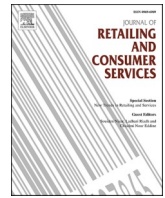




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# How a “China-made” label influences Chinese Youth’s product evaluation: The priming effect of patriotic and nationalistic news<sup>☆</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

This study is to verify whether and how a “China-made” label can influence online consumers’ product evaluation as adding labels to highlight products’ attributes has become an acquainted measure online by e-tailers/firms to attract online consumers’ attentions. For this purpose, we conduct a 2 (label of “China-made” vs. no label) x 3 (patriotism priming vs. nationalism priming vs. no priming) between-subject factorial design to verify hypotheses. The results reveal that when consumers’ nationalism is primed, the label significantly enhances the product evaluation by increasing the perceived social value of the product. Priming consumers’ patriotism, on the other hand, does not play a moderating role for this effect. A follow-up study confirms such effects for both low involvement and high involvement products. Therefore, e-tailers/firms that own China-made brands/products are advised to signal the “Chinese identity” of their products to online consumers under the current circumstance when nationalism and domestic brands are rising in China. The results also indicate that although products produced in a developing country are marked with a negative country of origin effect, marketers can turn it into a strength in marketing in certain conditions.

## 1. Introduction

Ever since the reform and opening-up policy, China’s economy has boomed strengthening Chinese consumers’ purchasing power. When China’s products were regarded as shoddy goods that were not able to compete with imported ones to satisfy Chinese consumers’ expectation, came the golden period for imported goods. According to [Daxueconsulting \(2021\)](#), foreign brands and products have been popular in Chinese market for a long time because they have been representatives of good quality and positive prestige. With such consumer perception, attitudes and behavior, it is self-evident that foreign products signal positive country of origin (COO) effect in Chinese market while domestic products signal negative COO effect.

In order to penetrate the Chinese market, China’s firms had to simulate foreign counterparts to shake off the stereotypical impression. Furthermore, China’s government has been making great efforts to change the situation, such as issuing and carrying out the Industrial Policies “Made in China (2025)” ([Congressional Research Service, 2020](#)), under which the government lists out 10 development priorities

including new-generation information technology, high-end computerized machines and robots, and aerospace etc. With the improvement of Chinese manufacturing capacity, Chinese brands are winning increasingly more attentions at home. The rise of nationalism contributes to the change of Chinese consumers’ attitudes towards domestic brands and products as well, such as cases of Li-Ning and Anta ([Zhou, 2021](#)). According to [Zipser \(2017\)](#) from McKinsey & Company, Chinese consumers’ attentions to Chinese brands and products have changed significantly, snowballing from 42% to 62% over a six-year period. [CBNData \(2020\)](#) further indicates that Chinese consumers’ attentions to Chinese brands and products have mushroomed from 38% to 70% in a decade. In a nutshell, Chinese consumers’ attentions are shifting to domestic products from foreign ones.

Statistically, China is the largest e-commerce market in the world and its growth will remain above the global average level ([Buchholz, 2021](#)). E-commerce in China - Statistics & Facts reports that the digital economy of China is one-third of its GDP and its e-commerce sales outperforms the combination of Europe and the United State ([Ma, 2021](#)). As China’s GDP already ranks top 2 in the world in 2020 in

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accordance with Statistics Times, it is out of question that China's e-commerce market brings about an unprecedented opportunity for the development of China-made brands.

According to the youth consumption research report by Yu (2020), more than 650 million youth netizens (aged from 19 to 35, accounting for around 76% of total netizens in China) are digital natives. Hence, attaining their consumption attentions through the Internet has become one of the top priorities of e-tailers/firms, as it is unquestionable that China-made products can rise once they are fully perceived and accepted by this group under the current circumstance. Consequently, the psychology and the behavior of online consumption of the Generation Y (born between 1980 and 1995) (Consultancy.uk, 2015) and the Generation Z (born between the early 1990s and early 2000s) (Bascha, 2011; Consultancy.uk, 2015) turn into a subject that marketers have to study.

Numerous scholars have studied and concluded different guidance to help society better understand the online business environment. For instance, Mitra and Fay (2008) figure out that e-tailers can use price to deal with service expectation of customers; Baier and Stüber (2010) find that online consumers have a high acceptance of recommendation to buy generated by online shops; Mavlanova et al. (2012) unveil that online retailers run their business successfully by using different signals for low-and high-quality sellers; Yu et al. (2018) further shed light on suggestions to luxury brands to display quality labels for online business. Wanting badly to be distinguished by and draw attention from online consumers, more and more firms that own China-made products simply put labels of "China-made" next to their product introduction page online without ensuring whether it is effective or not. Going with the stream, will it benefit e-tailers/firms now to deliberately declare their products are China-made, which signals negative COO effect? Thus, this study aims at verifying whether the label of "China-made" can affect online consumers' product evaluation and figure out the moderating role of priming patriotism and nationalism of young Chinese consumers. The results can provide the e-tailers/firms with an authentically effective way to signal in online market, help boom the future of "Created-in-China" products and be the reference to those who are dealing with the similar situation in other countries.

## 2. Theoretical framework and hypotheses

### 2.1. Signaling theory and product attribute label

Spence (1973) outlines a conceptual apparatus within which indices can be determined to reduce information asymmetry in job market between HRs and job applicants, which is developed to a theory called Signaling. The theory provides an unparalleled, pragmatic, and empirically testable standpoint on problems of social selection under circumstances of information asymmetry. It has been the support for numerous hypotheses, models, theories, and thoughts since then, such as management, I/O psychology and science (Connelly et al., 2011).

Spence (2002) also indicates that information is incomplete and asymmetric between sellers and buyers in markets. It is normal that sellers possess more knowledge of product attributes than buyers during general economic transactions (Bloomenthal, 2021). This phenomenon manifests more apparently in e-commerce environment where products are not authentically exposed to buyers. Differing from the traditional way that buyers can observe product quality during selection in brick-and-mortar shops, browsing product websites which are made by sellers is the most common way for buyers to obtain product information online. That is to say, sellers can lead buyers to learn only what they want buyers to learn about a product online. For instance, some e-tailers who own high-quality goods or service want to be distinguished by online consumers while those who own low-quality ones want the distinction to be blur (Spence, 2002; Mavlanova et al., 2012). Both purposes are achievable by signaling targeted information online, because consumers can figure out the actual quality of a product only after it is physically delivered to them.

A signal of targeted information is positively effective only when it makes signalers distinguished from the rest (Spence, 1973). Prior studies have proved that in e-commerce environment, adding labels to highlight product attributes such as component, safety, and warranty can positively signal to online customers and affect their product evaluation (e.g., Yu et al., 2018; Al-Samarraie et al., 2019; Pelet et al., 2020). Thus, adding a label of "China-made" might effectively catch consumers' eyeballs. However, when it comes to COO, a substantial body of literature has already concluded that products made in developing countries signal a negative message to consumers (e.g., Basfirinci and Cilingir, 2020; Septianto et al., 2020), which decreases consumers' purchase intention consequently. Correspondingly, many scholars also publish a host of studies aiming to figure out how to weaken the negative COO effect of products. For instance, Chu et al. (2010) provide guidance to marketers to display products made in developing countries in a separate evaluation mode; Rashid and Byun (2018) suggest to adding fair trade messages to products produced in developing countries to counterbalance the negative COO effect. It is acknowledged that being a product's attribute, the negative COO effect should be diluted. But seldom studies ponder about whether it can be turned into a strength in marketing and if it can, when and how to turn it into a strength. After all, COO is an inevitable attribute for a product. Making good use of product's attributes is better than avoiding it. Hence, we posit that a negative COO signal (e.g., China) can have a positive effect when Chinese consumers' patriotism and nationalism are triggered.

### 2.2. Patriotism and nationalism

Loyalty to groups and even nations is rooted in human needs (Druckman, 1994; Guetzkow, 1957). Druckman (1994) indicates that in terms of group, a nation meets human needs on economy, social culture and politics, providing individuals with a sense of security, belongingness and prestige. It is plausible for people to think about and evaluate positively the nation to which they belong.

Patriotism is regarded as feelings of attachment and loyalty to one's own nation (Blank and Schmidt, 1993; Mummendey et al., 2001; De Figueiredo and Elkins, 2003). It is a positive attitude and approval of the nation without a corresponding hostility towards other nations (e.g., Kosterman and Freshbach, 1989; Balabanis et al., 2001). In the aspect of consumption, people with a high level of patriotism tend to evaluate domestic products more favorably (Carvalho et al., 2019). These consumers are motivated to help their nation and see it as their obligation to support their nation's economy as well as domestic brands (Daser and Havva, 1987; Han, 1988). Vida and Reardon (2008) confirm that considerable relative strength of patriotism can support firms owning local brands to ameliorate their bonds with consumers. Yu and Hu (2020) further reinforce the confirmation by concluding that firms can use localized celebrity endorsements of brands/products to generate positive effect among patriotic consumers.

On the other hand, being another positive attitude, nationalism may be linked to outgroup rejection and hostility (Kosterman and Freshbach, 1989; Tajfel, 1969; De Figueiredo and Elkins, 2003; Ariely, 2012). According to Kosterman and Freshbach (1989), nationalism shows the aggressive aspect of positive ingroup evaluation as it encompasses the perspective that one's nation is superior to others and therefore should be dominant. In other words, unlike patriotism, "nationalism encourages an orientation involving liking for one's own group and disliking of certain other groups" (Druckman, 1994). Unsurprisingly, besides patriotism, nationalism also affects consumption. Scholars such as Han (1988) and Carvalho (2004) articulate that nationalistic consumers are willing to choose domestic brands over imported ones believing imported commodities will sabotage their nation's economy. In addition, Shimp and Sharma (1987), Rawwas et al. (1996) also support the point that such consumers decline to buy foreign products while incline to emphasize the positive aspects of domestic products. Although nationalism differs from patriotism, both of them have similar influence on consumers'

product evaluation, which is to favor domestic product.

According to Allport (1954), the attachment to one's ingroup and the hostility towards outgroups are not regarded as the north and south poles behind a feeling. One's own ingroups are not perceived unless they are contrasted to outgroups (Carvalho et al., 2019). In other words, the boundary of ingroup is normally obscured. Consumers do not always choose a domestic product for their normal daily life without specific reasons. When the boundary between the ingroup and the outgroup is clear and when people compare the ingroup with the outgroup, ingroup positivity is enhanced by this process called social comparison.

According to the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), social categorization, social identification, and social comparison are three mental processes where people evaluate other people as in-group or out-group members. In social categorization, people use social categories like Chinese and American, and assign other people to a category. Social identification refers to "the extent to which the ingroup has been incorporated into the sense of self, and at the same time, that the self is experienced as an integral part of the ingroup" (Brewer, 2001, p.21). Social comparison is the last stage where people tend to compare their groups with other groups.

When one's corresponding patriotism is primed, he/she feels prouder of his/her nation. Accordingly, this ingroup positivity leads to a more positive evaluation of domestic products. Similarly, when consumers' nationalism is primed, an extra surge of hatred towards outgroups may be triggered besides the acceptance of one's ingroup. In this case, to maintain their self-esteem, they tend to evaluate ingroup more favorably than other groups (Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

The "China-made" label simply and clearly signals the COO of China which definitely intensifies the ingroup perception and cognition. Therefore, when the patriotism and the nationalism of consumers are primed, they will show more positive attitude towards products with a "China-made" label.

As such, we postulate:

**H1.** "China-made" labels enhance product evaluation of Chinese consumers when their patriotism or their nationalism is primed (vs. not primed).

### 2.3. Perceived social value

We also expect that such an effect is mediated by perceived social value of products. Perceived social value is the perceived "utility derived from the product's ability to enhance one's social self-concept" (Peng et al., 2019, p. 3). Together with quality, price, emotional value, social value is one dimension of perceived value (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001) which is a key antecedent of product evaluation (Zeithaml, 1988). In terms of social value, prior studies (e.g., Sweeney and Soutar, 2001; Rintamäki et al., 2006; Bian and Forsythe, 2012) explicate that it is the perception of social self-concept, which is realized by enhancing self-esteem (Rintamäki et al., 2006; Bian and Forsythe, 2012). For example, by buying a hybrid car, one can signal to others that he/she is an environmentalist, a pro-social individual, even though higher fuel economy and lower emissions are not the salient factors resulting in choosing the hybrid car at the first place (Grisevicius et al., 2010; Maynard, 2007). Likewise, when it comes to COO concept, Chinese consumers can signal to other social members that they are part of the ingroup by buying domestic products. When the patriotism or the nationalism of consumers is primed, ingroup and outgroup comparison is activated, which then endows ingroup objects with a higher level of perceived social value. As a result, they may evaluate a domestic product more positively because it has a strong ingroup identity to impress other ingroup members such as their friends and family members. Therefore, we expect highlighting the COO of China can increase the perceived social value of a product, resulting in influencing the product evaluation when the patriotism or the nationalism is primed.

**H2.** "China-made" labels enhance product evaluation of Chinese

consumers by increasing the perceived social value when their patriotism or their nationalism is primed (vs. not primed).

## 3. Study 1

### 3.1. Research method

**Experimental Design.** In order to verify the hypotheses, we conducted an experimental study by deploying a 2 ("China-made" label vs. no label) x 3 (patriotism priming vs. nationalism priming vs. no priming) between-subject factorial design.

The design was formulated into a questionnaire constituting two parts implemented on a WJX platform which is an online survey tool in China. In the first part, participants were discretionarily assigned to three different groups by WJX (each participant to one group only). Three different pieces of news and relevant questions were shown to the three groups respectively. Only those who passed the first part could continue to participate in the second part in order to ensure the effectiveness of media literacy of participants. In the second part, participants in each group were further randomly assigned to two sub-groups by WJX (each participant to one group only) and asked to look at an online shopping interface of a product with or without the label of "China-made" respectively before they answered to questions of a questionnaire. At the end, all participants provided their demographic information including gender, age and educational background. Eventually, six-group results were collected for final analysis.

**Stimulus Materials. Stage 1: Test on Media Literacy.** To prime the patriotism and the nationalism of participants, we had to provide effective pieces of news for them. Thus, six different pieces of news were prudently selected from the Internet for a pre-interview with twenty passers-by to test their stimuli effects. Finally, three different pieces of news were narrowed down targeting patriotism priming, nationalism priming, and no priming severally (see APPENDIX). Participants were told to read the news carefully and were informed that the purpose of this task was to test their media literacy. Afterward, participants proceeded with the next stage of the experiment, browsing a fictitious online store.

**Stage 2: Test on Online Shopping Experience.** A fabricated online shopping interface was designed for a fictitious brand of shampoo. As a Fast Moving Consumer Goods, a shampoo product was a perfect option for the research for two reasons. First, shampoo covers a vast group of audience from the young to the old, be they male or female, which made the results age and gender bias free. Second, it requires only medium involvement of consumers when they are selecting it, unlike tissue which consumers can buy without consideration or facial cream which demands too much attention to its information. Using a fictitious brand could bypass consumers' existing knowledge of product position and their perception of attribute level towards any existing brand which is seen as information sources for consumers (Erdem and Swait, 1998), so that it could elicit impartial feelings of consumers without any brand bias. On the shopping interface, a shampoo product was displayed at the upper part and detail information (i.e., price, product name, quantity, function, purchase button) at the bottom part. Given that shampoo's segment markets are so mature, we had to diminished information interference as much as possible. Thus, the main components and functions of the shampoo product were written on the interface as "silicone-oil-free, amino acid shampoo with a recipe to make your hair elegant and oil-free and give you hair care". It provided participants with product function description, so that they did not feel confused about it, hence, avoiding hesitation towards selection. In addition, the price, which could be used to deal with consumers' service expectation by e-tailers (Mitra and Fay, 2008) and which consumers use to evaluate the product (Hansen, 2005), on the interface was set as 39.9 yuan, which was the same price of Head & Shoulder owned by P&G in Chinese market, being "the world's number one shampoo" according to Daxueconsulting (2019), so that it was not a dramatic factor to intervene the

results.

The interface was designed as a smart phone app page 99% similar to Taobao (Alibaba), which is the most popular online shopping website in China. Thereby, respondents could immerse themselves in the scene that they are most familiar with exerting maximum involvement.

To manipulate the label conditions, an eyeball-catching label of “China-made Products” (3 Chinese characters) in red was added next to the product versus no label (see Figs. 1 and 2). Respondents were asked to answer to questions based on their reads of the interface with the label or the same interface without the label.

**Participants.** Two hundred and sixteen valid questionnaire results done by Chinese participants were collected through WJX ( $M_{age}$ : 25.4,  $SD = 7.73$ ). The Generation Y (born between 1980 and 1995) (Consultancy.uk, 2015) and Z (born between the early 1990s and early 2000s) (Bascha, 2011; Consultancy.uk, 2015), being the main consumers of China-made products (Consumer Sector, 2020; McKinsey, 2019), were the target group. The research aimed at figuring out young Chinese consumers’ product evaluation towards a Chinese label. Thus, only young Chinese participants were involved in the research. Please see Table 1 for more demographic information.

**Measures.** All variables were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree. We used Sweeney and Soutar (2001) scale consisting of four items to measure perceived social value and a shorter version of Darling and Arnold (1988) research to measure product evaluation (see Table 2 for detailed items). Please see Tables 3–4 for detailed information regarding the reliability and validity of the scale.



Fig. 1. Condition with a label.



Fig. 2. Condition without a label.

Table 1  
General statistics.

VARIABLES	CLASSIFICATION	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Gender	Female	147	68%
	Male	69	32%
Educational Background	Lower than high school	4	1.85%
	High school	9	4.17%
	Bachelor (college)	7	3.24%
	Bachelor (University)	91	42.13%
	Master’s degree or above	105	48.61%

Table 2  
Construct measures.

VARIABLES	ITEMS	SOURCES
Perceived social value	PSV1: This product would help me to feel acceptable.	Sweeney & Soutar (2001)
	PSV2: This product would improve the way I am perceived.	
	PSV3: This product would make a good impression on other people.	
	PSV4: This product would give its owner social approval.	
Product evaluation	PE1: This product is carefully produced and has fine workmanship.	Darling & Arnold (1988)
	PE2: This product shows a very high degree of technological advancement.	
	PE3: This product is usually quite reliable and seems to last the desire length of time.	
	PE4: This product is usually a good value for the money.	



**Table 3**  
Construct reliability and convergent validity.

CONSTRUCT & MEASUREMENT ITEM	FACTOR LOADINGS	CRONBACH'S ALPHA	AVE	CR
Perceived Social Value		0.965	0.907	0.975
PSV1	0.922			
PSV2	0.970			
PSV3	0.963			
PSV4	0.953			
Product Evaluation		0.914	0.794	0.939
PE1	0.867			
PE2	0.914			
PE3	0.895			
PE4	0.889			

**Table 4**  
Discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker criterion).

	PERCEIVED SOCIAL VALUE	PRODUCT EVALUATION
Perceived Social Value	0.952	
Product Evaluation	0.778	0.891

### 3.2. Result

We first examined the main effect of a “China-made” label on product evaluation. The results of a simple linear regression suggested that the effect of the label on product evaluation was not significant ( $b = 0.18$ ,  $se = 0.12$ ,  $t = 1.52$ ,  $p = 0.13$ ). To testify Hypothesis 1 and 2, we used SPSS macro PROCESS 3.0 developed by Hayes (2013).

We examined whether the effect of the label, “China-made”, on product evaluation was moderated by priming patriotism and nationalism. As the independent variable was a multi-categorical variable (patriotism priming vs. nationalism priming vs. no priming), we used the indicator coding method of PROCESS. The coding method made comparisons between no priming and patriotism priming, and between no priming and nationalism priming.

The overall interaction term was statistically significant indicating the effect of the label on product evaluation across different priming types ( $b = 0.04$ ,  $F(2, 210) = 4.36$ ,  $p = 0.14$ ). In particular, nationalism (vs. no) priming moderated the effect of the label on product evaluation ( $b = 0.71$ ,  $se = 0.28$ ,  $t = 2.50$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ). Patriotism (vs. no) priming did not moderate the effect of label ( $b = 0.001$ ,  $se = 0.28$ ,  $t = 0.01$ ,  $p = 0.99$ ). For the conditional effect, when the patriotism or the nationalism of participants was not primed, the label did not increase the product evaluation ( $b = -0.08$ ,  $se = 0.21$ ,  $t = -0.37$ ,  $p = 0.71$ ). When participants' nationalism was primed, the label significantly increased the product evaluation ( $b = 0.63$ ,  $se = 0.19$ ,  $t = 3.287$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). However, we did not observe a significant effect of the label in the patriotism priming condition ( $b = -0.08$ ,  $se = 0.20$ ,  $t = -0.38$ ,  $p = 0.70$ ). Therefore, H1 was partially accepted, and the label condition enhanced product evaluation of consumers only when the nationalism was primed.

Next, we tested the H2 by performing a moderated mediation analysis, using the Model 7 from PROCESS (bootstrap samples: 10,000). The results showed that nationalism (vs. no) priming moderated the indirect effect of the label on product evaluation through perceived social value ( $b = 0.52$ ,  $se = 0.22$ , 95%-CI [0.0922, 0.9771]). Patriotism (vs. no) priming did not moderate the indirect effect of the label ( $b = -0.16$ ,  $se = 0.22$ , 95%-CI [-0.5958, 0.2819]). When participants' nationalism was primed, the label significantly enhanced the product evaluation by increasing the perceived social value ( $b = 0.64$ ,  $se = 0.16$ , 95%-CI [0.3438, 0.9509]). However, we did not observe a significant indirect effect when participants' patriotism was primed ( $b = -0.05$ ,  $se = 0.14$ , 95%-CI [-0.3307, 0.2262]), or when both the nationalism and the patriotism of participants were not primed ( $b = 0.11$ ,  $se = 0.17$ , 95%-CI [-0.2181, 0.4391]).

### 3.3. Discussion

The first study confirms that a “China-made” label can enhance product evaluation of young Chinese consumers by increasing the perceived social value when their nationalism is primed (vs. not primed). However, we do not observe a positive effect of the label when priming consumers' patriotism. This suggests that compared with priming patriotism, priming nationalism is much stronger in driving young Chinese consumers to favor a product with the “China-made” label. In this first study, we select shampoo when designing the stimuli. As shampoo is generally considered as a medium or low involvement product type, to increase the generalizability of the findings, we test both high involvement and low involvement products in a second study.

## 4. Study 2

### 4.1. Research method

**Experimental Design.** To examine whether the findings remain valid for high involvement products, we conducted the second study. The second study is a 2 (“China-made” label vs. no label) x 2 (high vs. low involvement product) between-subject factorial design. If a “China-made” label works equally for both high and low involvement products, we should observe a significant main effect and no interaction effect.

**Stimulus Materials.** As the effect of the label was only significant when consumers' nationalism was primed, the second study only focused on this condition. Therefore, the first task of the participants was to read the same article used in the nationalism priming condition in the first study. Afterward, participants were told that they needed to shop online and were shown a screenshot of an online store. To manipulate product involvement, we followed previous studies (Laurent and Kapferer, 1985; Zaichkowsky, 1985) on involvement scores for certain product categories. Typical high involvement products include machines, home appliances and stereos, while products like mouthwashes, household cleaning supplies, beauty aids, and toilet papers belong to the low involvement category. In this study, we selected a wireless soundbar for the high involvement product and a shower gel for the low involvement product. We designed an interface of a fictitious online store. Similar to the first study, we added a “China-made” label next to the products in the label condition (See Figs. 3–6).

**Participants.** Two hundred and fifteen Chinese participants were recruited through an online panel WJX. The mean age was 31.4 ( $SD = 8.69$ ). One hundred and seventeen of the respondents were female (54.4%). Please see Table 5 for more demographic information.

**Measures.** Product evaluation and perceived social value were measured using the same scales as those in the first study. Please see Tables 6–7 for detailed information regarding the reliability and validity of the scale. Furthermore, we measured the perceived product involvement to check if the manipulation of label is successful. Three items were extracted from the scale of Mittal (1989).

### 4.2. Results

We conducted a  $t$ -test to see if the manipulation of product involvement was successful. The results showed that people who saw the soundbar (high involvement condition) were more involved in the decision making process than those who checked the shower gel (low involvement condition) ( $M_{high} = 4.02$ ,  $SD = 0.57$ ,  $M_{low} = 3.77$ ,  $SD = 0.72$ ,  $t(213) = -2.84$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

Similar to the first study, we conducted a moderation analysis using PROCESS (Model 3) with product evaluation as the dependent variable. The results revealed a main effect of the “China-made” label on product evaluation ( $b = 0.25$ ,  $se = 0.08$ ,  $t = 2.98$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). However, we did not observe an interaction effect of label and product involvement on product evaluation ( $b = 0.04$ ,  $se = 0.17$ ,  $t = 0.23$ ,  $p = 0.82$ ).

Next, we conducted a mediation analysis (Model 4) and a moderated



Fig. 3. Condition with a label.



Fig. 5. Condition with a label. [Chu et al., 2010](#)



Fig. 4. Condition without a label.



Fig. 6. Condition without a label.

mediation (Model 7) with perceived social value as the mediator. The results of a simple mediation analysis suggested that a “China-made” label could significantly enhance the perceived social value, which in

turn led to high product evaluation ( $b = 0.16, se = 0.06, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.0434, 0.2766]$ ). However, the indirect effect of label on product evaluation through perceived social value was not moderated by product

**Table 5**  
General statistics.

VARIABLES	CLASSIFICATION	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Gender	Female	117	54.4%
	Male	98	45.6%
Educational Background	Lower than high school	1	0.5%
	High school	19	8.8%
	Bachelor (college)	33	15.3%
	Bachelor (University)	147	68.4%
	Master's degree or above	15	7.0%

**Table 6**  
Construct reliability and convergent validity.

CONSTRUCT & MEASUREMENT ITEM	FACTOR LOADINGS	CRONBACH'S ALPHA	AVE	CR
Perceived Social Value		0.830	0.662	0.887
PSV1	0.838			
PSV2	0.796			
PSV3	0.794			
PSV4	0.826			
Product Evaluation		0.736	0.560	0.835
PE1	0.671			
PE2	0.728			
PE3	0.809			
PE4	0.778			

**Table 7**  
Discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker criterion).

	PERCEIVED SOCIAL VALUE	PRODUCT EVALUATION
Perceived Social Value	0.814	
Product Evaluation	0.658	0.748

involvement ( $b = 0.01$ ,  $se = 0.11$ , 95% CI [-0.1978, 0.2237]).

#### 4.3. Discussion

In the second study, we confirm the positive effect of the “China-made” label on product evaluation through perceived social value across two different product types. This suggests that the findings could be applied to both high involvement and low involvement products.

### 5. General discussion and practical implication

With the increasing number of online shoppers and the development of online business, more and more marketers recognize that online marketing plays so important a role that it should be attached great importance to. Various online marketing measures are recommended by scholars and adopted by marketers already. Yet, few available measures focus on positively solving the negative COO effect of products (e.g., “China-made” labels). The best that existing measures can do is to either dilute or avoid presenting the negative COO effect of products. This study, however, focuses on the e-commerce in China to figure out whether a “China-made” label, representing the negative COO effect, can positively enhance consumers’ product evaluation or not. The hypotheses are tested by conducting two experimental studies involving Chinese participants. The results show that when participants’ nationalism is primed, their product evaluation is enhanced by seeing a “China-made” label. But when their patriotism is primed, such a phenomenon does not emerge. Moreover, the results demonstrate that when participants’ nationalism is primed, their product evaluation is significantly and positively enhanced by increasing the perceived social value when seeing the label. The results also indicate that patriotism does not exert the same moderation effect. In other words, the domestic identity of products produced in China can be positively perceived and be a mean

to meet the need of consumers’ social value in certain conditions.

**Theoretical Contribution.** Firstly, this study extends and complements existing theories on understanding the COO effects. Numerous previous studies examine plentiful factors to achieve alleviating the negative COO effect, factors such as consumer expertise and attribute strength (Maheswaran, 1994), brand image (Niss, 1996; Balabanis et al., 2001), brand quality (Huang and Radighieri, 2020), evaluation mode (Chu et al., 2010), benevolence and integrity beliefs (Kabadayi and Lerman, 2011), mitigation strategies (Panibratov, 2015), consumers’ processing mindset (Yang et al., 2015). But few of them provides guidance to deal with the negative COO effect positively. This study aims to close this gap by verifying how the influence of a “China-made” label which signals the negative COO effect works on product evaluation of young Chinese online consumers.

Secondly, in previous studies on COO effect, Rawwas et al. (1996) explore whether COO designations and consumer ideologies (nationalism and worldmindedness) influence product quality perceptions. Cheah and Phau (2006) investigate economic nationalism and consumer ethnocentrism, as well as their relationship toward product evaluation. Hong and Kang (2010) show that patriotism can affect consumers’ product evaluation, and Carvalho et al. (2019) indicate that people with a high level of patriotism tend to evaluate domestic products more favorably. The abovementioned studies regard nationalism or patriotism as the direct influencing factors and explore the influence of nationalism or patriotism on product evaluation. However, this study examines how the “China-made” label affects the consumer’s product evaluation when consumers’ nationalism or patriotism is primed by news, taking the label and news as stimuli. Interestingly, unlike nationalism, when participants’ patriotism is primed, their product evaluation is not enhanced by seeing the label, which is an unexpected result. Because previous studies have demonstrated the positive role of patriotism in consumers’ product evaluation (Carvalho et al., 2019; Hong and Kang, 2010). Moreover, under the condition of priming patriotism, the results also indicate that consumers’ product evaluation is not enhanced by increasing the perceived social value when seeing the label, which again differs from priming nationalism when a significant and positive effect is observed. This interesting finding may be caused by the difference between patriotism and nationalism: patriotism is a positive attitude and approval of the nation without a corresponding hostility towards other nations (e.g., Kosterman and Freshbach, 1989; Balabanis et al., 2001). Compared with the patriotism, “nationalism encourages an orientation involving liking for one’s own group and disliking of certain other groups” (Druckman, 1994).

Thirdly, as the product involvement is one of the crucial factors moderating the COO effects on consumers’ product evaluation, this study also explores whether the findings are applicable to both low involvement and high involvement products and a positive answer is returned. Previous studies discover that for highly involved products, consumers show more positive attitudes and greater considerations for foreign products (Roth and Romeo, 1992; De Moura Engracia Giraldo and Ikeda, 2009). While for lowly involved products, purchasers usually don’t engage themselves in long information processing (Amirov, 2013). This study shows that being it a low involvement product or a high involvement product, consumers’ product evaluation is enhanced by seeing the “China-made” label when their nationalism is primed. In other words, when consumers’ nationalism is primed, they may not choose foreign products that are highly involved, and their product evaluation of local products will be enhanced.

All in all, the findings of this article prove that the negative COO effect is not always a downside of a product. Under certain circumstances, the negative COO effect generates positive influence in social productive activities. This recognition opens a brand-new perspective of the negative COO effect. Undoubtedly, this article expands the coverage of relevant literature and contributes to academic research on the negative COO effect. Moreover, it may encourage the development of deeper and broader studies on the negative COO effect and may even

inspire more new viewpoints of the positive COO effect of products. Because when the negative COO effect is proved to be able to signal positive messages in markets, a possibility that the positive COO effect could signal negative messages is introduced at the same time.

**Practical Contribution.** In order to increase sales volume and market share, e-tailers/firms normally conceal or dilute the identity information of products that are produced in developing countries (e.g., China) during marketing. However, it is not a long-term strategy for domestic brands' development. Afterall, COO is an inevitable attribute for a product. This study nicely shows clear guidance to domestic brands about scenarios when the disadvantage (the negative COO effect) becomes an advantage in marketing. With this recognition, it is not necessary for marketers to always weaken the negative COO effect of products during marketing anymore. Instead, they can focus on the timing when to display such attribute to further develop domestic brands in local markets. For instance, the Chinese people's nationalism upsurged has been expressed on the Internet in recent years. At this moment, it may not be a good idea for marketers to draw too much attention to their products' foreign COO effect (produced in developed nations) in the online market in China. Because according to the study results, when Chinese consumers' nationalism is primed, the perceived social value of a domestic product can be enhanced, which positively increases product evaluation towards them, especially those with a "China-made" label, and generates hostility of consumers to outgroup products. That is to say, the positive COO effect is not always favorable under all sorts of circumstances. Thus, marketers should pay attentions to marketing environment when adopting the label means.

Drawing inferences about other cases from one instance, the findings can be a pragmatic reference to not only e-tailers/firms in relevant industries to signal their "Chinese identity" to online consumers, but also those who are facing the similar situation in other countries.

## APPENDIX. Stimulus Materials

GROUPS	MATERIAL CONTENT
Experiment Group (Nationalism priming)	[The White House Published a 128-page Collection of "Anti-China"] It was reported that the White House published a collection entitled "Trump on China" on its website one day before the election (November 2). The collection consisted of 8 speeches made by Trump and senior officials of the U.S. government accusing, slandering and stigmatizing China in order to demonstrate the stance of the Trump administration on "the most significant change of foreign policy made by the United States in a generation". The collection contained tremendous statements slandering and stigmatizing China. It criticized China for "trying to sabotage the American democratic system"; claimed that China "stole intellectual property rights"; attacked on China for initiating "espionage"; hyped "Chinese virus" and clamored that China should be responsible for the pandemic. The U.S. National Security Council also stated that these "anti-China" speeches were "a key component of the efforts made by the Trump administration to protect the American people".
Experiment Group (Patriotism priming)	[China's 5G Construction Progress Maintains First in the World] According to foreign media report, since the 5G licenses were issued last year, China's 5G network construction has entered the "fast lane". According to the latest data by Ministry of Industry and Information Technology of the PRC, more than 800,000 5G Base Stations have been deployed worldwide so far and China has had more than 150 million 5G users, which means that China's 5G construction progress far outruns other countries, ranking first in the world. According to the report, 5G development has entered a critical stage with a current key point of application promotions. China's development of 5G construction will continue to rise in 2–3 years. Some experts also suggested that the core goal of the next stage of China's 5G is to build the world's most successful 5G from experiences and commercial closed-loops.
Control Group (No priming)	["Hopewater", the Sparkling Herbal Juice Received Angel Investment] It was reported that "Hopewater", the new-style sparkling herbal juice, received an angel investment of around 10 million yuan invested by the Challengers. Sun Mengge, CEO of Hopewater, indicated that the investment would be used for product research and development, organization and channel development. Being a beverage brand started from the catering industry, Hopewater has established cooperative relationships with catering brands such as Tan Ya Xue, Xian He Zhuang and SHOO LOONG KAN. The reason keeping close cooperation with catering companies is that products of Hopewater are positioned to relieve the spicy and the greasy, and to help digestion for consumers in catering scenes in its early stage. Hopewater has already rolled out products including sparkling juice of "See Hawthorn", "Want Relationship (Peach Flower)" and "Want Happiness (Apricot)".

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## 6. Limitations and future research opportunities

This study provides an answer to solve the puzzle of whether to display a "China-made" label to attract young Chinese consumers' attentions. However, it still contains several limitations leading to suggestions for researchers. Firstly, this study only collects samples of the Generation Y and Z. Although they are the main group of online consumers, we cannot deduce how the label could influence on other generations from the results. According to [CNNIC statistics report \(2020\)](#), the number of old netizens keeps increasing. They are the old generations who have experienced the foundation of the People's Republic of China, meaning they have even stronger feelings on patriotism and nationalism. If more studies can focus on the old generations, results may shed light on strategies of both marketing and producing that are worth for firms to work on.

Secondly, the products in the studies are shampoo, a set of wireless soundbar and shower gel which cannot represent other commodities such as China-made handbags, China-made medicine and China-made cars. Thus, the findings may not be applicable to certain product categories. For example, conspicuous products like clothes, watches are bought out of an intention of signaling prestige and social status ([O' Cass and McEwen, 2004](#)), let alone cars. They are bigger, more visible and more expensive objects than shampoo, shower gel or wireless soundbars. Whether the "China-made" label can have the same effect on them or not remains unknown. Future research may work on other product categories such as China-made apparel.

Thirdly, there are multiple ways to enhance products' perceived social value besides adding labels. Researchers can testify more appropriate and feasible approaches that are suitable to more products to positively enhance the perceived social value to increase the product evaluation.



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