

Brand Awareness and Country Image of Nepali Customers

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Abstract

Purpose – The main purposes of this research are to investigate the brand awareness and country image of Nepali consumers while using products or services.

Design/methodology/approach – The survey was conducted to 100 respondents who were the government officials of the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies and Department of Industry. Descriptive statistics and Chi-Square test were used to analyze the collected data. The respondents who always check brands and always care about food brands were strongly associated. Those who care brands of Nepal's food products have association with who care brands of Indian food products.

Findings – The results of this research provide evidence that Nepali customers are highly aware about brands and mostly prefer foreign brands, and the Nepali market is dominated by foreign brands.

Conclusion – These results suggest that foreign brands hold significant influence in Nepali market, and that country image plays an important role in shaping consumer behavior in Nepal. To strengthen the position of domestic products or services, policymakers and firms/companies need to invest in effective branding strategies and build stronger trust and recognition among Nepali consumers.

Originality/value – This research adds new insights to the field by examining how awareness creates the image in the context of Nepali consumers brand awareness.

Keywords – Brand awareness, Country image, Nepali consumers, Indian brands

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1. Introduction

In the age of globalization, brand is associated with complex systems of meaning that communicate quality, create emotions, and establish trust among consumers. Brand is a valuable property for enterprises because customers' affix to brands emotionally through their previous experience, and which gives them advantages over competitors in the market (Gorovyi et al., 2025). Firms can build a brand through marketing practices such as advertising, effective packaging, and creating a visual identity. American Marketing Association defines brand as any name, symbol, or design that distinguishes one seller's offerings from another's. However, the meaning of brand differs from buyers' and suppliers' viewpoints. If buyers have enough information about the brand which they want to buy, then they can save both the time and costs. In addition to this, when customers go shopping, the location where the product is made affects the overall judgment of the product by consumers in terms of aspects such as quality and risk.

Individual awareness to the brand and country image shapes the intentions of people whether to buy or not to buy a specific product. Intentions play a crucial role in shaping Nepali customers' purchase objectives, especially toward new items such as sustainable or green financial products (Pokhrel et al., 2024). In a similar way, when consumers are familiar with a trusted brand and hold a positive perception of the product's country of origin, they are more likely to view green products as reliable and worth purchasing. Therefore, enhancing both brand awareness and country image can significantly increase consumers' willingness to adopt quality or environmentally friendly products in Nepal. Nakra (2015) found that Japan has been perceived as a high-quality origin for electronics product for long time. Dulal (2014) studied Nepali customers' purchasing intention, and he found that it is positively related with country-of-origin image. According to the Pappu and Quester (2007), when they studied the country image of three Asian countries: Japan, Malaysia and China, they found that consumers favored goods made in Japan than those made in the other two countries, which is consistent with the results of (Nakra, 2015), where the researcher had found that consumers view Japanese products more positively. If the country's image is associated with the product's image, consumers certainly want to buy products that are made in certain highly-regarded countries.

There have been ample researches on brand awareness and country image in developed and technologically advanced countries; however, there is a significant gap in understanding how these factors operate within least developing countries such as Nepal. In Nepal, few studies have explored about Nepali consumers' perception among domestic and foreign brands, and country image. From past to present, many national and international companies have been branding their products and services in Nepal. Brand awareness and country image significantly influence Nepali customers' purchase intentions toward different brands. However, purchase decisions do not operate in isolation; they are shaped by broader socioeconomic conditions such as individual income levels, the country's per capita income, and the overall purchasing power of consumers. In highly developed nations, consumers often have greater freedom and financial capacity to make sustainable purchasing decisions, whereas in developing countries like Nepal, several barriers exist. Nepal's incomplete democratic project and the continued exclusion of large segments of the population from decision-making processes further limit consumer autonomy (Mijar & Giri, 2025). Consequently, poor and marginalized groups often face economic and social constraints that restrict their ability to make independent purchase decisions, even when they are aware of or positively perceive certain brands or countries of origin.

Therefore, one of the main purposes of this research is to investigate the importance of brand awareness and country image of Nepali consumers. Furthermore, this research attempts to investigate the research questions: 1) Is there any association between customers' brand awareness and their preference for certain goods? 2) Is country image important for Nepali

customers? 3) Is there any relationship between customer's brand awareness and imports? Considering the objectives of the research, this study is essential to determine brands awareness and country image of Nepali customers. The research is expected to obtain valuable insights from an analysis of primary data, which is useful for private sector related policy makers, implementation units and business houses who are interested in the Nepali market.

2. Literature Review

Brand awareness is an element of consumer decision making and component of brand equity. It is reflected when consumers can identify or recall a brand when purchasing products or services. Aaker (1996) states that brand awareness represents the foundation of brand equity, influence perceptions of quality, loyalty. Kotler and Keller (2016) argue that awareness facilitates trust, reduces uncertainty, and simplifies decision processes in markets characterized by multiple competing alternatives. In underdeveloped market where products or services information is limited, brand awareness often works as a symbol of reliability and product quality. In addition to this, Keller (1993) states country image as a structured set of associations that consumers form about products based on their origin. Mohd Yasin et al. (2012) mention that a strong country image enhances the perceived value and global competitiveness of domestic products. Several factors determine the country of origin effect; for example, developed and high-tech countries have a more positive effect. Rosenbloom and Haefner (2009) found that among respondents of 6 countries, U.S. brands were trusted in 15 of 22 product categories, while Japanese brands were trusted in 6 categories.

Researches across various contexts show that brand awareness exerts a strong influence on consumer preferences and purchasing behavior. Sasmita and Suki (2014) revealed that brand awareness significantly affects young Malaysian consumers' buying behavior. Zhang et al. (2014) observed cultural differences in how awareness translates into loyalty. Moreover, consumers display greater brand sensitivity toward products that are frequently used, such as food, clothing, and personal care items, compared to those purchased less regularly. In developing countries, where market information is often limited, consumers rely heavily on brand reputation and country image as proxies for quality. Karki and Khadka (2023) reported that consumers in Kathmandu frequently assess the country of origin when purchasing fast-moving consumer goods (FMCGs), reflecting the ongoing relevance of country image in consumer decision-making. However, studies in global and regional level on brand awareness and country image is extensive, research focused on Nepali consumers' brand awareness and country remains limited. Nepal's legal framework for brand protection is primarily governed by the Patent, Design and Trademark Act of 1965, providing a legal foundation for intellectual property protection. Koirala (2024) notes a growing preference among urban consumers in Kathmandu for branded apparels. Although a few local brands such as CG and its product Wai-Wai noodles have achieved notable recognition, consumer trust and preference continue to favor foreign brands.

The literature reviews show significant gaps in the existing studies in terms of brand awareness and country image in Nepal. Most of the empirical studies on brand awareness and country image focus on developed countries, leaving smaller markets such as Nepal underrepresented. Furthermore, there is limited empirical evidence on how brand awareness and country image interact to influence Nepali consumers' purchasing decisions. Finally, the relationship between consumers' perception, and trust in domestic versus foreign brands has not been systematically explored. This study aims to bridge these gaps by examining the relationship between brand awareness, country image, and consumer perception in Nepal.

3. Method

The study has adopted descriptive statistics and a Chi-Square test to investigate the brand awareness and country image of Nepali customers. Descriptive statistics were used to depict graphical representations of survey data. Pie chart, Bar diagram and Line graph were used to show relationship among variables. The Chi-Square tests were used to analyze the association among the respondents' preferences. Associations among variables were analyzed using SPSS. The main interest of this analysis was examining the association between customers' brand awareness and preference of goods and countries.

The primary data were collected from Nepal government officials consisting of 100 officials who were working in the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal. The printed questionnaires were distributed to the government officials of the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, and Supplies and Department of Industry who have got the training about brand awareness and Nepali products at the Nepal Administrative Staff College. The survey asked respondents to write down the first three names of brands that came to their mind, as well as the specific brands they look for, the company which produces those brands, and the location where those brands are made when they go shopping for goods such as food, electronics, soft drinks, etc. In order to examine the respondents' brands awareness, they were asked 4 main questions, as well as 17 sub-questions.

Data Analysis

The Chi-Square test was used to examine the relationship between two variables. In business, Chi-square statistics is used to measure of how much the observed cell counts in a two-way table diverged from the expected cell counts (Moore et al., 2009). To calculate the statistics given formula was used:

$$\chi^2 = \sum^k \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

Where degree of freedom = (r-1) (c-1), r = number of rows and c = number of columns

O_i = the observed frequency in the i th cell of the table

E_i = the expected frequency in the i th cell of the table

For the Chi-Square test, following hypothesis was set:

H_0 : there is no relationship between variables

H_1 : there is a relationship between variables

If the difference between observed and expected value is large, there is high possibilities of rejecting null hypothesis. In order to validate test, expected value should be greater than 5 in 2 × 2 contingency table. If the expected frequencies are below than 5, the reason might be small sample size. At that time Fisher's exact test is used to test (Field, 2013). The calculation of this study contains 66 observed variables; of these variables, if the respondent's answers were yes assigned a value of 1, otherwise 0.

Check brand, check food brand, food of Nepal and food of India, produced significant results. Check brand was assigned a value of 1 if a respondent checks brands when he or she goes shopping and a value of 0 if they do not do this. This variable shows respondents' awareness about brands. If a respondent always checks for food brands, the check food brand was assigned a value of 1; otherwise, he or she was assigned a value of 0. This second variable assesses their awareness towards food brands. The third and fourth variables examined the association between food brands and countries, namely Nepal and India. For the food of Nepal variable,

if the participant responded that they check the brands of food made in Nepal, then they were assigned a value of 1; 0 for otherwise. Finally, regarding the food brands of India variable, if the respondent stated that he or she checks the brands of food made in India, then they were assigned a value of 1; if they did not check for Indian food brands, they were assigned a value of 0. To test the association between the check brand and check food's brand variables, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H0: No association between check brand and check food's brand variables

H1: Association between these two variables exists

To test the association between check food of Nepal and food of India variables, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H0: No association between food of Nepal and food of India

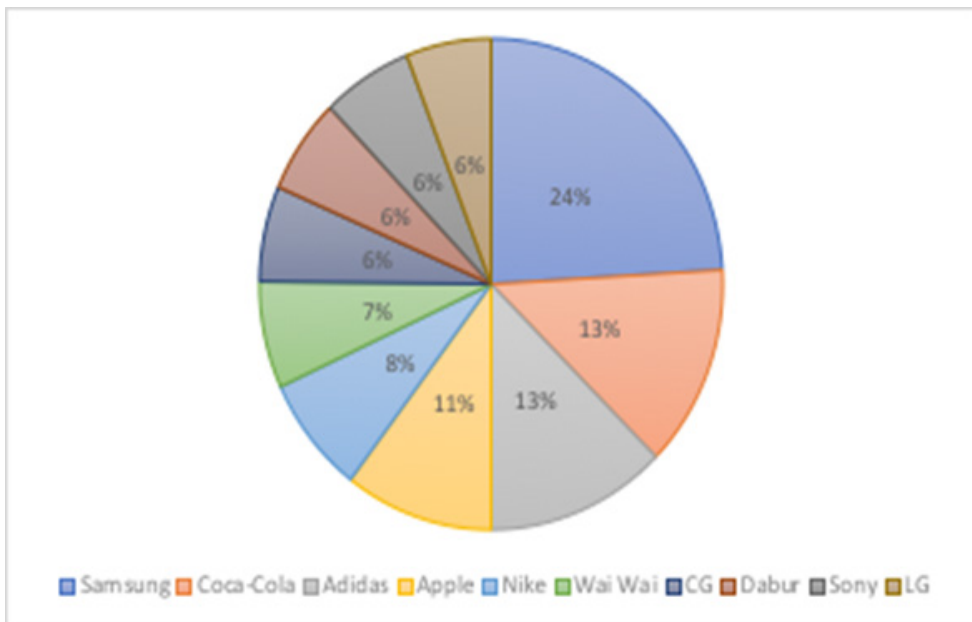
H1: Association between these two variables exists

4. Results

Descriptive statistics

Figure 1

Weightage of brands based on respondents recalled order.



A sample of the 100 respondents was taken for the survey. The weightage of 116 brands mentioned by them were calculated. The top most 10 high weight brands are shown in figure 1 below. Among these except two brands CG and Wai-Wai, all are foreign brands. Samsung was found the highest weightage brand. It shows foreign brands have dominant power in Nepali market.

Figure 2

Brands which came to the respondents' minds first

The respondents were asked to mention the three brands in the order respectively. Analyses of the respondent's answers are shown in the graphs below.

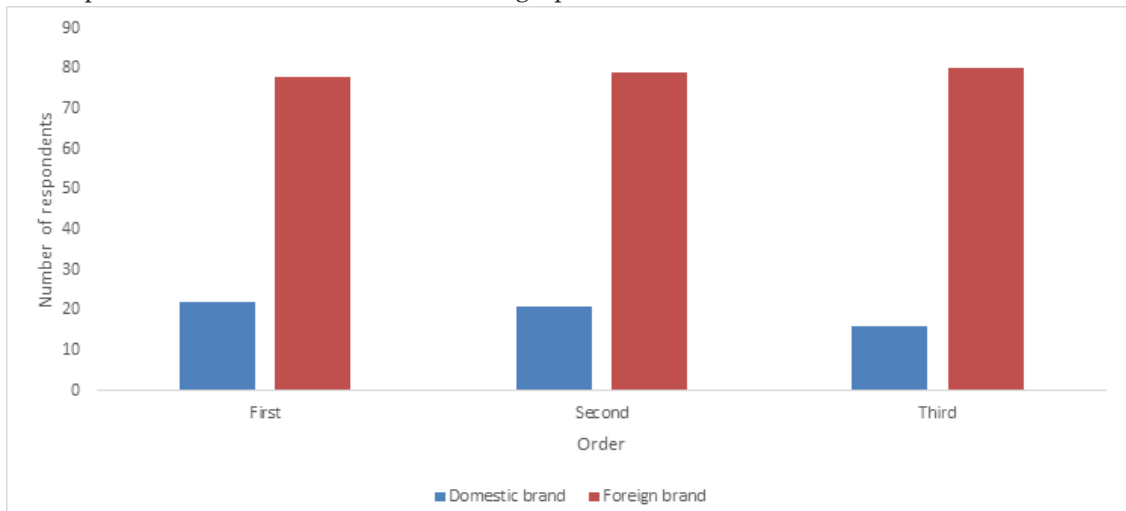


Figure 2 shows that a significant number of the respondents know foreign brands well. The respondents were four times more likely to mention foreign brands than a domestic one as the first one that came to their mind. The number of the respondents who mentioned foreign brands as the second and third ones that they thought of was even higher. This discrepancy might be due to strong brand imaging, marketing and people's trust of foreign brands.

Figure 3

Respondents response about producer, product made and check brand

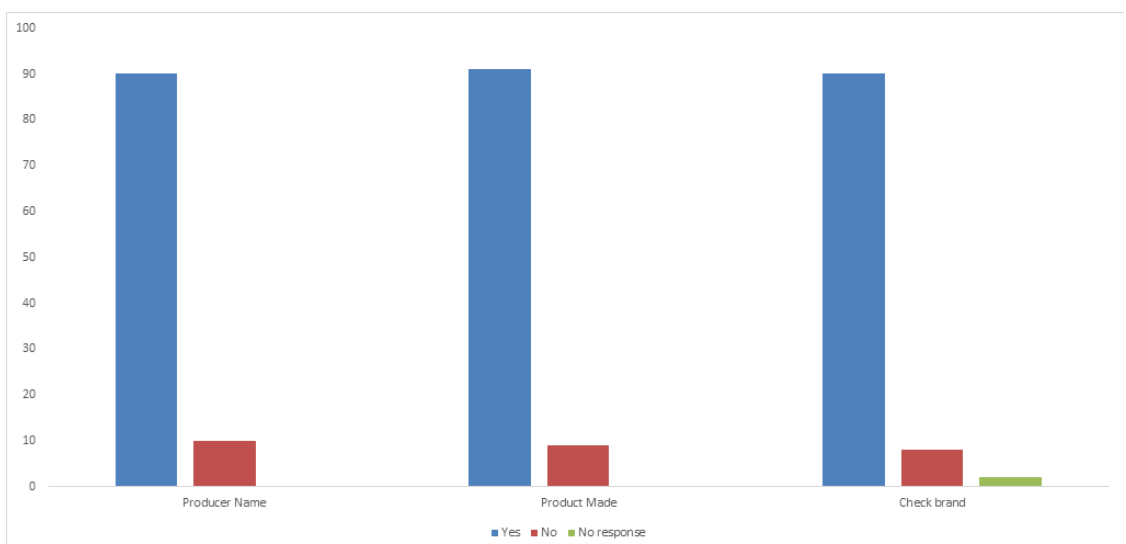


Figure 3 above shows that most of the respondents are sensitive to who produces the product, where it is made, and the brands of the product. Almost 90% of the respondents were concerned about all 3 of these things when they go for shopping.

Figure 4

Brands mentioned in categorically order

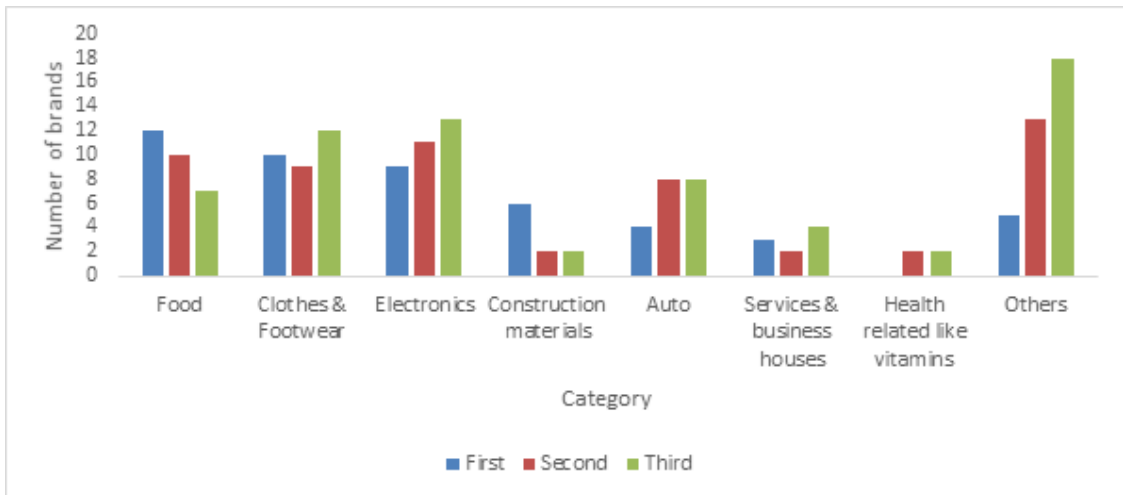
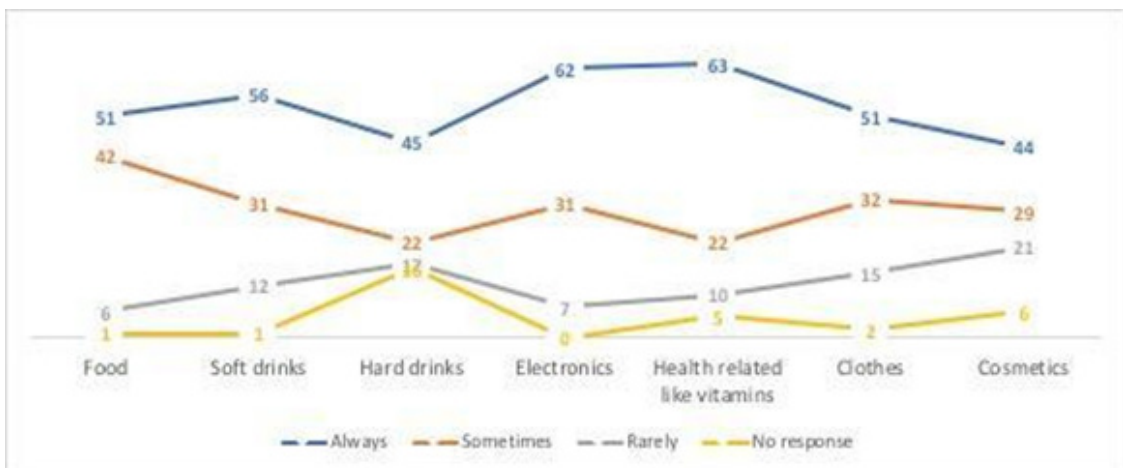


Figure 4 shows that people are more conscious about the brands of items that are used daily, like food, clothes and footwear, and electronics. Food products in particular tended to be the first type of brands that they mentioned. People might be mostly concerned about food brands and more familiar with them because food products are used in daily life. Another concern may be the taste; and quality of products; so, they want to buy food which they really know well.

Figure 5

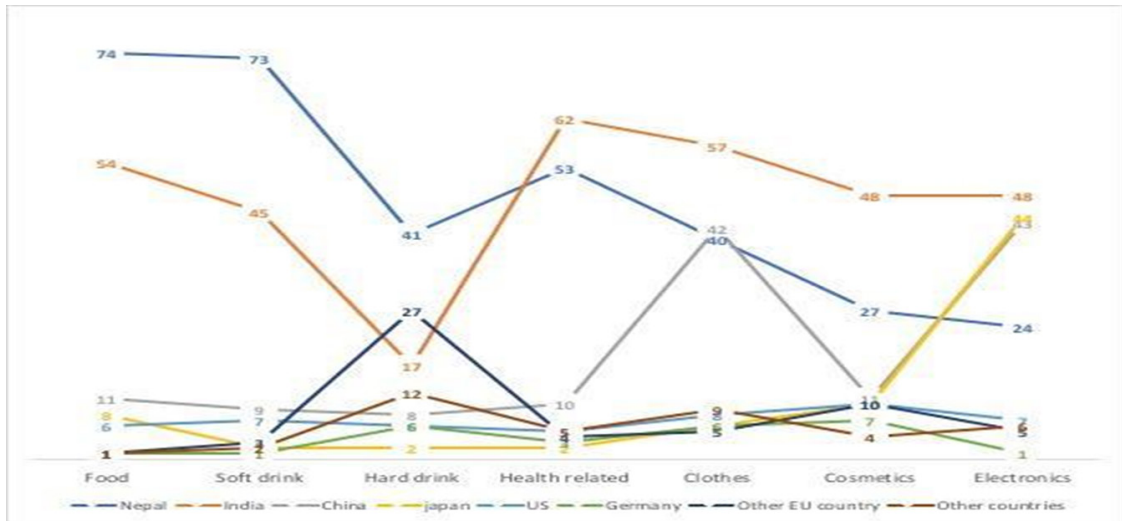
Frequency of brand checking by product type



As can be seen in Figure 5, the respondents are very careful about health-related, electronics, soft drinks and food brands. Sixty-three percentages of respondents always care health related brands. It might be due to customers are very cautious about health-related issues. Most of the respondents either always or sometimes care food brands, but very few rarely care.

Figure 6

Goods preferences of the respondents based on country



According to Figure 6, the respondents seemed to prefer Nepali and Indian food products over that of other countries. This may be the result of cultural preferences; since the research participants were Nepali, it is unexpected that they preferred traditional food brands. Indian food brands were popular like Nepali brands; not only are they traditionally similar, but they may also benefit from advantages such as strong branding; and variety of food availability. The respondents even more preferred Indian products like health related, clothes, cosmetics and electronics than domestic and other countries brands. Thus, the results show that Indian products are dominant in Nepali market rather than domestic products or those from other countries. They looked India and China followed by Japan for electronics almost in the same level. India is growing in electronics manufacturing (Nithin, 2016) and China is dominant producer of electronics, but Japanese electronics production has been changing unpredictably (Manners, 2017). It was depicted in respondent's responses as well.

Brand Acceptability in Nepal

Survey results disclosed patterns of Nepali customers' brands preferences based on products and countries. When the respondents recalled three brands, the number of brands increased in order from 48 to 57 and finally 64. Many respondents recalled a few brands that might be due to these brands have strong presence in Nepali market. Weightage of 116 brands mentioned by respondents were calculated by multiplying frequency and assigned value 3, 2 and 1 respectively in order. It was found that electronics brands are highly influencing and Samsung has the highest weightage among others. Among top 10 brands only CG and Wai-Wai were the domestic brands. Domestic brands influence seems comparatively weaker than the foreign brands. Nearly 80% of the respondents mentioned foreign brands recalled in order.

The highest number of the respondents mentioned food, clothes and footwear brands at first and second. In the third, they mentioned highest number of electronics brands. That might be due to purchasing frequency of these items. More than 90% of respondents checks producer's name, country and brands when they go shopping. Furthermore, 63% of respondents always care about health-related brands. It seemed that customers are more conscious about brand of health-related products and electronics. Only 6% of respondents rarely care about food brands, this is comparatively less than other who rarely cares brands. For food products, respondents care mostly about brands of Nepal. Next, they care Indian brands, it might because of some food ingredients are similar. As like food products, respondents mostly care about brands of soft drinks of Nepal, and India respectively. Interestingly, most of respondents do not care about brands of hard drinks. That might be due to Hindu religious perspectives. For health related food supplements, 60% of the respondents care about brands of India, after that 53% respondents care about Nepal. 57% respondents care Indian brands of clothes and 42% care Chinese brands; however, only 40% care Nepalese brands for clothes. For electronics product India, Japan and China are almost in the same level, these results show most of customers like Indian brands that might be the one reason India has dominant power in Nepali market than the domestic and other countries.

Chi-Square test results

The chi-square tests of independence were performed to examine the relationships among the variables. Among these variables, relationship between check brand and care food brand; and brand of food of Nepal and food of India were obtained significant. Pearson Chi-square statistics of check brand and care food brand, $\chi^2(1, N=100) = 9.276$, where 1 is degree of freedom and N is number of observations, and $P(0.002) < 0.05$ were obtained. It shows a very small probability of the observed data under the null hypothesis of no relationship. The obtained result is shown in table 1. However, 2 cells have an expected value of less than 5. So, Fisher's Exact Test $P(0.011) < 0.05$ was used to analyze the result. The null hypothesis was rejected since $p < 0.05$. Significantly strong association between those who always check brands and always care about food brands where phi value 0.309 was obtained. The results can be concluded that respondents who care brands always care food brands.

Table 1

Chi-Square test result of check brands and food brand

Chi-Square test (check brands*food brands)							
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact (2-sided)	Sig.	Exact (1-Sided)	Sig.
Pearson Chi-Square	9.276a	1	0.006				
Continuity Correction ^b	7.163	1	0.013				
Likelihood Ratio	12.361	1	0.005				
Fisher's Exact Test				0.011		0.006	
Liner-by-Linear Association	9.180	1	0.007				
No. of valid cases	97						

a. 2 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.88.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

In addition to this, the chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between the respondents who care brand of Nepal's food product and who care about brand of Indian food products. The test result is shown in table 2. Pearson Chi-Square statistics $\chi^2(1, N=100) = 7.443$, $p(0.006) < 0.05$ was obtained. Hence, null hypothesis, there is no relationship between variables respondents care brand of food products of Nepal and who care brand of food products of India is rejected. The variables that care brand of Nepal's food products have significant association with who care brand of Indian food products. From these results, Indian food products is popular for Nepali customers and they pay attention to Indian food products brands.

Table 2

Chi-Square test of brand of Nepal's food products and brand of India's food products

Chi-Square test (Brand of Nepal's food product* Brand of India's Food product)								
	Value	df	Asymp. (2-sided)	Sig.	Exact (2-sided)	Sig.	Exact (1-sided)	Sig.
Pearson Chi- Square	7.433a	1	0.006					
Continuity Correctionb	6.238	1	0.013					
Likelihood Ratio	7.779	1	0.005					
Fisher's Exact Test					0.011		0.006	
Linear-by-Linear Association	7.358	1	0.007					
N of valid cases	100							

a. Cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 11.96

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this research provide evidence that Nepali customers are highly aware about brands and mostly prefer foreign brands, particularly those originating from India and Japan, and the Nepali market is dominated by foreign products. Consumers mostly concern themselves with brands in terms of daily use items like foods, clothes and electronics. The results show that customers are concerned about foreign brands. From the hypothesis testing, we found significant associations between customers who are concerned about brands are also concerned about food brands. This result is closely related to the results of Anselmsson et al. (2014) where food brands came into the respondents' minds first. In addition, it was found that customers who check the food of Nepal also check the food of India. These results give proof of further value of brand awareness and country image (Mariutti & Giraldi, 2020).

6. Implications

This research provides some valuable insights for business leaders and policy makers. Business leaders who are interested in expanding into the Nepali market must be made aware the necessity of branding their products and protecting brand as an intellectual property. Products and services from renown countries and well-established brands that consumers mostly care might have high risk of imitation, for instance, Indian food products brands might be in risk of imitation. On the other hand, the image of domestic brands is very weak in consumers in

comparison to that of foreign brands. Nepali policy makers who are considering to promote domestic products and services and replace import need to think about branding of domestic products and services.

7. Limitations and Direction for the Research

The limitation of this research is that the respondents were chosen from government officials. The 100 government officials chosen randomly may not be representative of the general populace due to differences in income level, education level, understanding, access to the market, or purchasing frequency. Therefore, how government officials perceive brands might be different than how other people perceive them. In addition to this, simple statistical tools have been used to analyze collected data. Hence, it may not cover all important variables of brand awareness and country image. Researchers can study a brand equity in Nepal that might have significant meaning. Customers' awareness and common perception of a specific product from a certain country might be other possible avenues for further study.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest with any party while preparing this article.

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