Theoretical implication

The study makes several contributions to the brand, customer engagement, and the marketing literature in general. First, extending past research (e.g., Ho et al. 2022; Sashittal, Jassawalla, and Sachdeva 2023) by examining the country of origin of three different brands enriches scholars' understanding of the influence of the country of origin and customer engagement of different brands. For instance, the empirical results of the

country of origin produced varying results. The results show that country of origin influenced the affective and cognitive engagements of brands A and B and did not influence brand C. Thus offering more insight into how country of origin influences different brands. As indicated in our methodology, the study adopted the stakeholder, cue utilization theory-informed view to understand the relationship between country of origin, customer engagement, and brand evangelism. The findings, thus, extend utilization theory-based insight, which focusses on how consumers assess and make judgements about a situation, service, or product (Li et al. 2020; Kakaria, Simonetti, and Bigne 2023) Investigating how the country of origin influences customer engagement of brands A (Study 1), B (Study 2), and C (Study 3) of these brands in an emerging African country's context adds to the country of origin (Hsu,

Chang, and Yansritakul 2017; Chen, Wang, and Huang 2020; Brand and Baier 2022), customer engagement (Kim and Yim 2022; Hussain et al. 2023), and evangelism (Sharma et al. 2022; Mansoor and Paul 2022; Sashittal, Jassawalla, and Sachdeva 2023) literature. The analysis advances the literature by applying cue utilization theory to study the country of origin of three different brands in emerging country contexts. It helps close the gap between marketing theory and practice (Purohit et al. 2023). Finally, the study examined the mediation role of affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagement in the relationship between country of origin and customer evangelism among three different brands, i.e., A, B, and C, which also contribute to better insight and our understanding of these constructs.

Practical implication

The findings provide several takeaways for service and product managers. Even though the study was conducted across three brands, leaving out some other brands, the study expects the managerial implications of this study to extend beyond the current study context (Menidjel et al. 2023). First, the study outcome suggests that the country of origin plays an important role in customer engagement with their brands and, eventually, customer evangelism of their brands. In light of this, brand and marketing managers should aim to leverage the positive associations or perceptions linked to the brand's origin. This strategy can enhance consumer engagement and foster deeper brand loyalty.

Furthermore, this discovery allows brands to distinguish themselves in the market by highlighting their country of origin as a unique selling point. By doing so, brands can strengthen their brand identity and improve their position in the market. Second, affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagement findings on customer evangelism produced different outcomes. Not all the brands studied affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagement leads to customer evangelism, which has promising implications for brand and marketing managers. Signifying that engagement is not enough to make customers become brand evangelists and that it goes beyond engaging with

customers. This finding reveals more insight for brand and marketing managers to understand that not all brands effectively translate affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagement into customer evangelism. This revelation carries significant implications, indicating that simply engaging with customers is insufficient to cultivate brand evangelism. It suggests a need for strategies beyond conventional engagement efforts, emphasizing the importance of fostering emotional connections, authentic relationships, and value-added experiences to drive customer evangelism. Based on this outcome, brand and marketing managers should prioritize initiatives aimed at cultivating emotional connections with customers, fostering authenticity in brand interactions, and providing value-added experiences that exceed customer expectations. Further, empowering satisfied customers to become brand advocates through incentivized referral programs and platforms for amplifying their voices can strengthen brand loyalty.

Limitations and future direction

Even though the study provides some contributions, it has some limitations, which provide opportunities for future research. First, the study examined the country of origin on the affective, cognitive, and behavioral engagement of three different brands and also examined these constructs on customer brand engagement using the extend utilization theory, which provides future scholars with the opportunity to incorporate other constructs and extend our conceptual framework. Relatedly, scholars believe that additional factors beyond those examined in our conceptual framework may influence the hypothesized associations, which require further investigation. Secondly, the study utilized PLS-SEM analysis to explore the associations between constructs (Sarstedt et al. 2020). These theoretical relationships can be further investigated using alternative methodology approaches. For instance, longitudinal or experimental methods could be employed to examine the model across diverse contexts. Thirdly, the data was gathered from Ghanaian consumers, representing an emerging market shaped by distinct cultural factors. However,

research indicates that customers from varying cultural backgrounds interact with brands uniquely (see, for instance, Hollebeek, 2018; Menidjel et al. 2023), thus limiting the generalizability of the study's findings. Therefore, the study suggests that researchers replicate and expand upon the model in different cultural settings to address this limitation.

Disclosure statement

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