# DOES CO-BRANDING MATTER FOR THE CHINESE BRAND?

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**Abstract:** This study examined the co-branding effect on the Chinese brand with, it aimed to examine the significance of country of origin in this context. A real co-branding case (lenovo IBM ThinkPad) was used as our research stimulus and the experiment which consisted of a 2*2 between- subjects factorial design was adopted to form three kinds of co-branded brand to compare with the no-cobranded brand (lenovo); The results showed that (1)The co-branding strategy which just uses the primary brand of the alliance brand on the focal brand (lenovo IBM) can significantly improve consumers' perceptions toward the Chinese brand; However, (2) Both the strategy which   uses both the primary brand and the sub-brand of the alliance brand (lenovo IBM ThinkPad) or just use the sub-brand of the alliance brand (lenovo ThinkPad )on the focal brand fail to improve consumers' perceptions toward the Chinese brand.

Keywords: Brand of Origin, Brand Alliance, Co-branding,, Perceived Value,
          Purchase Intention

## INTRODUCTION

From the past studies, it is obvious that country of origin (COO) has become one of the most widely researched concepts in international marketing and consumer behavior area since Robert Schooler propose this construct in 1965 and Al-Sulaiti and Baker (1998) even consider it as the fifth element of the marketing mix. According to COO theory, when consumers are exposed to the product which is made from other countries, they will perceive some stereotype images about those countries and these images are subsequently used as information cues in judging products from different origins (Lotz and Hu, 2001). Specifically when the product comes from less-developed countries, consumers tend to a have a negative evaluation toward them.

Nowadays, brands have become highly valued assets for a company (Aaker, 1990), and branding has also become the top priority for every company including the Chinese brand, But it often costs the companies a number of money and takes them a long time to build their brand, this was proved by the scholars' finding that as globalization phenomenon continues to elevate competition in the marketplace, product introduction has become highly fraught with risk. One reason of such risk is the incredibly high cost of building brands for a product, which in some cases can exceed $100 million (Voss and Gammoh, 2004), and another is that firms are facing the reality of high new-product failure rates between 20 and 40% per year (Spethman & Benezra, 1994). That is to say, if the brand had a very strong negative brand of origin stereotype, it would be very difficult for it to build its own brand.

Although there are a number of ways for a company to build its own brand, according to the past literatures, brand alliance may be a good branding strategy since it can offer fresh opportunities for companies to gain new markets that may otherwise be difficult to reach effectively , and it is beneficial to the organizations involved to alleviate costs when entering new markets by using the established equity of the second brand (Aaker, 2004; Kapferer, 2004; Keller, 2003), moreover, it can also help the company to increase consumers' perceived quality and image toward their brand (Keller, 2003). In sum, many empirical studies in brand alliance research have proved that when exposed to a brand alliance, consumers will evaluate an unknown brand higher than the same brand without an ally (Rao and Ruekert, 1994; Rao, Qu, and Ruekert, 1999; Simonin and Ruth, 1998). However**,** from the past study, co-branding cue does not have much attention in the country of origin (COO) literature (Bluemelhuber, Carter, Lambe, 2007). There are few papers which use the perspective of country of origin to explain co-branding effects. As a result, it can be understood that co-branding may improve consumers' product evaluation, but it is not clear that how will consumers evaluate the

Chinese brand with a strong negative brand of origin stereotype if it co-brands with a famous brand.

Besides, we can see that from the real co-branding case, different brand names (lenovo IBM ThinkPad and lenovo ThinkPad) has been used on the same product called IBM ThinkPad by lenovo after it merges the IBM's personal computer department in 2005. As we know, IBM is so famous for its notebook brand, ThinkPad, which is a sub-brand of IBM's corporation having a large group of loyalty customers, so the brand name must be used carefully to transfer the brand equity of ThinkPad or IBM to lenovo. However, instead of discussing the sub-brand of the alliance brand, most of the past co-branding researches just discuss the primary brand of the alliance brand

However, from the past co-branding studies, they've failed to examine the co-branding effect under the country of origin context and lack of discussion of the sub-brand of alliance brand, in sum, our purposes of this study are (1) to broaden the external validity country of origin theory by analyzing co-branding cue which the researchers didn't pay much attention in the COO literature, moreover, (2) to provide a better understanding of how consumers organize the stereotype and halo-effect to form their evaluation toward the Chinese brand and therefore discuss that whether co-branding can help the Chinese brands to alleviate the negative brand of origin or not, and (3) to discuss the difference of the impact on each co-branding strategy for the Chinese brand to help marketer better determine under which condition co-branding will be favorably evaluated for the Chinese brand.

# Literature review

## Country of Origin Under Multiple Product Extrinsic Cues

Country of origin can be described as that the country where the brand originated (Ozsomer and Cavusgi, 1991). That is to say, we use brand of origin (BOO) concept. For instance, the brand of origin of lenovo is China. Various studies reveal that a product's country of origin can influence its evaluation, if we only used the COO cue to test its effect (Bilkey and Nes 1982).That means the impact of country of origin on consumers' perception and product evaluation will be lower if we examine it with the multiple-cue. However, most of the papers use price and brand name as their extrinsic cue stimuli, for example, it was demonstrated that when COO was considered with other extrinsic cues like price and brand, the effect of COO tend to be relatively weak or insignificant in explaining either product evaluations or purchase intentions (Hui and Zhou 2002; Ahmed, Johnson, Yeng, Fatt, Teng and Boon, 2004). In other words, from the past country of origin and brand alliance literature, they have not been integrated. Therefore, we try to integrate this two research concept, using the co-branding as an extrinsic product cue to examine its effect under the country of origin context. In this multiple model which includes brand of origin and co-branding product extrinsic cues, we wish to have a better understanding whether a second brand name can help to eliminate the focal brand's negative brand of origin stereotype or not.

## Co-Branding and Product Evaluation

Brand alliances can take on a symbolic form of co-branding, such as a joint promotion of the complementary use of each brand (Rao, Qu, & Ruekert, 1999) or the co-sponsorship of events (Ruth and Simonin, 2003). A brand ally can help to improve consumers evaluation of the focal brand has been proven several times (Lafferty, Goldsmith, & Hult, 2004). Moreover, the past empirical studies in brand-alliance research also suggest that, consumers will have higher evaluation toward an unknown brand than the same brand without an ally ( Rao & Ruekert, 1994; Rao et al., 1999, 1999; Simonin et al., 1998).In sum, from what we discussed above, it is obvious that, using the co-branding strategy do help to improve consumers product evaluation toward the focal brand.

## Signaling Theory

Signaling theory describes the concept that when the buyers and sellers which in consumer markets hold different levels, or types, of information, most of the time, the producer may has information regarding the product's inherent quality that consumers may not have. (Rao et al., 1994).In practice, Companies tend to launch an ad or set a high price to signal the messages that they are companies who with a high quality to separate themselves from the companies with poor quality. Besides, from the past study, theorists also considered the brand alliance a marketplace signal (Rao et al., 1994; Rao et al., 1999). Hence, in this study, we try to consider the utility of a brand name as a signal and applied it to the brand alliance context.

## Information Integrating Theory

Information integrating theory describes the process that when consumers are deposed to more than one stimulus, they tend to combine the stimuli to form beliefs or attitudes (Anderson, 1981). When consumers perceived the brand alliance stimulus

information, no matter presented through advertising or by experiencing it directly, they tend to have some related affect and belief about those brands and products and then stored them in memory (Simonin et al., 1998).Moreover, consumers tend to modify their belief or beliefs when they receive, interpret, evaluate, and then integrate stimulus information with existing beliefs or attitude.

## Halo Effect

When consumers have to evaluate an unfamiliar or less famous brand, because they do not have much brand association or hold a weakly attitude toward the focal brand, consumers may need another information stimulus to facilitate their product evaluation, in this situation, the affect associated with the alliance brand may to some degree be transferred to the co-brand, as a result, as a result, consumers tend to evaluate the co-brand mainly base on the alliance brand. However, if consumer do not perceived the co-branding signal, or their negative stereotype toward the focal brand is too strong to change even when they perceived the co-branding signal, in this situation, the affect associated with the focal brand may to some degree be transfer to the co-brand, as a result, consumers tend to evaluate the co-brand mainly base on the focal brand.

## Co-Branding and Perceived Sacrifice

Scholars defined perceived sacrifice as the combination of monetary sacrifice and non-monetary sacrifice like time cost, effort, search cost, and psychic (Becker, 1965). A brand alliance which improve the competitive position of both brands when compared with a non-aligned strategy (Desai & Keller, 2002; McCarthy & Norris, 1999) and gain more marketplace exposure (Spethmann and Benezra, 1994) can therefore reduce consumers search cost (Chiu, 2003).Hence, we can derive the following hypotheses,

H1: Compared with the co-branding strategy that does not use the primary brand of the alliance brand (IBM) on the product, the co-banding strategy that uses the primary brand of the alliance brand (IBM) on the product will have a lower extent of perceived sacrifice.

H2: Compared with the co-branding strategy that does not use the sub-brand of the alliance brand (ThinkPad) on the product, the co-banding strategy that uses the sub-brand of the alliance brand (ThinkPad) on the product will have a lower extent of perceived sacrifice.

## Co-Branding and Perceived Quality

Perceived quality can be broadly defined as the consumer's assessment about the product's overall excellence or superiority. (Zeithaml, 1988).The partner brand can successfully signal quality information that the focal brand could not itself signal (Rao et al., 1994).Therefore, we can hypothesize that,

H3: Compared with the co-branding strategy that does not use the primary brand of the alliance brand (IBM) on the product, the co-banding strategy that uses the primary brand of the alliance brand (IBM) on the product will have a higher extent of perceived quality.

H4: Compared with the co-branding strategy that does not use the sub-brand of the alliance brand (ThinkPad) on the product, the co-banding strategy that uses the sub-brand of the alliance brand (ThinkPad) on the product will have a higher extent of perceived quality.

## Co-Branding and Perceived Symbolic Image

Brand image is the reasoned or emotional perception consumers attach to a specific brand. It consists of functional and symbolic brand beliefs (Dobni and Zinkhan, 1990).According to Keller (1993), the different types of brand associations may include product-related and non-product-related attributes, consumers' overall brand attitudes, and functional, experiential, or symbolic benefits of the brand, but, owing to the constantly changing nature of the market, consumers are forced to operate in a state of imperfect information, as a result, in many situations, consumers' existing brand associations are deficient in some way, therefore secondary brand associations may be leveraged to form the associations needed to bolster brand image. Therefore, the following hypotheses were derived,

H5: Compared with the co-branding strategy that does not use the primary brand of the alliance brand (IBM) on the product, the co-banding strategy that uses the primary brand of the alliance brand (IBM) on the product will have a higher extent of perceived symbolic image.

H6: Compared with the co-branding strategy that does not use the sub-brand of the alliance brand (ThinkPad) on the product, the co-banding strategy that uses the sub-brand of the alliance brand (ThinkPad) on the product will have a higher extent of perceived symbolic image.

## Product Evaluation and Perceived Value

According to William (1991), perceived value is the link between the cognitive attitudes of perceived monetary sacrifice and purchase intention. Besides, the degree of perceived value will decrease if the companies can lower their consumer's perceived monetary and non-monetary cost (Zeithaml, 1988; Chiu, 2003). According to the prior research, perceived quality served as a mediator between extrinsic cues and perceived value (Dodds, Monroe and Grewal, 1991; Teas and Agarwal, 2000). Besides, Sweeny and Soutar (2001) found out that value for money and versatility (the functional value) is not only the reason which consumers want to get from the product, instead, the enjoyment or pleasure derived from the product (the emotional value) sometimes also plays an vital role as to be one of the determinants of the consumers product evaluation. Hence, the following hypothesis were derived,

H7: Perceived sacrifice has a negative impact on perceived value

H8: Perceived quality has a positive impact on perceived value

H9: Perceived symbolic image has a positive impact on perceived value
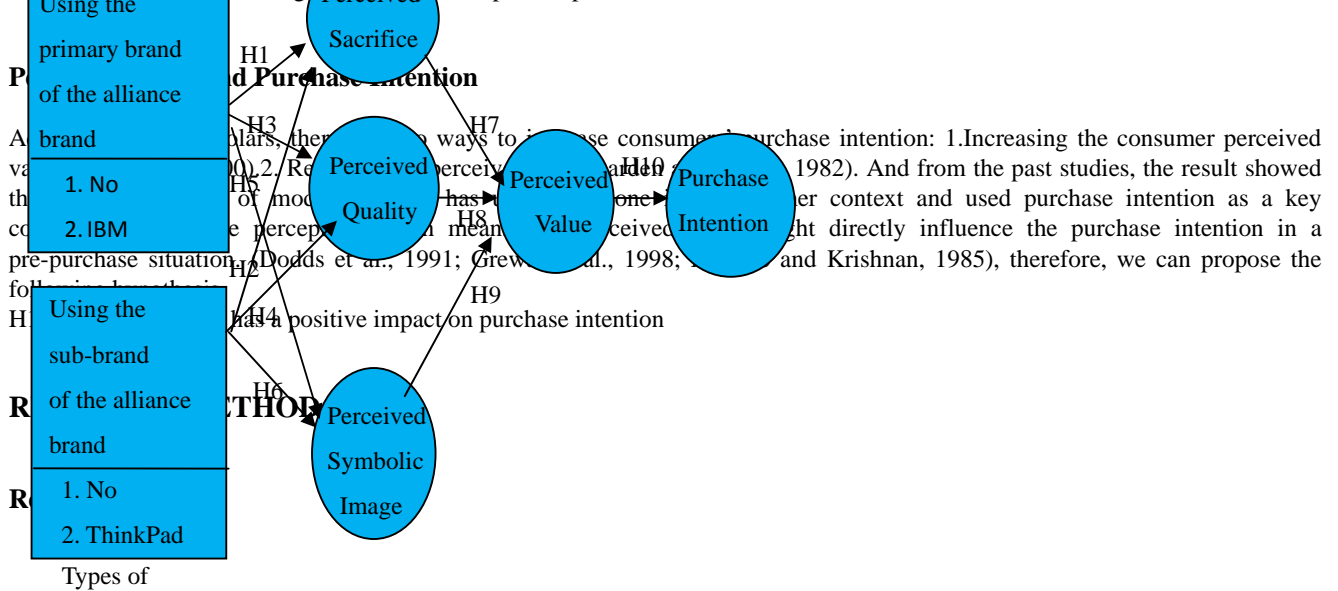
## Perceived Value and Purchase Intention

As we know, there are two ways to increase consumer's purchase intention: 1.Increasing the consumer perceived value (Dickson and Sawyer, 1990). 2.Reducing the perceived monetary cost (Monroe, 1982). And from the past studies, the result showed that perceived value plays the role of mediator and has impacts on purchase intention under context and used purchase intention as a key component to measure the perception. Research meant that perceived value might directly influence the purchase intention in a pre-purchase situation (Dodds et al., 1991; Grewal et al., 1998; Zeithaml and Krishnan, 1985), therefore, we can propose the following hypothesis

H10: Perceived value has a positive impact on purchase intention

## RESEARCH METHOD

## Research Model

Figure1 Research model

[Figure: Research model showing "Types of co-branding strategies" with two boxes — "Using the primary brand of the alliance brand (1. No, 2.IBM)" and "Using the sub-brand of the alliance brand (1. No, 2. ThinkPad)" — connected via paths H1–H6 to Perceived Sacrifice, Perceived Quality, Perceived Symbolic Image; which link via H7, H8, H9 to Perceived Value; and via H10 to Purchase Intention]

## Research Design

The hypotheses were tested via the experiment which consisted of a 2*2 between- subjects factorial design. The experimental manipulations involved two use the primary brand of the alliance brand treatment levels (do not use IBM and use IBM on the focal brand) and two use of the sub-brand of the alliance brand treatment levels (don't use ThinkPad and use ThinkPad on the focal brand ).

| Scenario | Use the primary brand of the alliance brand on the focal brand | Use the sub-brand of the alliance brand on the focal brand |
|---|---|---|
| lenovo | 1.No | 1.No |
| lenovo - IBM | 2.IBM | 1.No |
| lenovo - ThinkPad | 1.No | 2.ThinkPad |
| lenovo- IBM ThinkPad | 2.IBM | 2 .ThinkPad |

## Measurement

We adopted Likert's seven-point scale to measure the respondents' attitude.

Table1: Measurement of research constructs

| Construct | Measure Item | Reference |
|---|---|---|

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Perceived sacrifice | 1. If I purchased this computer, I would face the financial risk because of the possibility of such things as higher maintenance/repair cost<br>2. If I purchased this computer, I would not be confident that it will perform as described. | Zeithamal (1988) |
| Perceived quality | 1. I think the performance of this computer may be so poor that it needs to be repaired very often.<br>2. I think this computer seems to lack of durability<br>3. I think the service provided by this computer may not be very good. | Brucks And Zeithaml, 1991 |
| Perceived symbolic image | 1. I think this brand's computer can reflect status<br>2. I think this brand's computer can reflect personal style<br>3. I will have face if buying this brand's computer | Park, Jaworski and Maclnnis, 1986 |
| Perceived value | 1. I think this computer is worth more than what I paid for<br>2. This computer appears to be a bargain.<br>3. I believe that buying this computer is a good decision | Woodruff , and Cardial (1996) . |
| Purchase intention | 1. I will consider to buy this computer if need be<br>2. I am willing to buy this computer if need be<br>3. I will probably buy this computer if need be | Dodds, Monroe and Grewal (1991) |

**Data collection**

The data were collected via an online questionnaire, respondents for this study were graduate students to avoid the consumer ethnocentrism to some extent (Klein and Ettenson 1999).We randomly diffuse the questionnaire to the students studying in Taiwan's graduate schools. Each subject was randomly assigned to one of four scenarios.

**Control variables**

A consumer with high ethnocentrism may prefer products made in his/her own country and consider buying foreign-made products as improper behavior (Shimp & Sharma, 1987).To avoid the respondents who tend to reject the product from China irrationally, we controlled the animosity toward China and consumers ethnocentrism by asking Q15: I can accept the products made in China and Q16: I only buy the product from Taiwan.

**Reliability analysis**

The instrument of this study is very reliable with all the Cronbach's alpha value exceed 0.7.

Table 2: Reliability analysis

| Construct | Measure items | Cronbach's alpha |
|---|---|---|
| Perceived sacrifice | Q1~Q2 | 0.832 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived quality | Q3~Q5 | 0.906 | |
| Perceived symbolic image | Q6~Q8 | 0.889 | |
| Perceived value | Q9~Q11 | 0.919 | |
| Purchase intention | Q12~Q14 | 0.962 | |
| overall | Q1~Q14 | 0.789 | |

Source: This research

# DATA ANALYSIS

## Descriptive Statistics

The total size of the questionnaires is 285 which consisted of 231 valid questionnaires after excluding the respondents who have highly extent of animosity toward China and ethnocentrism, including 51 valid questionnaires for the lenovo scenario, 54 valid questionnaires for the lenovo IBM scenario, 78 valid questionnaires for the lenovo ThinkPad scenario, 48 valid questionnaires for the lenovo IBM ThinkPad scenario. Besides, the trait of our respondents is that men account for 46% of the respondents, and most of the respondents' age is at the range 23~28 (93%), in addition, 62% of the respondents can identify that lenovo is a Chinese brand, however, 38% of the respondents can't (3% vote for Japan, 16% for Taiwan, 15 % for America, 4% for South Korea).

## Hypotheses Test

To test the hypothesis 1 to H6, MANOVA was used, and the results were all combined into table3. From the table, we can see that, the main effect of primary brand is significant (all the P-values $< 0.05$), which means the H1, H3 and H5 were accepted. However, the main effect of sub-brand and the interaction are not significant (Wilk's Lambda test is not significant), so H2,H4,H6 were not accepted.

Table 3: Results from MANOVA analysis

| Source | Dependant variables | df | Wilk's Lambda | Mean difference | F-value | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Primary brand | Perceived sacrifice | 1 | 0.001 | -1.031 | 11.388 | 0.001* |
| | Perceived quality | 1 | | 1.571 | 11.442 | 0.001* |
| | Perceived Image | 1 | | 1.363 | 9.214 | 0.003* |
| Sub-brand | Perceived sacrifice | 1 | 0.221 | -0.372 | 1.480 | 0.225 |
| | Perceived quality | 1 | | 0.013 | 0.001 | 0.979 |
| | Perceived Image | 1 | | -0.283 | 0.397 | 0.530 |
| Primary brand * | Perceived sacrifice | 1 | 0.212 | -1.403 | 3.078 | 0.081 |
| Sub-brand | Perceived quality | 1 | | 1.583 | 3.845 | 0.051 |
| | Perceived image | 1 | | 1.081 | 0.096 | 0.757 |
| Residual | | 227 | | | | |

Notes: *p<0.05

To test the hypotheses from H7 to H12, two regression models were used, and we combined all the results into table 4.From the table, all the hypotheses were accepted.

Table 4: regression analysis

| Hypothesis | Adjusted R square | Beta coefficient | p-value | Hypotheses acceptance |
|---|---|---|---|---|

| | | | | |
|-----|-------|--------|--------|----------|
| H7  | 0.373 | -0.186 | 0.045* | Accepted |
| H8  | 0.373 | 0.220  | 0.021* | Accepted |
| H9  | 0.373 | 0.394  | 0*     | Accepted |
| H10 | 0.566 | 0.752  | 0*     | Accepted |

Notes: * p<0.05

## CONCLUSION

This paper discussed the influence of co-branding on the Chinese brand with a negative brand of origin by identifying three kinds of co-branding strategies in which the Chinese brand (lenovo) can use, these include (1) merely using the primary brand of the alliance brand on the focal brand (lenovo  IBM ), (2) merely using the sub-brand of the alliance brand (ThinkPad) on the focal brand (lenovo ThinkPad), (3) using both the primary and sub-brand of the alliance brand on the focal brand (lenovo IBM ThinkPad).The results reflected the concept of 21th value marketing, that is, to increase consumers purchase intention, we should first reduce their perceived sacrifice and increase their perceived quality and perceived image,  to enhance consumers' value perception and therefore to increase their purchase intention. From our results, perceived symbolic image plays the most important role in determining consumers' perceived value (beta coefficient is 0.394) while evaluating the notebook.

From the past study, we could find out that, there are some ways to dilute the negative BOO stereotype including foreign branding, brand name (focal brand's own brand name) , and price. In this study, we found out that a co-branding strategy that just use the primary brand of the alliance brand on the focal brand can also significantly dilute the negative BOO stereotype. That mean, if the Chinese brand feel difficult to build its own brand as a result from its negative BOO stereotype, the second brand name may be a good choice to help it eliminate. Moreover, if the focal brand has more than one brand name to use from its alliance brand, our results indicate that it should probably just use the primary brand of the alliance brand on the focal brand, because of that adding one more well-known, reputable sub-brand of the alliance brand as a signal of unobservable product quality may not provide a marginal improvement in consumer evaluation of the co-branded brand relative to a single ally. These findings are supported by those of Desai et al. (2002) who found that for slot-filler extensions, a co-branded ingredient was more useful for initial extensions, but a self-branded ingredient was more useful for subsequent extensions. Thus, there may be a wear out principal involved in brand alliance signals. For the lenovo ThinkPad scenario, one of the probable reason is that consumers' may consider ThinkPad as the sub-brand of the focal brand(lenovo) not alliance brand's (IBM's), so consumers' may not perceived the co-branding signal in this scenario, as a result, the negative stereotype can' t be diluted. For the lenovo IBM ThinkPad scenario, it may due to that, it will be too complicated to evaluate the computer when consumers are exposed to more than two brands in just one computer, that means, if a Chinese brand co-brands with another brand, it should think twice before adding the sub-brand of the alliance brand on the same product besides the primary brand of the alliance brand(IBM). In general, the managerial implication here is that for the Chinese brands who want to let consumers have a better perception of value toward their products by taking co-branding strategies, they should first to devote themselves in delivering the co-branding signal to the consumers, in addition, to avoid confusing consumers' product evaluation, the strategy which just uses two brands on one computer may be more appropriate than the one which uses three brands, and the primary brand of the alliance brand (IBM) may be more useful for the Chinese brand than the sub-brand of the alliance brand (ThinkPad) to increase consumers' product evaluation. In sum, co-branding strategy could benefits for the Chinese brands, however, it would not always work if they don't use it appropriate.

### Future research and research limitation

The limitation in this study is that, we just collected the data in Taiwan which would most likely just represent Taiwanese perspective toward the impact of co-branding on the Chinese brand, it would be better if future research interesting in this topic could gather data in countries other than Taiwan.  The globalization indicates that there will be a significant increase in cross-border brand alliance, so future research can extend the discussion of co-branding effect under COO context by (1) testing the effect of co-branding on the brand with a positively brand of origin, and (2) testing the difference of co-branding effect between the brand with a positive brand of origin and the brand with a negative brand of origin. Our study reinforces the past co-branding studies' findings by showing that co-branding with IBM improved evaluations of the co-branded brand. However, using more than two brand names together had no statistically significant effects relative to just use the primary brand of the alliance brand. Further research is needed to identify if, and under what conditions, the multiple brand alliance is a valuable brand management option. Since our research stimulus is the note-book, future research can extend our research by examining that if acer merges SONY's personal computer department, what kind of co-branding strategy will be best evaluated by consumers, acer SONY, or acer Vios, or acer - SONY Vios? Future research can also extend our research by testing the impacts of different co-branding strategies in different industry, for example, the same situation for LG, if it merges SAMSUNG's mobile phone department, what kind of co-branding strategy will be best evaluated by consumers, LG- SAMSUNG or LG Anycall or LG- SAMSUNG Anycall?

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