



## Country-of-Origin Effect and Consumer Purchase Intentions in the Indian Automobile Market: The Roles of Reflexiveness, Habituation, and Cognition

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### Abstract

The country-of-origin (COO) effect plays a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions across industries, yet its influence on the rapidly evolving Indian automobile sector remains underexplored. This study investigates the impact of reflexiveness, habituation, and cognition on consumer purchase intentions toward domestic and foreign automobiles in India. Using a standardized scale by Siamagka and Balabanis (2015), survey data were collected from 271 respondents, primarily from urban India. Regression analysis revealed that reflexiveness and habituation positively and significantly influenced purchase intention, while cognition exerted a small but significant negative effect, suggesting that strong foreign brand associations may reduce preference for Indian cars. Employment status emerged as a differentiating factor, with self-employed individuals showing a greater inclination toward foreign automobiles, whereas age and gender had no significant impact. The findings also highlighted limited adoption of electric vehicles (6.1% of cars owned), pointing to infrastructural and informational barriers. This study contributes to COO literature in the Indian context and provides actionable insights for automobile marketers and policymakers to strengthen consumer confidence in domestic brands.

**Keywords:** *Country of Origin Effect; Reflexiveness; Habituation; Automobile Industry; Consumer Behaviour*

### 1. Introduction

The automobile industry is a crucial part of the Indian economy, having contributed six percent to the GDP in 2023-24 (Ministry of Heavy Industries, n.d.) and leading to 4.5 million units of exports in the same year (Invest India, n.d.). In 2024, India had the third largest automobile market in the world with a sales volume of 2.5 crore units, marking an 11% growth from the previous year (Singh, 2025). Over the years, an increase in the number of foreign automobile brands in the Indian market such as Mercedes, Honda, and Hyundai has led to an increase in competition with Indian automobile brands. This new

competition has led to an increased variety for consumers, improvement in technology along with an increasing encroachment of the automobile market in India (Miglani, 2019). Due to these reasons, 66% of the cars sold by foreign brands in the Indian automobile market in 2022 (Pqr, 2023), a dramatic rise from their marginal share in the 1990s.

There are several reasons why there has been a positive shift in the consumer preference towards foreign car brands. Notably, one huge reason for this is the development of roads and infrastructure along with what the brand is associated with, an increase in the disposable income of consumers, and consumers being interested in the quality of the car as well, according to a study. (Shrivastava, 2022)

One interesting motivation for the increasing preference towards buying foreign cars can be explained by a phenomenon known as the ‘country of origin’ effect. The country-of-origin effect can be defined as the phenomenon at play ‘that occurs when consumers infer that the characteristics of a country transfers onto a product, a brand, or even a service’ (Andéhn et al., 2016). This effect could also be a reason for the shift in consumer preference towards foreign car brands as country of origin might lead to positive perceptions about product quality, customer service and value. The country-of-origin effect is clearly visible in the fashion industry with luxury products which are made in Italy or France are considered to have better quality than the products being made in China which are considered to be of cheap quality (Butković et al., 2018). The electronics industry also faces the country-of-origin effect with a study done on German consumers and their preference on buying electronics by Chinese companies (Jählig, 2021) concluded that even though there is a positive relationship between the country’s image and the purchase intention, it can also be a problem if the consumers already have a negative perception of the country, as that would reduce the purchase intention. Another study (Balestrini & Gamble, 2006) done on the country-of-origin effect on Chinese wine consumers concluded that the effect is very important when the consumers buy wine for special occasions whereas it is not so important when they buy it for personal reasons.

A primary study by Li and Setiowati (2023) conducted with 150 respondents for Indonesian customers of the Wuling Air Electric Vehicle (EV), explored the role of country of origin, brand awareness, perceived risk and brand image in inducing purchase intention. The research concluded that brand awareness, perceived risk, and country of origin did have a huge positive impact on purchase intention. However, perceived risk had a significant positive impact on brand image whereas, country of origin and brand awareness did not have a great impact on brand image. Another study by Kalicharan (2014) examined country of origin as a factor when choosing a product in the US. This time period was pertinent as the country of origin was legally mandated to be disclosed as product information. The paper studied how it affects consumers and their perception of product quality in the context of different economies. The research concluded that country of origin is important to indicate status for people with ethnocentric belief systems (the belief that the people, customs, and traditions of your own race or country are better than those of other races or countries (Ethnocentrism, 2025)) and for people in developing economies. However, it also found that the country-of-origin effect can be reduced by advertising the product in a way which highlights the quality of the product.

One quantitative study by Sohail and Sahin (2010) with a self-administered questionnaire answered by 940 respondents who use cars, focused on the impact of country of origin on consumers when they purchase a car. To investigate if the phenomenon is prevalent when buying a car, the attitudes of consumers towards the cars bought from Japan, South Korea, Europe, and America were collected. The study discovered that European cars had a positive perception by the consumers which could lead to them having the highest market share followed by Japan in second as the automobiles in Japan are of good quality but they are not accepted that well, socially. Even though America was slightly above Japan, the consumers had some issues with the quality of their automobiles. Finally, South Korean cars were rated last due to their low quality and maintenance, however they were more popular than the European cars.

While existing literature has extensively examined the country-of-origin effect in several countries and industries, there remains a gap in understanding how the phenomenon affects an Indian consumer's perception when purchasing an automobile in recent times as the Indian automobile market has changed a lot. This research aims to address this gap by focusing solely on the Indian automobile market and Indian consumers and to what extent does the country of origin affect their perception. By analysing the answers, the study seeks to contribute to the broader understanding of this phenomenon and its effects in the context of other foreign automobile markets.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Research Aim and Hypothesis**

This study aims to examine the factors influencing consumer preference and purchase intention towards domestic (Indian) automobiles, with a particular focus on reflexiveness, habituation, and cognition about foreign quality. The research also seeks to understand the demographic and ownership patterns that shape consumer attitudes towards Indian versus foreign car brands.

- To examine the role of reflexiveness, habituation and country-of-origin effect on inducing purchase intention for Indian automobiles.
- To understand the difference between males and females for values like reflexiveness, habituation, country-of-origin effect and purchase intention with regards to Indian automobiles.
- To understand the difference between self-employed and salaried individuals for values like reflexiveness, habituation, country-of-origin effect and purchase intention with regards to Indian automobiles.
- To ascertain the nature and composition of car ownership in the Indian market.

### **2.2 Research Design and Data Collection Procedure**

This is a quantitative research paper with the use of standardised scales and a 5-point Likert scale for answering the aim of this paper. The data was collected through a Google form survey to understand the extent to which the country of origin affects consumers' purchase intention when buying an automobile in India. The data was collected from all over India with the majority of the respondents residing in Delhi NCR. The survey was divided into three sections, with the first section collecting information on demographic variables such as age, gender, household income, education and employment status. The second section contained questions pertaining to ownership of domestic or foreign cars and electric and non-electric cars. The final section consisted of four standardised scales to measure habituation, reflexiveness, cognition and purchase intention in relation to foreign/domestic automobile ownership.

### **2.3 Sampling and Sample Characteristics**

The study utilized convenience sampling to collect data from an initial pool of 271 respondents, which, following data cleaning, was reduced to a final sample of 219 participants. The sample comprised 61% male and 39% female respondents. Approximately 60% of participants reported an annual household income exceeding ₹40 lakhs. Moreover, more than three-quarters of the sample were aged 40 years or older, indicating a predominance of middle-aged and older individuals in the study population.

## 2.4 Scales and Tools Used

For accurate data collection a standardised scale developed by Siamgaka and Balabanis (2015) was used. It has 17 items and is distributed among five dimensions - Reflexiveness, Habituation, Cognition, Prosociality, and Insecurity. I focused on Reflexiveness, Habituation, and Cognition for my study. A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure the degree of agreement ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' (Htet, 2022).

This is answered through statements such as "I would be convinced to buy cars produced by Indian brands if a campaign was launched in the social media promoting Indian automobiles" and "I would stop buying foreign automobiles if the Indian public launched campaigns to make people aware of the positive impact of domestic goods consumption on the Indian economy" for reflexiveness, "I am buying Indian automobiles out of habit" and "I prefer buying Indian automobiles because I am more familiar with them" for habituation, "Foreign automobiles are made to high standards and no other country can exceed them" and "When it comes to foreign automobiles, I do not need further information to assess their quality, the country of origin is sufficient signal of high quality for me" for cognition and "I will continue buying domestic automobiles" and "Domestic automobiles are worth buying" for purchase intention. One statement under cognition is reverse coded "Domestic automobiles are worth buying" as the others are for foreign quality. Habituation focuses on the fact that ethnocentrism is generated by a repeated behaviour linked to morality. The reflexiveness dimension considers the ethnocentrism caused by biased information that is received repeatedly, leading to rejection towards certain products. Cognition relates to the ethnocentrism of those who see the world through ethnic groups. Purchase intention is the preference of the consumer to buy the product or service (Htet, 2022).

## 2.5 Ethics and Informed Consent

Before filling the form, voluntary consent was clearly asked from the respondents. To be completely transparent, the Google Form had a clear description which included asking for permission through the statement, by continuing with this survey, you acknowledge that you have read and understood the information provided and voluntarily agree to participate, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, please note that all information you share will be kept strictly confidential and used solely for academic purposes. Your identity will not be disclosed to any third party under any circumstances, and providing them with the choice of stopping, To the best of my knowledge, there are no risks involved in participating in this study. However, if at any point you feel uncomfortable, you are free to discontinue your participation without any consequences. No Emails were collected to maintain anonymity.

## 3. Results and Discussion

The regression analysis revealed a significant model ( $F=71.17$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) with an  $R^2$  of 0.50, indicating that reflexiveness, habituation, and cognition together explain 50% of the variance in purchase intention. Reflexiveness ( $B=0.64$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and habituation ( $B=0.53$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) had strong positive effects, suggesting that repeated exposure to biased information and repeated behaviour significantly enhanced purchase intention for Indian-manufactured automobiles. In contrast, cognition showed a small but significant negative effect ( $B=-0.22$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), indicating that greater country of origin effect slightly reduces purchase intention for the same. One possible explanation for these results could be that the respondents believe that domestic goods are superior as compared to foreign goods.

**Table 1: Regression Analysis of Impact on Purchase Intention (N=218)**

Source	B	SE B	t	p
Constant	8.33	1.16	7.16	<0.001
Reflexiveness	0.64	0.09	7.06	<0.001***
Habituation	0.53	0.09	6.26	<0.001***
Cognition	-0.22	0.11	-2.01	0.046**
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	0.5			
<b>F</b>	71.17***			

Note: \*p<0.10, \*\*p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01; B = coefficient; SE B= standard error

The finding for the positive impact of reflexiveness on purchase is in line with another study that found that being exposed to positive framing and adverts regarding a specific product increases their intention to buy that product (Fan, 2022). This is visible in the regression analysis for reflexiveness as it shows a significant impact on the purchase intention of automobiles. Reflexiveness can also affect the purchase intention of automobiles because of various reasons. According to research, consumer perception and subjective display show a significant positive impact on consumers' purchase intention (Wang et al., 2023). Existing studies have also found that cause-related marketing linking purchases to broader social or national good significantly increases purchase intention. The effect has been found to be more impactful if the campaign explicitly communicates the concrete positive impact, such as improving the economy, etc. Moreover, the mere exposure effect also explains the impact of consistent positive campaigning on purchase intention (Hekkert et al., 2013).

Similarly, habituation can affect the purchase intention of automobiles through several ways. In this case it has a significant positive impact on the purchase intention. This could be because of being familiar with a brand causing brand loyalty and being habitual to purchase a car from that brand. A study on the effect of brand loyalty on imagery elaboration in online apparel concluded how brand familiarity creates a positive response and behaviour by the consumer (Yu et al., 2017).

Consumers have also been found to be resistant to new technologies leading to a negative effect on purchase intention. Studies have also proved that if a consumer is resistant to innovation, he would be less likely to buy that product (Malate, 2024). It can be then inferred that familiarity with a product or technology breeds purchase intention. The finding can also be explained by the fact that in re-purchasing a familiar product eliminates the need to invest mental energy in learning or evaluating alternatives. Researching new products requires time for comparison, reading reviews, and resolving uncertainty, especially in the case of technologically driven product categories like cars, which can be taxing (Jeon et al., 2021; Leong, 1993). Another reason for preferring products that are commonly used by their community or have been around since childhood is the fear of missing out or social alienation (Tumiwa & Susanti, 2024). Psychological phenomena like the bandwagon effect and social conformity effect pushes consumers to mimic the purchasing patterns of their group, even if alternatives do exist (Liang et al., 2024; Dinh & Lee, 2024).

The paper also finds that Indian consumers tend to have a strong positive inclination toward foreign car manufacturers. This preference is due to the historical perception that India lacks the expertise and is not technologically advanced in manufacturing automobiles in comparison with countries like Germany and Japan, which are globally recognized for being the pioneers in the field. A study on

consumer purchase decisions for cars in Tamil Nadu, India, found that the country of origin plays a huge role in influencing the purchase of products and services (Santhoshini & Subashini, 2023). This can be because of the global reputation of Germany and Japan in automobile manufacturing, enhancing consumer trust and perceived product quality (Kinra, 2006). Studies also show that Indian consumers find non-Indian cars better than that of Indian-made cars. These results reinforce a preference for foreign vehicles among Indian consumers, and prove their strong belief that foreign products have better quality and technological methods when producing products and services (Avinandan, 1996).

**Table 2: Independent T-Test Analysis based on Gender over 40 years of age (N=111)**

Construct	Gender	n	M	SD	t	p
Reflexiveness	Male	58	9.66	3.02	-0.65	0.519
	Female	53	9.32	2.42		
Habituation	Male	58	8.34	3.27	-1.16	0.25
	Female	53	7.7	2.61		
Cognition	Male	58	8.6	1.97	0.43	0.668
	Female	53	8.75	1.73		
Purchase Intention	Male	58	17.16	4.58	-1.13	0.26
	Female	53	16.28	3.49		

\*\*\*p<0.01, \*\*p<0.05, \*p<0.1

Independent sample t-tests were conducted to examine gender differences in reflexiveness, habituation, cognition, and purchase intention among respondents over 40 years of age. The results revealed no statistically significant differences between males and females across any of the constructs. Specifically, there was no significant gender difference in reflexiveness ( $t = -0.65$ ,  $p = 0.519$ ), habituation ( $t = -1.16$ ,  $p = 0.25$ ), cognition ( $t = 0.43$ ,  $p = 0.668$ ), or purchase intention ( $t = -1.13$ ,  $p = 0.26$ ). These findings suggest that among individuals over 40, gender does not significantly influence these behavioural constructs or their intention to purchase.

The test done on gender of people over the age of 40 showed no significant difference due to the country-of-origin effect in buying automobiles in India. A study done on the impact of gender on pre purchasing electric vehicles showed no impact of gender (Manandhar, 2021). This might be because gender does not matter when purchasing cars. This could be because nowadays advertisements of cars are gender neutral, for example Hyundai's BreakonStereotypes campaign. As the age and income group of the respondents is similar that is why their habits of buying a car may also be similar as it depends on the brand of the car, its values, how efficiently it works etc. as the respondents are from a similar generation, their perception of cars from different countries would be similar. According to a study by Sharma and Kota (2024), as a female is able to make a decent income which can help in contributing to the household, she would have more say and power while making decisions in the family increasing their decision-making financially. Another study by Aggarwal and Bairwa (2024) concluded that women's autonomy is impacted by education level and employment status hence the more educated and higher income a woman has the more agency she has in a household's decision-making.



**Table 3: Independent T-Test Analysis based on Employment Status (N=159)**

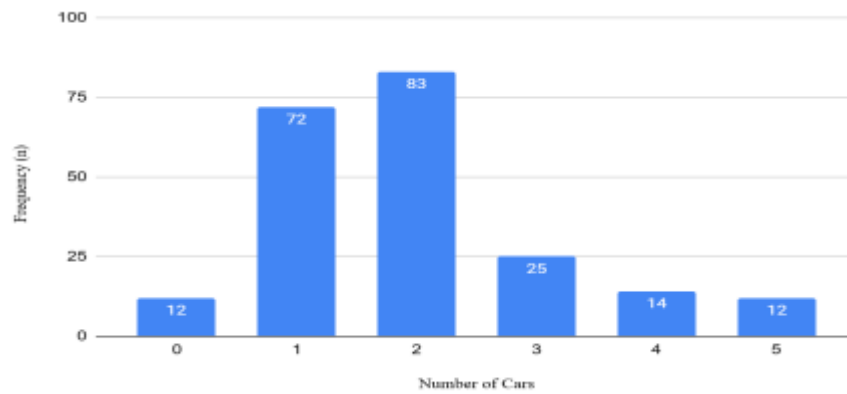
Construct	Employment Status	n	M	SD	t	p
Reflexiveness	Employed	85	9.93	2.87	1.92	0.057*
	Self-Employed	74	9.08	2.67		
Habituation	Employed	85	8.39	3.07	1.5	0.136
	Self-Employed	74	7.66	3.04		
Cognition	Employed	85	8.67	2.01	-1.9	0.06*
	Self-Employed	74	9.27	1.97		
Purchase Intention	Employed	85	17.52	4.13	1.8	0.073*
	Self-Employed	74	16.3	4.4		

\*\*\*p<0.01, \*\*p<0.05, \*p<0.1

Independent sample t-tests were conducted to examine differences in employment status (employed full-time vs self-employed) in reflexiveness, habituation, cognition, and purchase intention among 159 respondents. The results showed a significant difference in reflexiveness ( $t=1.92$ ,  $p=0.057$ ), cognition ( $t=-1.9$ ,  $p=0.06$ ), purchase intention ( $t=1.8$ ,  $p=0.073$ ) but not in habituation ( $t=1.5$ ,  $p=0.136$ ). These findings suggest that employment status does significantly influence these behavioural constructs or their intention to purchase. This could be because the self-employed people may earn more due to which they may prefer foreign automobiles due to their quality and brand image. This could also be possible because employed individuals earn a fixed amount due to which they would prefer buying affordable goods. Employed individuals may also be affected due to the import duties on the foreign products reducing their purchase intention. A vast variety of studies in consumer behaviour showed how Country of Origin strongly affects consumer choices and brand perceptions in India (Witek-Hajduk & Grudecka, 2023; Avinandan, 1996; Al-Sulaiti & Baker, 1998). Many Indian consumers associate foreign brands with superior quality, particularly in categories like automobiles, but socio-economic factors such as income, cultural context, and employment class moderate this effect. Studies have also proved that more risk-averse groups, usually employees who earn salaries are less likely to show the country-of-origin effect. A few studies explain how several cultural, economic, and social factors influence how impactful the country-of-origin effect would be based on the consumer segment being targeted (Avinandan, 1996; Witek-Hajduk & Grudecka, 2023b; Fayol-Song, 2014).

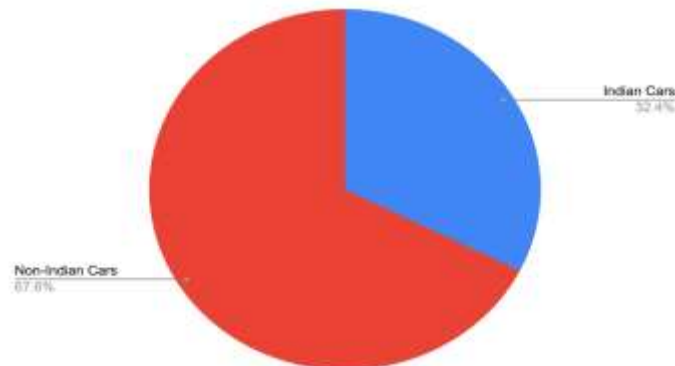
### 3.1 Nature and Composition of Car Ownership in India

As seen in Figure 1, the number of cars against the frequency which revealed that out of 218 respondents 83 (38.1%) of them had 2 cars, 72 (33.02%) of them had 1 car, 25 (11.47%) of them had 3 cars, 14 (6.42%) of them had 4 cars, 12 (5.50%) of them had 5 cars, and 12 (5.50%) of them had no cars.



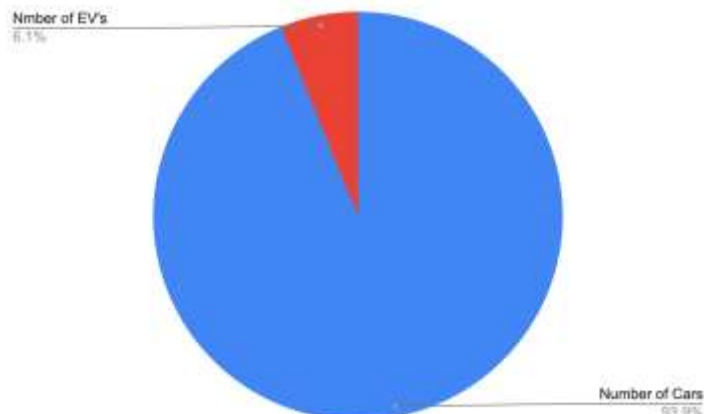
**Figure 1: Count of Number of Cars Owned (N=218)**

The following pie chart revealed that out of 413 cars in total 67.6% (279) of them are non-Indian brand cars whereas 32.4% (134) of them are Indian brand cars. It is similar to the 2022 statistics where 67% of the cars sold were by foreign car brands.



**Figure 2: Indian and Non-Indian Cars Ownership (%)**

Figure 3 revealed that out of 413 cars only 6.1% (27) were electric whereas 93.9% (386) of them were petrol diesel cars. A study done for finding the opportunities and challenges of electric vehicles in India (Bishnoi, 2024) concluded that even though many technologies have been developed, electric vehicles are still new for Indians as they are not well informed. Electric vehicles are currently not feasible for Indian consumers due to lack of charging stations. This could be why only 27 cars out of 413 are electric. It was also visible that more women have electric cars from the survey.



**Figure 3: Electric Vehicles Ownership (%)**



## Conclusion

This study set out to examine how the country-of-origin (COO) effect, along with reflexiveness, habituation, and cognition, influences consumer purchase intentions in the Indian automobile industry. The findings demonstrate that reflexiveness and habituation significantly strengthen purchase intention, highlighting the power of repeated exposure, familiarity, and positive framing in shaping consumer behaviour. In contrast, cognition exhibited a small but significant negative impact, suggesting that strong associations with foreign automobile quality may discourage preference for domestic brands. Demographic analysis revealed that employment status plays a moderating role: self-employed individuals were more inclined toward foreign brands, likely reflecting higher disposable incomes, status signalling, and risk tolerance. Conversely, salaried employees exhibited relatively stronger inclinations toward affordability and domestic options. In contrast, age and gender showed no significant influence on purchase intention, pointing to a convergence of consumer perceptions across these groups in the Indian market. The study also uncovered structural market challenges. The dominance of foreign brands—accounting for nearly 68% of cars owned—indicates the enduring perception that foreign automobiles embody superior quality and technology. Furthermore, the very low adoption of electric vehicles (6.1%) underscores infrastructural gaps, limited consumer awareness, and persistent hesitancy toward new technologies in India.

From a practical perspective, the results suggest that Indian automobile manufacturers must invest in consistent branding campaigns that emphasize innovation, reliability, and national economic contribution to counteract COO biases. Marketers could also leverage habituation and reflexiveness by strengthening long-term brand familiarity and positive consumer narratives. Policymakers, on the other hand, have a critical role in enabling a more level playing field through investment in EV infrastructure, incentives for domestic automobile R&D, and promoting “Made in India” initiatives to enhance trust in local brands.

Despite offering important insights, this study is limited by its relatively homogeneous sample in terms of age, income, and geography. Future research should broaden the respondent base to include more diverse demographic and regional profiles, which could reveal additional variations in COO effects and purchasing patterns. Longitudinal studies could also capture how these preferences evolve as the Indian automobile industry continues to globalize and transition toward electric mobility.

In conclusion, the study reinforces the relevance of the COO effect in shaping Indian consumer behavior while demonstrating how reflexiveness, habituation, and cognition interact to drive automobile purchase intentions. By bridging theoretical understanding with market realities, the findings contribute both to academic discourse and to practical strategies for manufacturers and policymakers seeking to strengthen the competitiveness of the Indian automobile industry.

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