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Brand Origin Labels and Consumer Behaviour in Indian Fashion Retail: A Comparative Study of Zara (Imported) and FabIndia (Made in India)

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ABSTRACT: This study examines how brand origin labels—"Imported" (Zara) and "Made in India" (FabIndia)—influence customer trust, perceived quality, and purchase intention in India's urban fashion retail market. Drawing on Country-of-Origin Theory, Signaling Theory, Brand Equity Theory, and the Theory of Planned Behavior, a quantitative survey was administered to 200 consumers in Bengaluru using a validated five-point Likert-scale instrument. Reliability, correlation, and regression analyses were performed. Results confirm that brand origin labels significantly predict both customer trust ($\beta = 0.160$, $R^2 = 0.165$) and perceived quality ($\beta = 0.183$, $R^2 = 0.220$). Perceived quality ($\beta = 0.394$) and customer trust ($\beta = 0.360$) are both significant positive predictors of purchase intention individually, and their combined model explains 31.6% of variance in purchase intention ($R^2 = 0.316$), with quality emerging as the slightly stronger driver. The findings contribute an integrated theoretical model to country-of-origin literature and offer actionable branding strategies for both global and domestic fashion retailers operating in Indian metropolitan markets.

KEYWORDS: brand origin label; country-of-origin effect; customer trust; perceived quality; purchase intention; fashion retail; India

I. INTRODUCTION

The Indian fashion retail industry has grown substantially in the past two decades, propelled by rising disposable incomes, rapid urbanization, and deep digital penetration in metropolitan centres. Within this environment, global fast-fashion brands such as Zara and heritage domestic brands such as FabIndia coexist and compete for the attention of a consumer base simultaneously exposed to international aspirations and renewed national identity. The resultant tension—between the allure of the imported and the pride of the locally made—makes India a uniquely informative context in which to study brand-origin effects.

Country-of-origin (COO) research has long established that the geographic provenance of a product functions as a quality heuristic, shaping brand evaluation and purchase likelihood (Diamantopoulos et al., 2019; Abalkhail, 2023). In emerging economies especially, imported labels have historically been conflated with prestige and superior craftsmanship, while domestic labels have carried associations of authenticity and cultural resonance. Recent shifts in Indian consumer sentiment—evidenced by the government-backed "Vocal for Local" campaign and growing ethnocentrism—suggest that this hierarchy is no longer static, making comparative, within-country analysis particularly timely.

Despite a rich body of COO literature, two gaps persist. First, most studies focus on cross-country comparisons or single brand categories and rarely situate the analysis within a single metropolitan market where both label types compete under identical retail conditions. Second, few studies integrate customer trust and perceived quality simultaneously into a single predictive framework for purchase intention. The present study addresses both gaps by testing an integrated model using Zara and FabIndia as operationalisations of imported and Made-in-India brand identities respectively, among Bengaluru consumers.



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II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

The study is grounded in four complementary theoretical perspectives. Country-of-Origin Theory (Bilkey & Nes, 1982) posits that consumers use a product's geographic provenance as an informational shortcut when evaluating unfamiliar or complex offerings—an effect especially pronounced in fashion where symbolic value is integral to purchase. Signaling Theory (Spence, 1973) extends this argument to information-asymmetric markets: an "Imported" label signals alignment with global quality standards, while "Made in India" signals artisanal authenticity and ethical sourcing. Brand Equity Theory (Keller, 1993) identifies perceived quality and brand trust as core equity dimensions that translate perceptual inputs into behavioral outcomes. Finally, the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) connects these evaluations to purchase intention by asserting that attitude—formed through quality and trust beliefs—is the proximate determinant of behavioral intention.

From this theoretical synthesis, three hypotheses are derived:

H1: Brand origin label has a significant positive effect on (a) customer trust and (b) perceived quality.

H2: Perceived quality has a significant positive effect on purchase intention.

H3: Customer trust has a significant positive effect on purchase intention.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

A cross-sectional, quantitative survey design was employed. Primary data were collected from 200 adult consumers (aged 18–45) in Bengaluru who had purchased from at least one of the two focal brands in the preceding six months, verified through a screening question. Convenience sampling was used given the metropolitan, brand-literate target population. The sample size is consistent with recommendations for regression-based models in consumer behavior research (Hair et al., 2019).

3.2 Instrument

The structured questionnaire comprised four sections corresponding to the study constructs: Brand Origin Label Perception (7 items), Customer Trust (8 items), Perceived Quality (7 items), and Purchase Intention (8 items). All items were anchored on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Items were adapted from validated scales in the COO, brand trust, and purchase intention literature (Hanaysha, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2020; Diamantopoulos et al., 2019). A pilot study with 25 respondents preceded the main data collection and confirmed item clarity.

3.3 Analytical Approach

Data were analyzed using SPSS. Internal consistency was assessed via Cronbach's Alpha. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, simple linear regression (H1, H2, H3), and multiple regression (combined effect of Trust and Quality on Purchase Intention) were performed. Significance was evaluated at $\alpha = 0.05$.

IV. RESULTS

4.1 Sample Profile

Of the 200 respondents, 62% were female and 38% male. Approximately 54% fell in the 18–25 age cohort and 35% in the 26–35 cohort. Graduate and postgraduate qualifications accounted for 81% of the sample. Working professionals (44%) and students (38%) dominated occupational categories. The majority reported monthly incomes between ₹20,000–₹1,00,000, consistent with the urban middle-to-upper-middle class demographic that constitutes the primary target market for Zara and FabIndia.

4.2 Reliability Analysis

Table 1 presents Cronbach's Alpha values for each construct. Brand Label ($\alpha = 0.928$) and Trust ($\alpha = 0.889$) demonstrated excellent reliability. Perceived Quality ($\alpha = 0.876$) showed strong reliability. Purchase Intention returned a moderate alpha ($\alpha = 0.564$), which, while below the conventional 0.70 threshold, is acceptable in exploratory comparative research and is noted as a limitation.



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Table 1. Reliability Statistics

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's α	Interpretation
Brand Origin Label	7	0.928	Excellent
Customer Trust	8	0.889	Strong
Perceived Quality	7	0.876	Strong
Purchase Intention	8	0.564	Moderate

4.3 Descriptive Statistics

All constructs recorded high mean scores (Table 2). Trust ($M = 4.89$) and Perceived Quality ($M = 4.90$) approached the scale ceiling, indicating very favorable brand evaluations. Brand Label perception ($M = 4.10$) showed comparatively higher variance ($SD = 0.59$), suggesting greater inter-respondent divergence in how origin cues are weighted—a finding that in itself underscores the relevance of studying this construct. Purchase Intention ($M = 4.56$) was high yet slightly lower than trust and quality means, consistent with the regression findings that show trust and quality as its drivers rather than correlates.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Construct	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Brand Origin Label	200	4.10	0.59	3.14	5.00
Customer Trust	200	4.89	0.23	4.00	5.00
Perceived Quality	200	4.90	0.23	4.00	5.00
Purchase Intention	200	4.56	0.19	3.63	4.75

4.4 Correlation Analysis

Table 3 presents the Pearson correlation matrix. All inter-construct relationships are positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). The strongest correlation with Purchase Intention was observed for Perceived Quality ($r = 0.465$), followed by Trust ($r = 0.429$). Brand Label correlated moderately with Quality ($r = 0.469$) and Trust ($r = 0.406$), and somewhat less strongly with Purchase Intention directly ($r = 0.344$), suggesting that label effects on purchase behavior are largely mediated through trust and quality perceptions rather than operating directly.

Table 3. Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variable	1. Brand Label	2. Trust	3. Quality	4. Purchase Intention
1. Brand Label	1.000	0.406**	0.469**	0.344**
2. Customer Trust		1.000	0.269**	0.429**
3. Perceived Quality			1.000	0.465**
4. Purchase Intention				1.000

** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

4.5 Hypothesis Testing

Table 4 summarises all regression results. H1a was supported: Brand Label significantly predicted Customer Trust ($\beta = 0.160$, $R^2 = 0.165$, $F = 39.10$, $p < 0.001$). H1b was also supported: Brand Label significantly predicted Perceived



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Quality ($\beta = 0.183$, $R^2 = 0.220$, $F = 55.85$, $p < 0.001$), with a slightly larger effect size than H1a, indicating that origin cues shape quality evaluation more strongly than trust formation. H2 was supported: Perceived Quality significantly predicted Purchase Intention ($\beta = 0.394$, $R^2 = 0.216$, $F = 54.65$, $p < 0.001$). H3 was supported: Customer Trust significantly predicted Purchase Intention ($\beta = 0.360$, $R^2 = 0.184$, $F = 44.55$, $p < 0.001$). The multiple regression model (Table 4, row 4) confirmed that Trust and Quality together account for 31.6% of the variance in Purchase Intention ($F = 45.40$, $p < 0.001$), with Perceived Quality ($\beta = 0.319$) emerging as a marginally stronger driver than Trust ($\beta = 0.275$).

Table 4. Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	R^2	F	p	Result
H1a	Brand Label → Trust	0.160	0.165	39.10	<0.001	Supported
H1b	Brand Label → Quality	0.183	0.220	55.85	<0.001	Supported
H2	Quality → Purchase Intention	0.394	0.216	54.65	<0.001	Supported
H3	Trust → Purchase Intention	0.360	0.184	44.55	<0.001	Supported
Combined	Trust + Quality → Purchase Intention	0.275 / 0.319	0.316	45.40	<0.001	Supported

V. DISCUSSION

The results collectively affirm that brand origin labels function as meaningful market signals rather than incidental product descriptors. By demonstrating that origin perception positively predicts both trust and quality evaluations, this study extends COO theory to an intra-market, brand-specific context within an emerging economy—a setting that has received comparatively less empirical attention than cross-national comparisons.

The finding that Brand Label exerts a slightly larger effect on Perceived Quality ($\beta = 0.183$, $R^2 = 0.220$) than on Trust ($\beta = 0.160$, $R^2 = 0.165$) aligns with established COO research positing that origin cues serve primarily as extrinsic quality signals (Abalkhail, 2023; Blanco-Encomienda et al., 2021). Trust formation, while significantly influenced by label identity, additionally draws on accumulated brand experience and communication, diluting the label's relative influence. The implication for Zara is that its imported identity primes quality expectation; for FabIndia, the Made-in-India label elevates quality expectations via associations with skilled craftsmanship and ethical sourcing.

The stronger effect of Perceived Quality on Purchase Intention ($\beta = 0.394$) relative to Trust ($\beta = 0.360$) in the individual regressions, and in the joint model (0.319 vs. 0.275), resonates with Hanaysha (2022) and Zhang & Kim (2023), who similarly found quality to be the dominant functional predictor of buying intention in fashion contexts. However, the fact that both constructs retain independent explanatory power in the multiple regression underscores that purchase intention is a jointly determined outcome: neither quality perceptions alone nor trust alone fully captures consumer readiness to buy. Brands that invest exclusively in one dimension risk leaving value on the table.

The moderate direct relationship between Brand Label and Purchase Intention ($r = 0.344$) compared to the stronger indirect paths through Trust and Quality suggests a partially mediated structure. While formal mediation testing (e.g., bootstrapped indirect effects via PROCESS) was beyond the scope of this study, the pattern is theoretically coherent with Signaling Theory: the label triggers a signal, but purchase behavior crystallizes only when that signal is reinforced by quality and trust evaluations. This aligns with Cheah et al. (2020), who found that authenticity mediates COO-intention relationships in fashion.

The Bengaluru context adds important nuance. The city's consumer base—characterized by high global exposure yet strong cultural rootedness—appears able to construct favorable quality and trust narratives for both imported and domestic labels simultaneously, rather than preferring one over the other categorically. This pluralistic evaluation



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pattern challenges simplistic ethnocentrism models and suggests that metropolitan Indian consumers occupy a post-global consumer identity in which both foreign prestige and domestic pride are compatible motivational bases.

VI. THEORETICAL AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Theoretical Contributions

This study makes three primary theoretical contributions. First, it extends COO theory to a within-country, brand-paired comparative design, generating evidence that origin labels retain evaluative power even when both labels are well-known and the consumer has direct purchasing experience with both brands. Second, it develops and tests an integrated model linking Brand Label → Trust/Quality → Purchase Intention, bridging fragmented literatures on COO effects, brand equity, and consumer decision-making in a single empirical framework. Third, the finding that Bengaluru consumers hold positive quality and trust associations for both imported and Indian-made labels challenges existing dichotomous framings of COO preferences and calls for more nuanced, pluralistic conceptualisations of consumer national identity in hybrid globalised markets.

6.2 Managerial Implications

For Zara and comparable international retailers, the findings indicate that the imported label creates a receptive quality-perception frame; however, the relatively modest R^2 values suggest that label identity alone is insufficient. Managers should activate this frame through consistent quality delivery, transparent product information, and messaging that translates global heritage into locally relevant value propositions.

For FabIndia and similarly positioned domestic brands, the results are equally encouraging: Made-in-India labeling generates significant quality and trust perceptions among urban consumers. The strategic imperative is to convert these perceptions into purchase intention by communicating product durability, contemporary design relevance, and reliable after-sales experience—elements that move the brand from cultural preference to functional conviction.

The finding that Quality marginally outweighs Trust as a purchase intention driver prescribes a resource allocation heuristic: where budgets are constrained, product quality communication (certifications, material provenance, user-generated reviews) should precede trust-repair initiatives, though both warrant sustained investment.

VII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Several limitations bound the generalizability of the findings. Geographically, the study is confined to Bengaluru, and consumer attitudes toward origin labels may differ across Indian cities, socioeconomic strata, and rural markets. The two-brand design, while providing focused comparability, precludes claims about the broader population of imported and domestic labels. The moderate Cronbach's Alpha for Purchase Intention indicates that the scale requires refinement. Cross-sectional data preclude causal inference or tracking of attitude evolution over time.

Future research should deploy the model in multi-city designs to test geographic boundary conditions, incorporate SEM with formal mediation analysis to test the full indirect pathway (Label → Trust/Quality → Intention), and expand the brand set to include emerging D2C Indian labels and other mid-tier international brands. Longitudinal designs would illuminate whether the "Vocal for Local" movement translates into durable shifts in COO-mediated quality and trust perceptions. Moderation by consumer ethnocentrism, social identity, and sustainability awareness also warrants investigation, given theoretical expectations and recent market trends.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that brand origin labels are not passive descriptors but active cognitive signals that shape how consumers evaluate and intend to purchase from fashion brands. Using Zara and FabIndia as anchors for imported and Made-in-India identities in Bengaluru, the research confirms that origin perception significantly predicts both customer trust and perceived quality, which in turn drive purchase intention. Perceived quality emerged as the slightly more powerful predictor of buying behavior, and the combination of trust and quality explained nearly one-third of the variance in purchase intention. The findings carry direct relevance for branding practice: both global and domestic fashion brands operating in India's competitive urban markets must actively translate their origin identity into credible trust signals and compelling quality narratives to secure consumer preference. The study contributes an integrated



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empirical model to COO and brand equity literatures and opens productive avenues for future comparative and longitudinal research.

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