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Research Paper

The Effect of Cultural Orientation and Country of Origin Image on Purchase Intention

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to examine the effect of cultural dimensions and country of origin image on consumers' purchase intention. This study is conducted on the individual level and hypothesizes that masculinity and uncertainty avoidance, two dimensions of Hofstede's framework of national culture, and country-of-origin (COO) image have a significant impact on purchase intention. The study also explores the mediating effect of product evaluation and the perceived quality of Japanese cars. The data collected in the scope of this study puts forward an online survey questionnaire of 430 Tunisian consumers. At a preliminary stage, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was run using SPSS, then a Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was conducted using AMOS. The findings show that COO has a significant positive effect on purchase intention of Japanese products, whereas masculinity has a significant negative effect. The results also confirm that uncertainty avoidance has no substantial direct effect on this purchase intention. The study's prominent contribution is to empirically determine the extent to which consumers' intent to purchase Japanese products is driven by their cultural orientation, product origin, and quality judgment.

Keywords: Cultural dimensions; Hofstede; country of origin image; consumer behaviour; purchase intention.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding consumers' behavior and their purchase decisions allow marketing managers to anticipate their behavior, and to some extent, influence their decision. This requires looking at the decision process's complexity and the cognitive and emotional processes involved in the consumer's choices. Consumer behavior is defined by Solomon et al. (2013, p.5) as "the study of the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use or dispose of products, services, ideas or experiences to satisfy needs and desires." In their approach, the authors include various consumption elements and emphasize a person's needs and desires this behavior covers. Hence, the consumers' purchase decision process illustrates how they respond to the needs that incite them to buy and consume goods. A significant step in developing marketing strategies is the understanding of each step of the purchase decision process. That is, the stages an individual goes through to ultimately make a decision, as well as the elements that impact his behavior (Blackwell et al., 2001).

During the evaluation process, a consumer will compare the alternatives available to him and select those that allow him to achieve his goal. This process involves a set of information processing strategies adapted to consumers' level of motivation, their ability to process information. Nevertheless, a consumer is always confronted with the possibility of interrupting the purchase process for various reasons (Blackwell et al., 2001). From this perspective, purchase intention denotes the likelihood that consumers may acquire a product or service at a future time (Wu et al., 2011) and also their willingness to purchase a particular brand (Moslehpour et al., 2018). Indeed, the importance of intention lies in its significance in predicting consumer behavior (Wu et al., 2011; Monataño & Kasprzyk, 2015). Consumers' perceptions, attitudes, and behavior are associated with purchase intention (Mirabi et al., 2015). Next to these drivers, research on consumer behavior identifies external factors that influence purchase decisions, for instance, cultural orientation,

COO, product knowledge, and product quality (Blackwell et al., 2001; Solomon et al., 2013). Hence, this study explores the impact of cultural dimensions, particularly Hofstede's national culture framework (1983, 2011), and country of origin image on consumers' purchase intention. The study also considers the role of the perceived quality of foreign products and product evaluation in cars' decision-making process related to buying cars, a high involvement product. The research is to be conducted in Tunisia and to investigate Japanese cars.

It is important to highlight the need for this study as limited research about the cultural impacts on the Tunisian consumer's attitude toward Japanese products has been conducted so far. Undoubtedly there are extensive cross-cultural studies carried by North American and European researchers; however, no meaningful attention has been brought to Arab countries, specifically Tunisia, in the above-mentioned valuable studies. Moreover, while a substantial number of studies focused on Hofstede's individualism/collectivism dimension, this research goes beyond these two dimensions and focuses on less traditional dimensions, namely masculinity and uncertainty avoidance. This study's major contribution is to establish empirical evidence to the following assumption: consumer's intention to purchase Japanese products can be motivated by cultural values and COO. The finding of this research demonstrates to marketers the importance of taking into account the cultural characteristics of consumers and their attitudes toward foreign products in their marketing strategies. The study's practical implications can enhance Japanese products' sales and consumption.

The first section of the paper presents an outline of the variables examined in the study, namely Hofstede's cultural dimensions and COO, followed by the hypotheses that explore the impact of culture and COO on the purchase intention. The study then reports the statistical analysis of a survey targeting Tunisian consumers and examining their purchase behavior toward Japanese cars. Finally, the research discusses the findings of the study and their theoretical implications in the Tunisian context.

Japanese cars are selected for this study because Japanese brands' market share has steadily been growing over the last years to become a leader in the Tunisian market (BSB Toyota report, 2018). Next to France and Italy, Japan is one of Tunisia's most important partners in terms of financial and technical assistance, particularly with the growth of Japanese direct investments in Tunisia.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, different concepts are used to develop the study's hypotheses. These concepts are cultural dimension, country of origin image, the perceived quality of foreign products, and product evaluation. From these concepts, six hypotheses are developed to test each factor's influence on purchase intention.

2.1 Cultural dimensions

Culture is "the lens" through which an individual pictures and apprehends his world and "the blueprint" which determines his activities and social actions (McCraken, 1986). However, the concept of culture is ambiguous and hard to define. Blackwell et al. (2001) define culture as "a complex of values, ideas, attitudes and other meaningful symbols that allows humans to communicate, interpret and evaluate as members of society" (Blackwell et al., 2001, p.552). Culture can also be described as "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others" (Hofstede, 2011, p.3). The impact of culture on different consumer domains has been well recognized (Shavitt & Barners, 2019). Indeed, culture has a prominent role in influencing consumers' behavior. Consumption motives are influenced by culture (Karami et al., 2017, Conner et al., 2017), in the same way, consumers' purchase decision is shaped by values and beliefs (Moriuchi, 2021).

However, in order to determine the role of culture in consumers' behavior, scholars have advanced several cultural conceptualizations (Hall, 1977; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998; Schwartz, 1994). However, given its extensive use in related cultural research, the Geert Hofstede framework has been used to study cultural dimensions and examine their implications on consumer behavior. Hofstede (1983, 2011) identifies six dimensions of national culture: Individualism (versus collectivism), power distance, masculinity (versus femininity), long-term orientation (versus short-term orientation), and indulgence (versus restraint). Therefore, within the confines of this study, the effect of both masculinity and uncertainty avoidance will be examined on the individual level, as they are strongly related to car buying motives (De Mooij, 2011).

Uncertainty avoidance (UA). This dimension is related to "society's tolerance for ambiguity" (Hofstede, 2011, p.10). It refers to society's relation to future unpredictability (Masuda et al., 2020). Societies have developed instruments, such as explicit or inexplicit rules, laws, and religion, to reduce the feeling of uncertainty and moderate ambiguity (Hofstede et al., 2010; Yoo & Donthu, 2005). In this sense, societies with high UA will

heavily rely on strict rules of behavior and determined belief systems (Puumalainen et al., 2015). In this regard, it is suggested that consumers from high UA societies will seek to reduce ambiguity by adopting less innovative and diligent consumption behavior (de Bellis et al., 2015), contrary to low UA consumers, who have higher tendencies of impulsive decisions (Conner et al., 2017).

Tunisian society shows a strong tendency to avoid uncertainty as it scores 75 in this dimension (Hofstede Insights, n.d.). More recently, in a Tunisian transitional economy, where consumers are duly encouraged to buy domestic products rather than imported ones, this dimension is being brought into more light. Hence, it can be hypothesized as follows:

H1: Uncertainty avoidance will have a significant negative effect on the purchase intention of Japanese products.

Masculinity. This aspect pertains to "the distribution of values between the genders" (Hofstede, 2011, p.12). It describes societies according to how they adhere to stereotypes associated with gender (Asamoah & Chovancová, 2016). For instance, masculine cultures will highly tend to differentiate between gender roles and independence. In contrast, feminine cultures will emphasize gender equality and interdependence (Yoo & Donthu, 2005). Likewise, masculine societies focus on achievement and success, whereas feminine societies symbolize cooperation, modesty (YahyaVana & Salman, 2017, Eastman et al., 2018). Masculinity is associated with status consumption as it explains consumption motives related to appearance to demonstrate status and achievement (De Mooij, 2017). Literature has established masculinity's impact on innovative behavior (Singh, 2006) and luxury product consumption (De Moiij, 2015; Eastman et al., 2018).

When considering Hofstede's index[1] (Hofstede Insights, n.d.), Tunisia's culture scores 40 on this dimension, indicating a moderate feminine society. Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is drawn:

H2: Masculinity will have a significant negative effect on the purchase intention of Japanese products.

2.2 Country of origin image (COO)

COO, considered as a multidimensional construct (Chen et al., 2014), has become increasingly prominent given its significant effect on consumer's behavior and purchase decisions (Gürhan-Canli et al., 2018). Nagashima (1970) advances one of the earliest definitions of COO and describes it as "the picture, the reputation, the stereotype that

[1] https://www.hofstede-insights.com/

businessmen and consumers attach to products of a specific country" (p. 68). More recently, Maher and Carter (2011) referred to "the attitudes that consumers of one country hold toward another country" (p. 559). Sousa et al. (2021) stress the significance of COO as it is a predictor of product quality. Indeed, consumers tend to rely on COO information as an extrinsic cue to facilitate the decision process when information about the product is unavailable (Reardon et al., 2017). In the same line, consumers will favorably evaluate a product when they hold a positive stereotypical image about a given country (Chen, 2014, Touzani et al., 2015). By grasping the image consumers have of a particular country, marketers can associate this image to their product to shape product perceptions and preferences (Roth & Romeo, 1992).

H3: COO will have a significant positive effect on the purchase intention of Japanese products.

2.3 Perceived quality of foreign products

Zeithaml (1988, p.3) provides a broad conception of perceived quality and defines it as "the consumer's judgment about a product's overall excellence or superiority". The author posits that the perceived quality refers to the consumer's overall evaluation of the product and can be compared, to some extent, to attitude. Indeed, the perceived quality is intangible and represents consumer's feelings toward a product or a brand (Mirabi et al., 2015). Hence, it is important to stress the relevance of the perceived quality and the products' intrinsic and extrinsic attributes. A product's perceived quality usually shapes purchase intention. Hence, consumers form a particular perception of the quality, price, or other product characteristics before buying it (Saleem et al., 2015). In international marketing studies, particular attention has been given to foreign products' perceived quality as its impact on product evaluation has been demonstrated. In developed countries where consumers' ethnocentrism is strong, consumers would take satisfaction in domestic products that they evaluate more positively than imported products. In contrast, a form of reverse ethnocentrism is revealed in developing countries where consumers show a significant preference for products originating in developed countries (Wang & Chen, 2004; Essoussi & Merunka, 2007). Considering that the evaluation of foreign products' quality will influence consumers' purchase intention, the following hypotheses are suggested.

H4a: The perceived quality of Japanese products mediates the relationship between uncertainty avoidance and purchase intention.

H4b: The perceived quality of Japanese products mediates the relationship between

masculinity and purchase intention.

H4c: The perceived quality of Japanese products mediates the relationship between COO and purchase intention.

2.4 Product evaluation

Consumer research models demonstrate the link between product evaluation and purchase intention (Howard & Sheth, 1969; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen, 1991). Blackwell et al. (2001) present the seven-stage process, the EBM model, that consumers undergo when making a purchase decision. The product evaluation stage is achieved only when consumers identify the different alternatives of products by categorizing brands within different types of sets to narrow down the choices that would ultimately lead to a purchase (Solmon et al., 2013). For instance, when evaluating cars, consumers will rely on tangible and intangible attributes such as price, quality and security to assess the different alternatives offered to them (Abu-Alkeir, 2020). Researchers and marketers focus on purchase-decision steps to understand the motivation behind buying a product. Indeed, product evaluation will induce positive or negative attitudes toward a product, influencing consumers' purchase intention. Accordingly, it is suggested:

H5: Product evaluation has a significant positive effect on the purchase intention of the Japanese products.

Furthermore, product evaluation is significantly bound to cultural values. For instance, evidence provided by Gürhan-calli and Maheswaran (2000) have established the relationship between cultural values and COO and its impact on product evaluation. Furthermore, Costa et al. (2016) have demonstrated the effect of COO on the evaluation of foreign products. In the same line, consumers will evaluate more favorably a product in the presence of a positive product stereotypes, such as Japanese electronics and French luxury products (Chen et al., 2014). Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H5a: Product evaluation mediates the relationship between uncertainty avoidance and purchase intention.

H5b: Product evaluation mediates the relationship between masculinity and purchase intention.

H5c: Product evaluation mediated the relationship between COO and purchase intention.

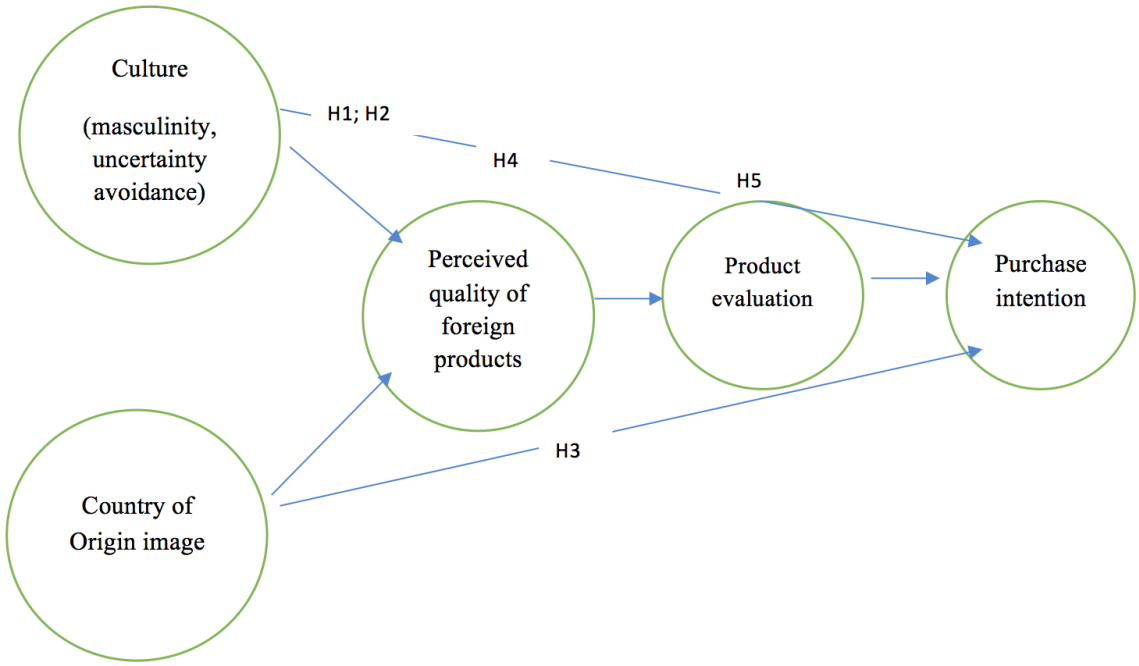

Fig1. A proposed framework for the research

Source: Adapted from Yoo and Donthu (2005) and de Mooij and Hofstede (2011)

Figure 1 illustrate the conceptual model of the research, which displays two sets of relationships. In the first set, the model postulates the direct effect of cultural dimensions (masculinity and uncertainty avoidance), COO, and product evaluation on purchase intention (H1 – H2 – H3 – H5). Through the second set of relationships, the research examines the mediating effect of Japanese products' perceived quality and product evaluation between the independent variables and purchase intention (H4 – H5).

3 RESEARCH METHOD

To meet the study's goals, I designed a survey in reference to the existing literature review. The questionnaire covered the five variables illustrated in the conceptual model. The questionnaire was drafted in English, then converted into French. In a later stage, they were retranslated into English according to the "back-translation" technique recommended by Brislin (1970) and widely used in cross-cultural studies. Indeed, the French language has been used to collect data for its convenience for Tunisian people, considering their high French literacy.

This study aimed at measuring the influence of the cultural orientation of Tunisian consumer behavior. Accordingly, I used the Cultural Values Scale (CVSCALE) developed by Yoo and Donthu (2005). The COO image measures have been adopted from Hanzaee and

Khosrozadeh's (2011) study, based on Martin and Eroglu's (1993) country image scale. To measure the perceived quality of Japanese products, the scale of product judgment developed by Klein et al. (1998) and adapted by Yoo and Donthu (2005) in their studies (2002, 2005, 2011) has been drawn on. Product evaluation was measured using Swaminathan et al. (2007) scale. Conclusively, the purchase intention scale has been based on Klein et al. (1998) and Yoo and Donthu (2005). However, except for COO and purchase intention, the rest of the scales were used without adaptation. Keeping this in mind, participants were invited to express their agreement on different items on a five-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree). However, the purchase intention scale was reverse coded, as the questions were negatively worded (Hughes, 2009).

For my online survey, I collected primary data using Google forms and social networks as platforms that allow access to a significant and a representative number of respondents. The data collection followed the convenience sampling method and took place from June to September 2020. Initially, 450 responses were collected; however, after discarding the incomplete questionnaires, only 430 responses have been included in the statistical analysis. The sample size has been determined according to the criteria of Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) (Collier, 2020).

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) has been conducted using SPSS (26), whereas Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) were carried out using AMOS (26). Different Goodness-of-fit indices were determined to examine the overall fit of the measurement and the structural model. For instance, the absolute indexes included the Chi-square (χ^2), the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), and the Goodness-of-fit statistic (GFI). The incremental indices such as the Normed-fit index (NFI), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) were used. Finally, the Root Mean Square of Approximation (RMSEA) was used as a parsimony index.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 Sample description

The sample fairly represented both genders. 64% were female, while 36 % were male. Of the 430 respondents, 45% belonged to the age group of 21 to 30 years, while 37% were in the age range of 31 to 40 years. Moreover, 40% of the surveyed population had a moderately higher income level than the average population, with a monthly income of 2000 or more TND (equivalent to the US $700).

4.2 Internal Reliability

To determine the scale's reliability, I used Cronbach's alpha. Six items were deleted to increase Cronbach's alpha (see appendix). The low reliability of the removed items might be explained by a modified cultural context: from an US context, where the scales were developed, to a Tunisian context, where the study was conducted. Overall, indices of internal consistency are within adequate levels for all study variables. As indicated in Table 1, coefficient alpha estimates for each measure reach the cut-off level of reliability (Georges and Mallery, 2016).

Table 1. Internal reliability

	Cronbach's Alpha
Masculinity	0.72
Uncertainty avoidance	0.79
Country of origin	0.87
Perceived quality of Japanese products	0.83
Product evaluation	0.94
Purchase intention	0.88

4.2 Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

A Principal Components Analysis (PCA) was run using SPSS (version 26) on the questionnaire's remaining 31 items. As illustrated in Table 2, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) is 0.874, and Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant as $p<0.005$, which demonstrates the adequacy of the data for factor analysis (Hair et al., 1995).

Table 2. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	0.886
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	
Approx. Chi-Square	6884.225
df	378
Sig.	0

PCA with orthogonal rotation (Varimax) produced six factors that accounted for 67.32 % of the total variance. The number of factors was determined based on the criterion of Guttman-Kaiser, which stipulates that the factors with an eigenvalue greater than 1 are to be used for

further analysis (Yeomans and Golder,1982, Hair et al., 1995). With a cut-off value of 0.32 as suggested by Tabachnick and Fidell (2001), three complex variables were removed from the analysis (see appendix). A scree test showed six significant factors to be maintained, confirming the number of factors obtained. Finally, oblique rotation (Promax) provided similar factor patterns and was chosen as this study postulates that factors are correlated.

4.3 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Factors resulting from the EFA were used to conduct Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) using AMOS (version 26). CFA, as a first step of the Structural Equational Modeling (SEM), was conducted as a means to examine the relationship between the latent constructs or factors and the observed variables that measure those latent constructs (Jackson et al., 2009; O'Rourke & Hatcher, 2013). CFA involved establishing a measurement model in which observed variables were identified, and latent constructs were correlated. Maximum Likelihood Estimation was used to assess the study's measurement and structural models.

Overall, the Goodness-of-fit indices revealed an adequate fit of the respecified model in line with the required threshold suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999) (Table 3). Indeed, to achieve an acceptable fit, CFI and TLI measures should reach the cut-off value of 0.95. Similarly, SRMR should be close to 0.08 and RMSEA close to 0.06 (Hu and Bentler, 1999).

Table 3. Fitness Assessment of the Measurement Model

	χ^2	DF	χ^2/df	RMSEA	GFI	SRMR	NFI	CFI	TLI
Model	528.837	260	2.034	0.049	0.911	0.048	0.907	0.950	0.943

Note: χ^2=chi-square, DF= degrees of freedom, χ^2/df=normed chi-square, RMSEA= Root Mean Square Error of Approximation, GFI= Goodness-of-fit statistic, SRMR= Standardized Root Mean Square, NFI= Normed-fit index, CFI= Comparative Fit Index, TLI=Tucker-Lewis index.

The composite reliability (CR), an indicator of construct reliability, was used to assess internal consistency factors. As illustrated in Table 4, CR values demonstrates good reliability (Malhorta & Dash, 2016). Also, the AVE, as an indication of convergent validity, ranged from 0.46 to 0.80. Except for cultural constructs (masculinity and uncertainty avoidance), all items reached the 0.5 threshold level suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981). Overall, it is established that convergent validity is reached. Indeed, Malhotra and Dash (2016, p.714) posit that "AVE is a more conservative measure than composite reliability. On the basis of composite reliability alone, the researcher may conclude that the convergent validity of the construct is adequate, even though more than 50 % of Based on

due to error." Lastly, discriminant validity was confirmed when the AVE was higher than the Maximum Shared Variance (MSV) and Average Shared Squared Variance (Hair et al., 1995). For each construct, the square root of the AVE was larger than its correlation with the other constructs (Zaiţ & Bertea, 2011).

Table 4. Factor intercorrelation

	PE	MA	UA	JQ	COO	PI
Product evaluation (PE)	(0.90)					
Masculinity (MA)	0.06	(0.70)				
Uncertainty avoidance (UA)	0.14	0.22	(0.68)			
Perceived quality of Japanese products (JQ)	0.53	0.24	0.28	(0.71)		
Country-of-origin image (COO)	0.30	0.09	0.27	0.48	(0.74)	
Purchase intention (PI)	0.29	-0.21	0.07	0.34	0.19	(0.85)
Composite Reliability (CR)	0.94	0.74	0.81	0.84	0.86	0.88
Average Variance Explained (AVE)	0.80	0.49	0.46	0.50	0.55	0.72
Maximum Shared Variance (MSV)	0.28	0.06	0.08	0.28	0.23	0.12
Average Shared Squared Variance (ASV)	0.26	0.08	0.19	0.37	0.26	0.14

Note: values in parentheses are the square root of the AVE

4.4 The Structural Model (SEM)

A structural equation modeling was conducted with six constructs and 25 items. The structural model identifies three exogenous variables: masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, and COO image, which are connected to the perceived quality of Japanese products and product evaluation, which in turn are connected to the purchase intention. Fit indices, as indicated in Table 5, demonstrate the good fit of the structural model. Three of the four hypothesized paths are significant (p<0.05). Overall, the structural model accounts for

28.4% of Japanese products' perceived quality, 28,4 % for the evaluation of Japanese cars, and 15% of purchase intention.

Table 5. Structural Model

Hypothetical Path	Standardized Estimate	*t*-value	*P*	Hypothesis
H1: Uncertainty Avoidance --->Purchase intention	0.062	0.876	0.381	Not Supported
H2: Masculinity ---> Purchase intention	-0.202	-4.039	***	Supported
H3: Country of Origin Image --->Purchase intention	0.185	2.202	0.002	Supported
H5: Product Evaluation --->Purchase intention	0.249	5.146	***	Supported
Squared Multiple Correlation				
Perceived quality of Japanese products	0.284			
Purchase Intention	0.284			
Product evaluation	0.15			
Model Fit Statistics				
χ 2 = 551.641, DF = 264, 2/df = 2.090, RMSEA=0.050, GFI =0.907, SRMR =0.053, NFI=0.903, CFI =0.947, TLI =0.940.				

Note: χ^2=chi-square, DF= degrees of freedom, χ^2/df=normed chi-square, RMSEA= Root Mean Square Error of Approximation, GFI= Goodness-of-fit statistic, SRMR= Standardized Root Mean Square, NFI= Normed-fit index, CFI= Comparative Fit Index, TLI=Tucker-Lewis index.

Only one cultural dimension revealed a significant relationship (p<0.01) with purchase intention following the hypothesized paths. Masculinity (H2) had a negative link with purchase intention (estimate= -0.202, t-value=-4.039, p<0.01), contrary to uncertainty avoidance (H1) which indicated no significant effect (estimate = 0.062, t-value=0.876, *p=0.381*). Moreover, the analysis confirmed a significant positive link between COO and purchase intention (H3) (estimate=0.185, t-value=2.202, p<0.05). Finally, the analysis showed a significant positive impact of product evaluation on purchase intention (H5) (estimate=0.249, t-value=5.146, p<0.01). This study also demonstrated the mediation effect of Japanese products' perceived quality and product evaluation between cultural dimensions (masculinity and uncertainty avoidance), COO, and purchase intention.

As described in Table 6, full mediation is established in the serial mediation that tested the

relationship between uncertainty avoidance and purchase intention (H4a, H5a). The indirect effect through both mediating variables to purchase intention is 0.024 and is significant at the p=0.015 level. However, competitive mediation is present in the serial mediation that tested the relationship between masculinity and purchase intention (H4b, H5b). The indirect effect resulting from the perceived quality of Japanese products and Japanese cars' evaluation to purchase intention is 0.018 and is significant at the *p*=0.005 level. Finally, partial mediation is supported in the serial mediation that tested the relationship between COO and purchase intention (H4c, H5c). The direct effect is significant with a *p-value* <0.05, and the results of the indirect effect of both intermediating variables to purchase intention are 0.095 and significant at the *p*=0.000 level.

Table 6. Mediation

Relationships	Indirect Effect	Confidence level		p-value	Conclusion
		Low	High		
Masculinity -->Perceived quality of Japanese products -->Product Evaluation -->Purchase intention	0.018	0.005	0.042	0.005	Competitive Mediation
Uncertainty Avoidance -->Perceived quality of Japanese products --> Product Evaluation -->Purchase Intention	0.024	0.004	0.065	0.015	Full Mediation
Country of Origin Image -->Perceived quality of Japanese products --> Product Evaluation -->Purchase Intention	0.095	0.043	0.183	0.000	Partial Mediation

5. DISCUSSION

As already mentioned, only a minor number of studies have been conducted so far on the cultural effects on the Tunisian consumer's attitude toward Japanese products in spite of the comparably greater number of studies on culture and its significant impact on consumer

behavior. This paper attempts to fill in this gap by exploring Tunisian consumers' purchase decisions toward Japanese products.

This study's findings show that masculinity has a significant negative impact on Japanese cars' purchase intention. Consistent with previous studies, these findings demonstrate that feminine societies have lower needs for status consumption (De Mooij, 2011), contrary to masculine cultures, where consumption motives are a means of self-expression (De Mooij, 2015, 2017; Eastman et al., 2018). Similarly, low masculinity consumers do not prefer domestic products over imported ones, as high masculinity is correlated positively to ethnocentric behavior (Yoo & Donthu, 2005). In the study's context, Tunisia does not produce cars; hence, this negative effect might be explained by consumers' preference to purchase cars originating from historically and culturally close countries such as France, also a feminine culture.

However, uncertainty avoidance shows no significant direct link with purchase intention. The link between the variables is positive, contrary to the hypothesized path, but the impact's size is not significant. On the other hand, consumers' attitudes and perceptions toward Japanese products have generated an indirect positive effect of uncertainty avoidance on purchase intention. Tunisian consumers seem not to regard Japanese cars' consumption as an ambiguous behavior as they rely on their perception of high-quality Japanese products, which reduces the risk of unfamiliar situations. These outcomes are consistent with past studies that found the significance of product quality perception for high UA consumers when making a purchase decision (Lee et al., 2007, Conner et al., 2017). In contrast, as indicated in Table 4, there is a relatively high correlation between masculinity and uncertainty avoidance, which might have weakened the direct effect on purchase intention.

Moreover, the findings show that COO has a significant effect on Japanese cars' purchase intention. The link between COO and purchase intention is reinforced by the two factors: the perceived quality of Japanese products and product evaluation. These findings support previous studies on the importance of COO image and foreign products' perceived quality in consumer's purchase decision (Gürhan-Canli et Maheswaran, 2000; Sousa et al., 2021). The findings are also in line with studies that showed the prominence of the COO information in emerging countries, such as Tunisia (Abdellah-Kilani & Zorai, 2019, Touzani et al., 2015). Research have demonstrated the positive effect of COO on consumers' product evaluation, being an extrinsic clue that influences evaluation and attitude (Kalicharan, 2014; Reardon et al., 2017). This impact is notably significant when considering high involvement products

(Karimov & El Murad, 2018) such as cars with which this study is concerned.

In accordance with previous research (Gürhan-calli & Maheswaran, 2000; Chen et al., 2014), this study illustrates the significance of product evaluation on purchase intention. In the same line, the study's findings show that Japanese products' perceived quality has the most significant impact on the study's dependent variable, with a significant impact on Japanese cars' evaluation. Supporting earlier studies (Wang & Chen, 2004; Essoussi & Merunka, 2007; Saleem et al., 2015), these results have revealed that Tunisian consumers give particular importance to the quality of Japanese products.

6. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings of this study offer an increased knowledge of consumer behavior and may suggest relevant managerial implications. Consistent with previous research, this study has revealed that cultural dimensions could influence purchase behavior (Yoo & Shin, 2017; Shavitt & Barners, 2019). This study also supports the claim suggesting that cultural differences need to be considered when operating in international markets (Conner et al., 2017). That is, marketers should cluster consumers on individual and country levels according to their cultural orientation. Accordingly, in feminine societies such as Tunisia, communication strategies should convey messages of modesty and gender role differences and rely on softer drama style in advertising to provide a contextual meaning for the product (De Mooij, 2011).

Conversely, in high uncertainty avoidance cultures, consumers are more quality-oriented (Conner et al., 2017). Thus, the focus should be placed on foreign products' quality to reduce product uncertainty (Lee et al., 2007). It is suggested that marketers evoke positive perceptions of their products to boost product evaluation and increase consumers' intention to purchase Japanese products. Marketers must adopt a strategic planning concentrated on building and promoting the quality of their products. Besides quality cues, marketers can rely on other contextual cues to denote their products' quality, such as warranty and return policies (Yu et al., 2018). Moreover, companies eager to operate in emerging markets such as Tunisia should emphasize the country image, particularly when it is well perceived and favorably matched with the product-country image (Verlegh et al., 2005). This is crucial for Japanese companies, particularly with the current growth of Japanese direct investments in Tunisia. In other respects, marketers should use social networks to reach their target consumers and promote their products as, by December 2020, roughly 68% of the Tunisian

population has been accessing Facebook, one of Africa's highest penetration rates (Internet World Stats, 2021).

Drawing on Tunisian consumers' past attitudes and experiences, marketers of Japanese products should focus on the many forces, whether cultural or historical, to shape Tunisian consumers' mainstream behavior. In this scope, it is expected that a developing society may build on an open attitude toward an advanced country, in this case, Japan, if positively presented as an economically advanced model whose products are positively discernible by consumers. This long-term aim has to be associated with a necessity to advertise Japanese products to reduce consumers' degrees of reluctance and to affect their behavior positively.

The current study bears certain limitations, which provides a basis for future research. First, this study was concerned with one origin country (Japan) and one product category (high involvement). It would be of great interest to test its generalizability to other product categories, especially low involvement goods, and perhaps to compare Japan with other origin countries. Also, the findings of this study, which touch on perceptions of Tunisian consumers, may not be transferred to other consumers from other countries. It would be helpful for future research to reproduce this study in different contexts. Finally, this study used the CETSCALE developed by Yoo and Donthu (2005) to measure the Tunisian consumer's cultural orientation. It took into consideration only two cultural dimensions: masculinity and uncertainty avoidance. Measuring the five cultural dimensions at the same time would unveil an expanded perspective of the role of culture on the purchase decision of the Tunisian consumer.

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APPENDIX

	Scale	Mean	SD
	Masculinity		
MA1	It is more important for men to have a professional career than it is for women.	1.99	1.292
MA2	Men usually solve problems with logical analysis; women usually solve problems with intuition	2.26	1.204
MA3	Solving difficult problems usually requires an active, forcible approach, which is typical of men	2.11	1.131
MA4*	There are some jobs a man can always do better than a woman.	2.91	1.384
	Uncertainty Avoidance		
UA1	It is important to have instructions spelled out in detail so that I always know what I'm expected to do	3.57	1.128
UA2	It is important to closely follow instructions and procedures	3.88	0.885
UA3	Rules/regulations are important because they inform me of what is expected of me	4.06	0.784
UA4	Standardized work procedures are helpful	3.58	0.978
UA5	Instructions for operations are important.	3.96	0.831
	Perceived quality of Japanese products		
JQ1	Products made in Japan are carefully produced and have fine workmanship.	3.9	0.893
JQ2	Products made in Japan are generally of a higher quality than similar products available from other countries.	3.38	1.037
JQ3	Products made in Japan show a very high degree of technological advancement.	4.01	0.839
JQ4	Products made in Japan usually show a very clever use of color and design.	3.63	0.931
JQ5	Products made in Japan are usually quite reliable and seem to last the desired length of time.	3.7	0.943
JQ6*	Products made in Japan are usually a good value for the money.	3.46	0.909

	COO		
COO1	The level of economic development of Japan is high	4.32	0.729
COO2*	The level of democratic level of Japan is high	3.27	0.861
COO3	The level of industrialization of Japan is high	4.34	0.717
COO4	The standards of living of Japan are high	4.05	0.873
COO5	The level of advanced technology of Japan is high	4.46	0.718
COO6	The level of education of Japan is high	4.32	0.773
COO7**	The quality of Japanese product is high	3.99	0.872
COO8**	I feel confident for owning a product from Japan	3.87	0.984
	Japanese products are reliable		0.945
COO9**		3.88	
	Product evaluation		
PE1	Low - high quality	3.93	0.799
PE2	Bad - good impression	3.89	0.911
PE3	Unfavorable-favorable impression	3.92	0.905
PE4	Negative-positive impression	3.9	0.951
	Purchase intention		
PI1*	I would feel guilty if I bought a Japanese product.	3.9	1.108
PI2	I would never buy a Japanese car.	4.11	0.965
PI3	Whenever possible, I avoid buying Japanese products.	4.07	0.973
PI4*	Whenever available, I would prefer to buy products made in Japan.	2.91	1.011
PI5	I do not like the idea of owning Japanese products.	4.08	0.971
PI6*	If two products were equal in quality, but one was from Japan and one was from another country, I would pay 10% more for the product from the other country.	3.86	1.1

Notes:
*Items deleted to increase Cronbach's Alpha
** Complex variables deleted during EFA

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