

## 93 Made in Scotland: country of origin branding in the Scottish textile industry

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### Abstract

The Scottish textile industry continues to contribute significantly to the national economy, turning over £1bn annually and generating 8,200 domestic jobs. With exports now worth over £360m, industry leaders recognise that 'Made in Scotland' is a prized asset that brand managers must protect and elevate on a global scale. Globalisation has fuelled growth in consumer demand for deeper levels of transparency of provenance. The significance of country of origin (COO) rises as premium Scottish textile firms expand their global presence and the market place becomes more competitive. In response, premium Scottish textile brand identities utilise a range of COO cues to differentiate and generate competitive advantage. While Scotland is believed to possess an 'aura of excellence' that brands must strive to maintain, few studies examine Scottish COO beyond the confines of government reports.

Academics have largely developed COO understanding from a brand image perspective, yet this area of research remains underdeveloped in relation to specific product categories and brand identity. In response, this research contextualises the brand identity concept in conjunction with COO, providing insight into the strategic incorporation of COO in the premium Scottish textile industry. The inductive qualitative research strategy adopted aligns with the interpretivist paradigm guiding this research. Semi-structured interviews with leading Scottish textile executives reveal the strategic use of COO. Typically embedded within the wider brand narrative, COO acts as a valuable point of difference. Findings reveal that benefits of COO branding include brand differentiation, brand protection, symbolic and emotional associations, increased purchase intent and ultimately, competitive advantage. Based on primary findings a model has been created to illustrate the benefits of COO associations in contemporary multi-dimensional brand stories.

### 1. Introduction

Recent studies report increasing consumer demand for deeper levels of transparency of provenance driven by increased globalisation and nationalist discourse (Yildiz, Heitz-Spahn and Belaud, 2018; Han and Guo, 2018; Fisher and Zeugner-Roth, 2017). As discrimination against foreign-made products rises country of origin (COO) becomes increasingly important to both consumers and firms alike

(Melewar and Karaosmanglu, 2006; Moser, Schaefer and Meise, 2012). Despite lively academic debate surrounding COO and vast theoretical development from a brand image perspective (e.g. Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2011; Yasin, Noor and Mohamad, 2007; Srikantanyoo and Gnoth, 2002; Baker and Ballington, 2002), this area of research is underdeveloped in relation to brand identity and specific product categories.

The Scottish textile industry's rising contribution to Scotland's economy (BBC, 2018) and innovative brand development (Walpole, 2018) establishes Scottish textile brands as a topic of interest. Scottish COO is fundamentally embedded within the identities of many internationally recognised Scottish brand categories (e.g. textile, shortbread, whisky, smoked salmon) however few studies examine Scotland as COO out-with government reports (Hamilton, 2010; Lyne et al. 2009). Reference is generally made as part of a wider study (e.g. Baker and Ballington, 2002; Dinnie, 2004; Thakor and Kohli, 1996), consequently failing to address the significance of Scotland as COO.

COO is an influential image variable that directly impacts consumers' beliefs, attitudes (Erickson, Johansson and Chao, 1984; Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2001) and consumer buying processes (Yasin, Noor and Mohamad, 2007). Indeed, extrinsic COO cues are believed to significantly influence consumer evaluations of hedonic, high involvement products such as premium Scottish textiles (Srikantanyoo and Gnoth, 2002; Erickson, Johansson and Chao, 1984). This study therefore analyses the role and value of COO in premium Scottish premium textile brand identities.

## **2. Theoretical background**

### **2.1 The premium Scottish textile brand sector**

The definition of a 'premium' brand is debatable (Atwal and Williams, 2008) and terminology is inconsistent. Although 'luxury' and 'premium' are often used interchangeably it is recognised that these terms apply to different levels of luxuriousness (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004) and are 'fundamentally different' (Kapferer and Bastien 2009: p. 313). Despite the idiosyncratic nature of premium/luxury (e.g. what may be viewed as luxury by one individual may not be viewed as a luxury to another) (Phau and Prendergast, 2000; Janssen et al., 2014), brand management literature concurs that premium and luxury brands can be conceptualised according to their high quality, uniqueness, beauty, aspirational qualities, symbolic nature and rarity (Nuño and Quelch, 1998; Fiona and Moore, 2009; Hamiede 2011). The Scottish textile industry has an affinity with culture, taste and style, and benefits from rich heritage underpinning and traditional craftsmanship. Harris Tweed has been described as 'the champagne of fabrics' (Scotland, 2014) while Scottish cashmere is argued to be one of the world's finest fabrics (Conway 1998). Yet, price points and product availability remain within reach of many customers and products deliver high levels of functionality, subsequently 'premium' is deemed an appropriate categorisation of Scottish textile brands to guide this study.

## 2.2 Brand identity

Brand identity is a recent, yet established, concept in brand management (Kapferer, 2012) that is 'central to a brand's strategic vision... (providing) direction, purpose and meaning for the brand' (Aaker 1996, p. 68). Brand identity originates from the organisation (Nandan, 2005) therefore preceding brand image and is sent via a number of coded messages (Kapferer, 2012). Brand identity is regularly defined as an identifier, differentiating the brand from competitors and adding value to the product/service (Kuenzel and Halliday, 2008; Kapferer, 2008). Aaker (1996, p. 68), a leading brand theorist, provides the following definition, 'Brand identity is a unique set of brand associations that the brand strategist aspires to create and maintain. These associations represent what the brand stands for and imply a promise to customers from the organization members'. It is of growing importance that a brand's identity has a consistent common vision and goal that acts clearly as a differentiator and creates a 'solid and coherent entity' (Kapferer, 2012, p. 172), especially in highly competitive environments such as the premium textile and fashion sector (Bruce-Gardyne, 2012; McColl and Moore, 2011). Brand associations are boundless and may be product-related or extrinsic to the product itself, with tangible and intangible top-of-mind identifiers (Keller, 1993) forming the backbone of the brand and adding value (Chernatony and McDonald, 1992). Of particular relevance to this study is the inclusion of COO signifiers leading to associations with functional, emotional and self-expressive benefits (Aaker, 1996). COO arguably provides symbolic meaning, acting as an 'ambassador of cultural excellence' (Kapferer, 2012 p. 461). This stance is shared by Fionda and Moore (2009) and Insch and McBride (2004) however Samiee (2005) rejects claims that COO is a significant signifier influencing consumer evaluations of superiority, thus highlighting COO's questionable importance in the identities of premium Scottish textile brands.

## 2.3 Country of origin

Since Schooler's (1965) pioneering study of COO from a consumer behaviour perspective, COO image and its varying effects on consumer perceptions has become a prevalent theme throughout branding literature (Al-Sulaiti and Backer 1998; Balabanis and Diamantopolos 2001; Parameswaren and Pisharodi 1994; Srikantanyoo and Gnoth 2002). Today, COO image effect is defined as 'the impact that generalisations and perceptions about a country have on a person's evaluations of the country's products and/or brand' (Jaffe and Nebenzahl, 2001 p. 41). COO is widely accredited as an influential image variable that directly impacts consumers' beliefs, attitudes (Erickson, Johansson and Chao 1984; Srikantanyoo and Gnoth 2002; Balabanis and Diamantopolos 2001) and consumer buying processes (Yasin, Noor and Mohamad 2007). In particular, extrinsic COO cues are believed to significantly influence consumer evaluations of hedonic, high involvement products such as premium Scottish textiles (Srikatanyoo and Gnoth 2002; Erickson, Johansson and Chao 1984). Wall et al. (1991 cited in Jaffe and Nebenzahl 2001) provides texture to this view, finding that COO affects "product quality assessments more than price and brand information". Moreover, Srikatanyoo and Gnoth (2002) find COO as the *most* important factor, strengthening or weakening the brand, potentially lowering any perceived risk and contributing toward sustainable competitive advantage (Baker and Ballington, 2002; Parameswaren and Pisharodi 1994). However, context must be considered. Lin and Sternquist, (1994) reveal that

consumer perceptions of garment quality are significantly effected by COO however more developed countries, such as Scotland, were found to rely less on COO cues due to greater purchasing experience and access to information.

There is widespread agreement that COO preferences exist (Veale and Quester, 2009; Lotz and Hu, 2001; Yasin, Noor and Mohamad, 2007) with nationalistic discourse, nostalgia, local culture and environmentalism driving a home-country bias (Al-Sulaiti and Baker, 1998; Steenkamp and De Jong, 2010; Yildiz, Heitz Spahn and Belaud, 2018). Unsurprisingly Scotland as COO acts more notably as competitive advantage when Scottish consumers possess high levels of ethnocentrism as COO can be used to 'express patriotic sentiment' (Jaffe and Nebenzahl 2001 p. 76) and is viewed as more morally acceptable (Huddleston, Good and Stoel, 2001). Biased consumer evaluations are recognised as leading to positive or negative COO stereotypes (Lotz and Hu, 2001). Importantly, Srikatanyoo and Gnoth (2002) find that COO perceptions are upgradable, unfavourable perceptions can become favourable, specifically though brand management strategies.

There is a consensus throughout the literature that COO image effect is explained by the halo or summary construct. The summary construct is a dynamic process in which consumers form country images based on their ongoing experience with a country's products (Jaffe and Nebenzahl, 2001; Han, 1989). As a result of exposure, secondary brand associations from cognitive, affective and conative consumer responses are generated (Balabanis and Diamantopolos, 2001, Pereira, Hsu and Kundu, 2005). In contrast the halo effect refers to a cognitive process whereby product or brand perceptions are formed based on the transferrable qualities the consumer associates with a certain country (Piron, 2000; Hui and Zhou, 2003) and involves consumers processing the COO as a heuristic device (Jia et al., 2010). Jaffe and Nebenzahl (2001) and Han (1989) maintain that the halo construct operates when consumers have no prior experience or knowledge of products made in a particular country, instead product or brand evaluations are based on the attributes associated with the country itself. Attributes can be founded on, but not limited to, the country's culture, economic climate, history, traditions and political or social development (Jaffe and Nebenzahl, 2001; Pereira, Hsu and Kundu, 2005).

### **2.3.1 Scotland as country of origin**

Limited academic research examines Scotland as COO (Hamilton, 2010; Combes et al., 2001; Baker and Ballinton, 2002), even less so in relation to the Scottish textile industry. Additionally, results are generally outdated, lack depth or fail to reflect the present situation (Baker and Ballington, 2002; Combes et al., 2001). Despite this, the limited research available presents a uniform opinion that Scotland achieves positive provenance (Baker and Ballington, 2002; Hamilton, 2010) with consumer perceptions emphasising 'history and tradition' (Baker and Ballington, 2002 p. 164). Furthermore, government literature 'Luxury Scotland' documents Scotland's affinity with luxury sectors and draws attention to the country's ability to cater to 'increasingly sophisticated tastes' (Scotland, 2014).

### **3.0 Methodology**

A constructivist position is adopted, supporting the school of thought that COO perceptions are continually revised as customers gain experience with the country. In agreement, an interpretivist mono-methods qualitative research approach comprising of in-depth semi-structured interviews was undertaken with business executives. The Scottish Textile & Leather Association's Map of Textile Attractions (STLA, 2014) was used as the primary sample frame from which five leading premium Scottish textile firms were selected (Ritchie et al., 2014): Johnstons of Elgin; Knockando Woolmill; Harris Tweed Hebrides; Lochcarron of Scotland and one which requests to remain anonymous (A1). The selection criteria for this cross-section of Scottish textile companies were based on their premium positioning, varying differential characteristics including size, location, age and scale of manufacturing and 'Scottishness'.

In line with critical case sampling, a purposive sampling approach was used to select participants for interview based on their influential decision-making role within Scottish textile companies (Patton 2001; Coyne 1997). By interviewing brand managers the likelihood of obtaining rich and valuable information heightened due to their proximity and direct influence over the company's brand identity strategy (Ritchie et al. 2014).

In line with the inductive approach of this study, data analysis is 'geared toward theory construction' (Lapan, Quartaroli and Riemer, 2011 p. 42) to address current gaps in understanding. Initially, open line-by-line coding was undertaken followed by axial coding and memos to highlight salient themes (Lapan, Quartaroli and Riemer, 2011) making data more manageable and meaningful (Denscombe, 2010). Secondly, selective coding was undertaken to compare and contrast selected situations in the coded data (Carson et al., 2001) in pursuit of answering: What is the role and value of Scottish COO in the brand identities of premium Scottish textile brands?

### **4.0 Findings**

#### **4.1 Scotland's associations**

First it is important to establish the associations brand executives hold with Scotland to determine and understand the image of Scotland with which they resonate as the brand's COO identity is subsequently rooted in these perceptions (Madharvaram, Badrinarayanan and McDonald 2005). Brand strategist associations can be categorised as follows: product associations; natural environment associations; industrial, historical and cultural association and personality associations.

Unsurprisingly, considering the sample frame, favourable product associations are prevalent. This study wholly confirm Hughes' (1995) earlier findings that Scotland signifies quality and authenticity. Such product associations express judgements of excellence, credibility and superiority (Yoo, Donthu and Lee, 2000; Aaker and Biel, 1993) synonymous with premium/luxury brand taxonomy (Fionda and Moore, 2009; Keller, 2009) reinforcing that Scotland's image can be categorised as premium/luxury (Fionda and Moore, 2009; Keller, 2009). Brand executives also

express natural environment associations that portray Scotland's image as desirable and idealised. This mirrors Scotland's dominating image in government and tourist literature and visuals (Scarles, 2004; Visit Scotland, 2018). Associations such as 'idyllic', 'rural' and 'countryside' indicate positive provenance and relate to the traditional and romantic notion of Scotland. These landscape associations confirm Combes et al's (2001, p. 12) findings that landscape has 'a strong degree of relevance to contemporary Scottish identity' and supports Daniel's claim (1993 cited in Combes et al., 2001 p. 5) that national identity is born from "landscapes".

On first examination contrasting associations such as 'very traditional' and 'technology' present a somewhat contradictory picture. However, Scotland's association with 'progressive' supports Baker and Ballington's (2002, p. 164) earlier findings that Scotland has a 'modern lifestyle which marries tradition with contemporary values'. This finding is echoed by Johnstons of Elgin's CEO, Simone Cotton, stating that it is beneficial for the sector to 'take traditional elements in a modern context'.

Participants' personification of Scotland emotionalises the country leading to benefits such as increased consumer confidence (Rosenbaum-Elliott, Percy and Pervan 2011) and heightened symbolic value (De Chernatony 2009; Kapferer 2008). Scottish associations of reliability, pride, skilled, fairness and honesty fall in line with Aaker's (1996) brand personality dimensions 'competence' and 'sincerity', indicating Scotland's genuine and authentic capability. This supports earlier findings by O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2000), Blain, Levy and Ritchie (2005) and Hills and Fladmark (1994) that suggest Scotland's personality is rooted in integrity and honesty.

The dominance of favourable associations (Keller 1993; Till Baack and Waterman 2011) strongly suggests that positive provenance is achieved by Scotland in the minds of brand executives. Additionally, participants recognise the 'aura of excellence' (Norval 2013) surrounding Scottish industry, here they are indirectly describing the halo effect taking place, with Dawn Robson-Bell, Design and Sales Director, Lochcarron of Scotland stating confirming that '*we do rely strongly on the whole image of Scotland.*'

## **4.2 Characteristics of premium Scottish textile brands**

Premium Scottish textile brands were asked to 'summarise their brand in a few words or a couple of phrases' to reveal their brand essence. To shed light on the role of COO it is of particular importance to understand the brand essence on which associations are built. Seven divergent, yet closely interrelated, characteristics emerged. Although all characteristics are considered important in the positioning and differentiation strategy of premium Scottish textile brands (Kuenzel and Halliday, 2008), it should be noted that individual brands place differing levels of importance on each characteristic. The following thematic groupings arose: premium/luxury positioning, high quality, design, authenticity, Scottish country of origin, global reputation, heritage, and niche.

An inconsistent and somewhat confused approach to brand positioning is evident, mirroring literature review findings that premium and luxury are not clearly

differentiated. Lochcarron of Scotland explains, 'I would say we are a premium brand. Luxury, perhaps we are aspiring' while A1 states 'I would say it's a premium brand of luxury knitwear'. From this it can be posited that the 'premium' Scottish textile brand sector does not fall under a singular categorisation of premium or luxury, instead it adheres to a spectrum of premium ranging to luxury. All participants recognised high quality product and classic design as central to their identity, core credentials of premium/luxury brands (Fionda and Moore 2009).

Authenticity is achieved through a prevalent portal of upholding time-honoured manufacturing techniques and skills in their brand identities (Beverland, 2005). This resonates with the traditional sense of 'authentic' rooted in brand heritage (Pedersen, 2013), and the countrywear category that many participants resonate with. Scottish textile brands impart unique historical and cultural references through storytelling which appeals to consumers' increasing desire for authentic brand experiences (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010). All participants referenced traditional manufacturing techniques such as spinning yarn, weaving fabrics and knitting as part of their extended brand identity, which are academically found to 'clarify, enrich, and differentiate' the brand (Aaker 1996 p. 78).

Unlike De Chernatony and Riley's 1998 study where COO fell under 'brand heritage' as part of the brand's value system, this study identified COO as a meaningful core brand dimension. Anne Macleod, Brand Development Director, Harris Tweed Hebrides, states 'Harris Tweed can only be manufactured in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland, so Scotland and our geography is absolutely intrinsic to the brand' while Johnstons of Elgin claims Scotland 'has always been one of the central pillars' and Lochcarron of Scotland states 'we absolutely embed (Scottish) country of origin and geography of origin into our brand'. These statements confirm Grace and O'Cass' (2002) earlier findings that COO is interpreted as a significant and meaningful brand characteristic. Scottish COO can therefore be categorised as an independent defining characteristic of the premium Scottish textile brand sector.

Heritage encompasses the history and tradition which are built into the premium Scottish textile brands' DNA. The centrality of the sector's heritage is exemplified by Knockando Woollen Mill manager Terry Cleaver;

*We are promoting heritage of this place... it's being going since 1770, so for us we are basically custodians of that weaving history... and particularly with the modern mill we've got... a very short pithy statement of the brand, and we're selling the heritage of the weavers and the agricultural importance and very much those traditions based on education.*

History and tradition closely relate to the sector's COO (Baker and Ballington, 2002) highlighting the congruence between the sector's characteristics and Scotland's image. Furthermore, heritage attributes significantly contribute towards the sector's premium/luxury positioning (Fionda and Moore, 2009) and is an integral component of the sectors 'global reputation' (McMeekin, 2001). Participants recognise both the domestic market and international market as key to the success of Scottish textile brands and are pivotal contributor to their brand essences. While recognising their global appeal, Scottish textile brands also define themselves as 'niche' and

'specialists'. This agrees with publication Scotland the Cutting Edge's (2007) observation that Scottish textiles has been 'going through a period of continuous change in recent years, moving into a niche market-orientated sector operating in a global market'.

### **4.3 Communication of Scottish COO**

The communication mechanisms employed to communicate Scottish COO are pivotal to understanding its role. Visual identity, 'Made in' label, brand literature, brand story, promotional events and partnerships emerged as salient COO communication strategies.

First, it should be noted that despite the prevalent documentation of brand name in COO brand literature (Thakor, 1996; Lim and O'Cass, 2001; Wall, Liefeld and Heslop, 1991), none of the participants implicitly recognised brand name as a method of communicating COO. It is suggested that brand name as a fundamental informational cue has been overlooked owing to its assumed evident nature. Although absent from interviews, COO branding literature (e.g. Thakor, 1996; Lim and O'Cass, 2001; Wall, Liefeld and Heslop, 1991), confirm that brand name acts as an informational cue identifying and communicating Scottish COO through both pronunciation (Thakor, 1996) and the inclusion of origin name (e.g. Lochcarron of Scotland).

Participants emphasised Scottish COO communication through visual aesthetics such as colour, tartan and estate tweed design. This study differs from previous studies (e.g. Cho, 1998; Kotler and Gertner, 2002) in that it draws attention to COO communicated through specific product attributes distinctive to the Scottish textile sector. It can be argued that the Scottish textile sector is reasonably unique in that it can communicate COO through product visual identities strongly associated with Scottish national identity, for example tartan and tweed.

COO product 'styling' is recognised as "conscious or unconscious mimicking of popular perceptions" (Thakor, 1996 p. 35) of national design. Scotland's natural environment (e.g. heather, rural landscapes) was acknowledged as an effective way to communicate 'Scottishness' by tapping into consumers pre-existing images of Scotland. By identifying and isolating favourable existing perception of Scotland, premium Scottish textile brands enhance the brands' positive provenance (Kotler and Gertner, 2002).

Contrary to the prevailing notion that 'made-in' labels are "nowhere near as salient" as price and product descriptions (Thakor, 1996 p. 30) all participants identified 'made-in' labels as the principal extrinsic cue. A consensus exists among participants that benefits arise when 'made in Scotland' is explicitly stated. Hence Johnstons of Elgin state 'It goes on all the hang tags... We talk about it on our website. We talk about it on our literature. It is always there within the brand story right up front' while A1 states 'We put 'Made in Scotland' on the front page, we've got 'Made in Scotland' on every page!'.

Premium Scottish textile brands engage in a diverse range of strategic alliances that actively contribute towards the sector's affinity with Scotland (Wigley and



Provelengiou, 2011). The creation of synergistic partnerships (Wassmer and Dussauge, 2011; Wigley and Provelengiou, 2011) leverages the transfer of brand associations to add value to one another (James, 2006; Keller, 2003). Specifically, Harris Tweed Hebrides' creates effective symbolic alliances as they 'improve and enhance signals of product quality' (James, 2006 p. 15) by strategically linking the brand to high profile quality events such as the Commonwealth Games and the Ryder Cup.

Captivating brand stories encourage consumers to enter the emotional realm and activate symbolic meaning of the brand. All participants extensively communicate COO as part of their larger brand story while also imbedding elements of history, heritage and manufacturing processes. Johnstons of Elgin emphasises the aspirational and emotional benefits of creating a supporting network of differentiating characteristics (e.g. COO, royal warrant, family history, manufacturing techniques) which act together to form an overall multi-dimensional brand identity. Participants stress COO as a component of their story but recognise that it is no more important than any other component and that instead it is the combined effect that adds value to the brand.

#### **4.4 The value of Scottish COO in premium Scottish textile brand identities**

Through effective brand management COO is strategically linked to the identities of premium Scottish textile brands as a means to appeal to consumers' ethnocentric tendencies and tourist and international consumers' desire for traditional Scottish textiles. Differentiation strategies seek to achieve uniqueness, distinguishing the brand from both domestic and foreign competitors (e.g. Italian cashmere), by creating a multi-dimensional brand identity inclusive of Scottish COO. Despite limited product heterogeneity in the premium Scottish textile brand sector (i.e. most produce high quality knitwear, cashmere and/or tartans and tweeds) individual brands differentiate themselves, both on an international and domestic platform, through their unique brand stories in which COO plays a lead role. Harris Tweed Hebrides recognises that global consumers are 'looking for provenance' and believes consumers 'act favourably' towards the incorporation of Scotland in their brand identity. However, Harris Tweed Hebrides goes on to state that 'obviously we have to back that up with good design, good colour, good customer service. Without all of that, you know, Scotland has got value but without all of those additional things that we bring to the mix it's not enough'.

The overarching benefits of Scottish COO from a brand identity perspective are now discussed in turn as follows; symbolic and emotional device, differentiating device, increased purchases intent, brand protection and shorthand device.

Scottish COO acts as a symbolic and emotional device generating added value. Derived from intangible benefits, the creation of symbolic COO is beneficial as it creates competitive advantage by instilling consumer confidence and communicating superior value (Harris and Riley 2000; Wood 2000). Transparency of Scottish provenance not only appeals to 'what the consumer stands for' (Chernatony and Riley, 1998 p. 422), it also signifies core values of 'exclusivity', 'quality', 'durability' and 'expertise', thus adding value to the brand (Chernatony and McDonald, 2008) as captured by Johnstons of Elgin;

*I want them to believe that because it's a Scottish product it's a quality product and I want them to feel buying a luxury product where you'll pay a lot more than you're buying on the high street is about emotional connection and I want them to feel a positive emotional connection to Scotland because that helps that whole story.*

Many participants recognise that consumer awareness of Scottish COO increases purchase intent and 'help(s) with sell through at retail' (A1). This supports Piron's (2000) earlier findings that likelihood of purchase for luxury products increases when favourable COO is present. A1 believes that 'made in Scotland' must be communicated, 'otherwise you know, there's no reason for them to pay a premium price for it'; this shares similarities with Fischer, Oldenkotte and Nuremberg's (2012 p. 1-2) belief that COO 'directly affects the likelihood of purchase (and consumers are) willing to spend more money to obtain them'.

All participants recognise the brand protection given by their Scottish COO. Trademarks in the premium Scottish textile brand sector help protect the equity Scotland and Scottish textiles has built up over time (Florek and Insch, 2008). These trademarks (e.g. Harris Tweed Orb) convey meaning and help to ensure Scotland's integrity (Florek and Insch, 2008). Brands managers differentiated between the superior 'made in Scotland' and the lesser 'designed in Scotland' label and commented on the misuse of 'made in Scotland' labels by 'pirates' (A1) diluting the overall image of Scottish textiles. Brand strategists recognised that the authentic role of Scottish COO in their own brand identities is essential to protect against lower quality textile brands incorrectly claiming Scottish origin.

Scottish COO acts as a shorthand device 'facilitating information processing' (De Chernatony and Riley 1988 p. 426) and enabling fast brand recall and recognition (De Chernatony and Riley 1988; Aaker, 1996). Symbolic Scottish brand imagery and brand names provide COO memory shortcuts enabling faster purchase decisions (De Chernatony and Riley's 1998) when Scotland acts as a risk reducer. It can be postulated that Scottish COO has achieved shorthand status from consumers gaining experience and cognitive knowledge of the brand over a significant period of time (De Chernatony and Riley 1998). Meaningful functional and symbolic attributes associated with COO are pro-actively sought through the brand identities of premium Scottish textile brands. Active offline relationships with consumers (e.g. guided tours) and online communication and memberships (e.g. Friends of the Mill) reinforce Scottish COO in pursuit of competitive advantage.

The aforementioned conclusions are illustrated in Figure 1.

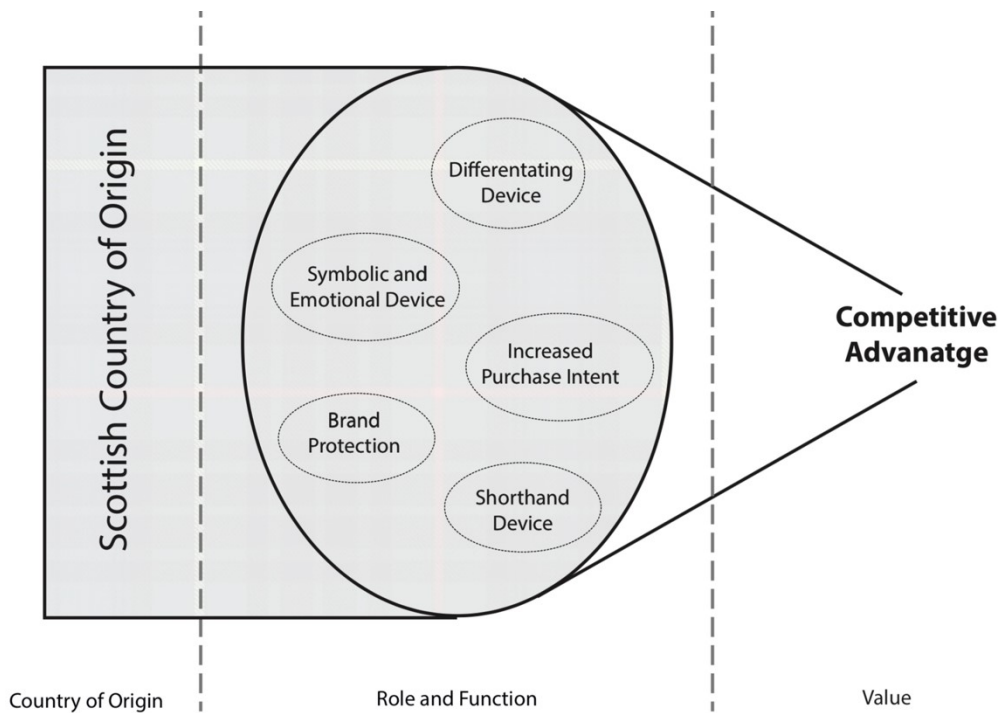


Fig 1: The Function and value of Scottish COO in the premium Scottish textile brand sector

## 5.0 Conclusion

Scottish COO underpins the sector's branding arguably verifying differentiation and superiority (Hudson and Balmer, 2013). Although COO is utilised to varying degrees, it was consistently integrated, particularly into the overall brand 'story'. Favourable Scottish associations (e.g. traditional, honest, authentic, landscape etc.) suited to the sector are repeatedly used to embed associations of quality and authenticity, thus building positive provenance. It can also be concluded that Scottish COO is an emotional and symbolic shorthand embedded in the brand identities of premium textile brands enabling consumers to 'recognise superior value' (Harris and Riley 2010 p. 43), whilst lowering perceived risk (Hudson and Balmer 2013), increasing purchase intent and offering brand protection, ultimately resulting in competitive advantage.

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