

**Electronic Word-of-Mouth and Country-of-Origin Effects:
A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Discussion Boards**

By

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CERTIFICATION

This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of PhD, in the Graduate School of Management, Macquarie University. This represents the original work and contribution of the author, except as acknowledged by general and specific references.

I hereby certify that this has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Signed:

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Abstract

The growth of electronic discussion boards has enabled consumers from different cultures to communicate with people of similar interests. Through this online channel, marketing concepts such as word-of-mouth (WOM) and country-of-origin (CoO) effects have the potential to become more important because of the potentially large number of participants involved. The US and China, being the largest and second-largest online population in the world respectively, are ideal countries to investigate the frequency and extent of these marketing concepts.

The thesis consists of three separate but inter-related papers which have been published in journals or have been accepted for publication. Each paper builds on the one before and analyses different aspects of online consumer behaviour such as information-giving, information-seeking and the CoO statements made by participants of discussion boards. By examining and comparing the frequency and content of discussion postings on discussion boards within US and China based websites, the thesis makes a comparison of the information-giving and information-seeking behaviour of the discussants and also looks at the extent and the content of CoO statements made. Online observation of discussion postings from six different discussion boards (three each from the US and China) was conducted over two 90-day periods in 2004 and 2005 and a total of 5,993 discussion postings were downloaded for analysis. In addition, an online survey of 214 participants was conducted to compare the stated and actual (or “revealed”) behaviour of discussants on the US and China based discussion boards.

Overall, the findings indicate consistent differences over a 12-month period in the behaviour of the US and Chinese discussants. The US discussants were found to provide more information than their Chinese counterparts while the Chinese discussants exhibited more information-seeking behaviour on the discussion boards. The findings also indicate that the Chinese discussants demonstrated more negative CoO statements and these statements were observed to be related to Japan and/or brands that originated from Japan. The findings suggest that such negative CoO statements can increase rapidly online and it appears that the negative sentiments by the Chinese were apparently unrelated to product quality; instead they appear to have been predominantly associated with war related animosity.

These findings have important implications for marketers selling to the Chinese as discussion boards appear to be more important as a source of information for the Chinese than the Americans. Also, given that the Chinese discussants demonstrated a high level of negative CoO statements relating to products from Japan, marketers selling Japanese products to the Chinese must understand the underlying issues related to these negative CoO statements and take steps to prevent non-purchase of Japanese products.

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