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# Mass prestige value and competition between American versus Asian laptop brands in an emerging market—Theory and evidence

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, competition between brands have been linked to mass prestige associated with the brands. Mass Prestige (Masstige) is very important to study, and yet it is a relatively less investigated construct in the literature. This study is an attempt to contribute to the literature grounded in masstige theoretical approach by examining the prestige associated with the four best-selling laptop brands: 1) two American brands (HP, Dell); and 2) two Asian brands (Lenovo and Acer). We analyzed the competition between these brands in the second fastest growing emerging market, India. In order to measure masstige value, we used the Masstige Mean scale (Paul, 2015). The results show that American brands have the potential to be seen as prestige brands while Asian brands are trailing behind in masstige value and competition. Finally, but not less important, this paper discusses the potential reasons for different masstige value of four laptop brands.

## 1. Introduction

Brands are semiotic marketing systems that generate value for participants, society, and broader environment, through co-created meaningful exchange (Conejo & Wooliscroft, 2014). Brands today are touching the lives of consumers across the globe in unprecedented ways. Brand Management as a topic has never been this important as it is today. The 'brand equity' as a concept has captured the attention of many researchers (Cobb-Walgren, Ruble, & Donthu, 1995) with competition intensifying in different industries with the globalization gathering momentum. Several researchers have addressed the conceptualization, measurement and management of brand equity (e.g; Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2010; Keller, 1993, 2001, 2016; Keller & Lehmann, 2003, 2006; Pappu, Quester, & Cooksey, 2005; Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). Pertaining to the importance of brand equity, specifically consumer based brand equity (CBBE), Yoo and Donthu (2001) developed a multi-dimensional CBBE scale using students sample from America and Korea based on Aaker's (1996) and Keller's (1993) conceptualization of brand equity. Subsequently, researchers (Netemeyer et al., 2004; Pappu et al., 2005) introduced a modified CBBE measure. Despite extensive research and significant advances over the last three decades in the area of brand equity conceptualization (e.g. Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993, 2001), measurement (e.g. Netemeyer et al., 2004; Pappu et al., 2005; Yoo & Donthu, 2001) and management (e.g. Yoo et al., 2000), our understanding of brand equity is yet to be fully explored. For example, Christodoulides and de Chernatony (2010) in their review paper reported six different conceptual thoughts and sixteen measures of consumer based brand equity (CBBE). The available measures of CBBE across cultures are biased towards its country of origin (Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2010). There exist gaps in global branding literature and the area offers the potential to advance and enrich the measurement scales and literature (Chabowski, Samiee, & Hult, 2013). Chabowski et al. (2013) examined 120 articles related to the global branding literature (GBL), and evaluated the knowledge structure of this area of research to date. They employed multidimensional scaling, leverage resource and capability-based paradigms, using the five underpinning knowledge groups (international branding strategy, brand positioning, brand/country origin, brand concept-image, and brand performance), to propose an agenda for future research by identifying the existing gaps. According to their findings, there is potential for research that advances and enriches the GBL. We respond to their call to fill the research gap by addressing perhaps the most important topic in branding literature – brand equity.

There are many studies analyzing national brands within the same country in repeated ways; however, the studies comparing the brand equity of foreign versus local brands are not many. It is interesting to report that research in some newly introduced measures of CBBE like

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masstige marketing is still in their infancy stage. Paul (2015) on call of existing literature extended the area of research of CBBE in terms of mass prestige approach and developed a measure − Masstige Mean score scale (MMSS) to measure the popularity of brands. This article attempts to contribute to the brand equity literature by advancing the understanding towards one of the least researched measures of brand equity – masstige marketing and analyses the competition between laptop brands in a developing country context.

"Masstige Marketing" is a strategic marketing term for market penetration of medium and large enterprises based on creating brand equity in terms of brand knowledge, likability, love and prestige. The concepts of brand love and brand attachment have received great attention in branding and consumer behavior research lately (Nguyen, Melewa, & Chen, 2013). The masstige strategy is based on the theory of downward brand extension to the masses. Masstige here is defined as "prestigious but attainable" as was proposed by Silverstein and Fiske (2003) in their Harvard Business Review article. In fact, Silverstein and Fiske (2003) coined the term "masstige," (short for mass prestige). Prestige, mass prestige and masstige are treated in the same fashion here. Mass prestige is vast in scope and it is even associated with brands targeted at lower income groups (Paul, 2015). It can be understood by the fact that every brand even if it is promoted using mass promotion can have some value of prestige (Truong, McColl, & Kitchen, 2009) associated with it. Masstige products are considered prestigious goods and priced between the middle and premium range. With the growing number of middle class consumers, and many trading up to higher levels of quality and taste, prestigious goods are no longer just for the upper-affluent, but also for mass-market consumers (Silverstein, Fiske, & Butman, 2008). Some scholars have called it Populence (Granot, Russelb, & Brashear-Alejandro, 2013). Hence, masstige is for masses.

The concept of associating prestige with brands is rooted in the ideology that consumers are deeply reflected by their possessions (Belk, 1988) and they tend to achieve their ideal-self using brands. Consumers in emerging countries like India tend to follow upper mobility (Nijman, 2006) as part of reaching their ideal self. Middle class in emerging markets is always in search of comfort in life and continuously aspires for raising living standards, thus giving rise to a new middle class (Kravets & Sandikci, 2014). These new middle class consumers consider the act of attaining status as their fundamental motive (Griskevicius & Kenrick, 2013). These people could be better targeted with reasonable price premium coupled with socially accepted prestige status of brand (Truong et al., 2009). This prestige associated with brands provides them high status in society. Masstige marketing asking reasonable premium and targeting middle class people is a boon strategy to tap the market. The only way to tap this huge market is by making the luxury/prestige products available for masses. Good news for marketers is that it can be attempted with downward stretch. Down stretch even in unrelated categories is possible (Klink, 2001). For those who fear from the negative impact on the parent brand as a result of down stretch of prestige brand, the sub-branding is a good option (Kirmani, Sood, & Bridges, 1999). It has become even easier today as even lower end brands are qualifying themselves as luxury or prestigious brands, which is resulting in the increased use of terms such as masstige (Kapferer & Vincent, 2009). Masstige marketing positively influence consumers' trust and satisfaction (Hong, Lee, & Yun, 2010), produces synergetic effects for achieving strong brand value in both core and extension brands (Kim & Ko, 2010). Mass prestige associated with brands help in shaping perceived quality and risk, therefore saves the cost of information search, which in turn positively influence purchase decision (Baek, Kim & Yu, 2010). Not a surprise that masstige marketing is considered as one of the three critical strategies for success of brands in foreign markets (Oh & Kim, 2011).

The concept of "masstige marketing" advocating the reach of prestige goods to masses seems like a unique buzzword. However, the research in this area is limited and still remains in its 'infancy' stage. The extant literature depicts that there has been some interest of scholars towards masstige marketing but it is not sufficient enough to take the construct towards maturity. Keller and Lehmann (2006) highlighted this when they showed concern over the lack of academic research on vertical extensions including downward stretch of prestige brands. Therefore, following prior research (Paul, 2015; Truong et al., 2009; Yoo et al., 2000; Yoo & Donthu, 2001), and call of literature, this study is an attempt to advance the understanding of the concept (mass prestige) in the context of a strategically important emerging market. Brand popularity of certain popular Asian and American brands in a foreign market in terms of Masstige Mean Index ("MMI") has been estimated to analyze the competition between brands in this study.

Brand equity in this study is defined in terms of mass prestige and popularity. This study seeks to provide insights for the brands to redesign their marketing strategies taking into account competition based on their score in terms of MMI. We identified that the foreign brands have captured significant and substantial market share in laptop sales during the last decade in emerging countries. Among the emerging economies, India is selected for this study for two strong reasons. First, India has been land of several kings and through its culture and belongings, consumers in India communicate their lavish belongings to society (Eng & Bogaert, 2010). Not everyone can fulfill this desire of being royal. But rising income among the middle class has made them shift towards products, which are perceived to be prestige products. Second, since India has been the second fastest growing emerging market for several years, this has resulted into huge demand for prestige products.

For the current study, laptop is chosen as product category for the following reasons: a) GDP per capita of India in 2016 was US $1709.4 as compared to US $57,466.8 of USA (World-Bank, 2016). A nice Dell laptop would cost at least $1200 in India. India's low per capita income along with higher aspirations of Indians make a foreign laptop brand like Dell a masstige item; b) there are evidences in literature which consider laptop as a worldly possession (Batra & Ghoshal, 2017). It is not new to report that having worldly possessions are among the legitimate ways to display status and prestige; c) a laptop is found to be a status product which scores high on scales measuring status signaling (Kassim, Bogari, Salamah, & Zain, 2016; Wang & Wallendorf, 2006). There are studies, which stated that people use brands to maintain their occupational prestige (Geiger-Oneto, Gelb, Walker, & Hess, 2013). Thus, laptops being important occupational products in this digital era fits well in the study of prestige brands; d) Truong et al. (2009) extended the conceptualization of Silverstein and Fiske (2003) and classified Ralph Lauren Polo shirts sold in outlets for $9.00 or Swaroski crystals with prices as low as $20.00 as new luxury goods belonging to the category of masstige brands. Even brands promoted using mass targeting have some prestige associated with it (Truong et al., 2009); e) Specifically in India, consumption of prestige brand is not only associated with its expensiveness and elusiveness but part of it is about the brand being a foreign brand especially western (Eng & Bogaert, 2010); A laptop brand is considered as a status symbol in India; and f) Paul (2015) has specifically highlighted that laptop brands (he even named three out of the four brands in present study – Dell, HP and Acer) are appropriate subjects for masstige marketing strategy analysis. In this context, we selected the best-selling laptop brands to study the extent of their success and popularity in India in terms of their mass prestige. This motivated us to critically analyze and measure brand equity of laptop brands for comparison in terms of mass prestige. This paper compares and contrasts the mass prestige associated with American (HP, Dell) and Asian (Lenovo, Acer) laptop brands. Consequently, this study aims to contribute towards the development of masstige

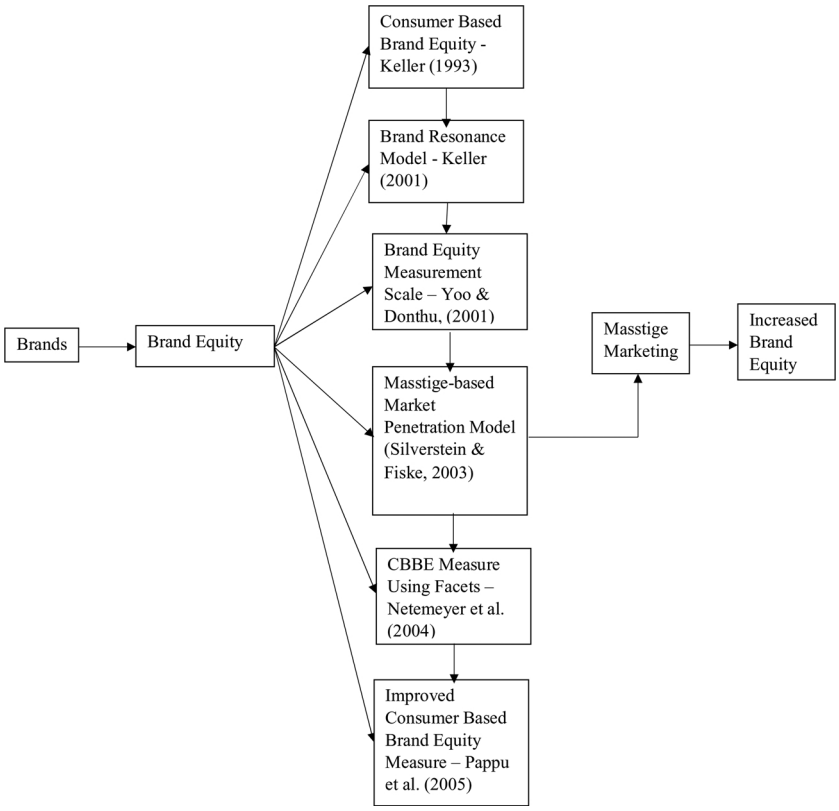



**Fig. 1.** Theoretical Foundation and Extension.

marketing theory and help managers to examine their marketing strategies' effectiveness. This study would aid firms, particularly, multinational firms in crafting their marketing plans, by determining and comparing their MMI values in a foreign market.

## 2. Theoretical foundation and extension

In order to position this article in a manner that display similarities and differences with extant literature and frameworks, we briefly present the established theoretical frameworks for brand equity measurement and management to record the theoretical emergence of mass prestige and its placement at relevant place on the continuum of brand equity. Based on this exercise, we describe different dimensions of masstige approach developed in this study for strategic brand management. Keeping the aforesaid objective in mind, we identify and critically examine the following prominent theoretical frameworks/ measures in this context for comparison and to build up our case for using the masstige mean scale and index in this study (See Fig. 1).

### 2.1. Customer-based brand equity (CBBE) framework (Keller, 1993)

Keller's (1993) CBBE framework grounded in consumer behavior theory, is characterized by three theoretical dimensions (Keller, 2016). They are: (1) Differential effects created by a brand; (2) Brand knowledge defined broadly as any type of mental brand association; and (3) Response to a wide variety of different marketing variables. The concept of brand knowledge can be broken down into two key components: a) Brand awareness consisting of brand recall and recognition; and b) Brand image characterized by strength, favorability and uniqueness.

### 2.2. Brand resonance model (Keller, 2001)

This model was first introduced by Keller (2001) grounded in four components- Behavioral loyalty, attitudinal attachment, sense of community and active engagement. Brand resonance is defined in terms of the extent to which a consumer is in 'synch' with a brand. Brands with strong resonance benefit from increased customer loyalty. Keller (2001) presented a pyramid model with a series of layers to build resonance: i. brand salience (how easily or often a consumer thinks of the brand); ii. Brand performance and imagery; iii. Judgement and feelings; and iv. Resonance.

### 2.3. Brand equity measurement scale (Yoo & Donthu, 2001)

Yoo and Donthu (2001) developed a multidimensional measure of consumer-based brand equity and assessed its psychometric properties to fill the gap in the literature. Consumer-based means measurement of cognitive and behavioral brand equity at the individual consumer level through a consumer survey. Unlike most previous studies, they developed a measure of brand equity that is reliable, and acceptable. In addition, their measure's latent structure is assessed for generalizability across multiple samples drawn from several cultures, specifically, Koreans, Korean Americans and Americans.

### 2.4. Masstige-based market penetration model (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003)

In 2003, Silverstein and Fiske (2003) contributed to the literature of brand equity with their seminal article on Masstige marketing, and proposed a masstige based market penetration model. According to this model, "Masstige" marketing strategy is a market penetration approach for medium and large firms. With the booming middle class, more

consumers are trading up to higher quality products which are no longer just for the affluent, but also for mass-market consumers (Silverstein & Fiske 2003). The term "Masstige" was derived based on recent consumer behavior in the United States (US). In the US, middle class consumers with relatively high incomes tend to seek high quality and low-price products (Silverstein & Fiske 2003). As opposed to traditional luxury brands, masstige brands sell at a relatively competitive price and boast mass-artisanal production, providing certain exclusivity to consumers (Silverstein & Fiske 2003). With the emergence of the masstige model, brand equity was introduced to one more dimension of its measurement. The Masstige model states that brand equity can also be operationalized using masstige marketing.

### 2.5. CBBE measure using facets (Netemeyer et al., 2004)

Netemeyer et al. (2004) added a measure to the literature of brand equity (CBBE). Building on the existing frameworks of brand equity, Netemeyer et al. (2004) extended the understanding of CBBE from the perspective of primary facets, which contributes to Brand Equity. These facets are: perceived quality, perceived value of the cost, uniqueness and willingness to pay price premium for brand.

### 2.6. Improved CBBE measure (Pappu et al., 2005)

A set of brand equity dimensions – brand awareness, associations, perceived quality, and loyalty can be assessed through survey research (Keller, 1993, 2001; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). However, this set of dimensions were not unanimously accepted – For example, Pappu et al. (2005) critically examined the multi-dimensional brand equity scale developed by Yoo and Donthu (2001) and argued that brand awareness and associations should be seen as same dimension or variable. In this context, in order to improve the generalizability and reliability, Pappu et al. (2005) constructed a scale to measure CBBE, incorporating brand personality variable. They used sample of actual consumers from Australia in two product categories-cars (Toyota, Mitusbishi and Suzuki) and televisions (Sony, Hitachi and Toshiba) across six brands. Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Structural Equation Modelling were employed as tools for analysis.

Grounded in consumer behavior theory, the above models/measures of brand equity offer marketers a comprehensive set of tools to help them devise branding strategies and tactics to build long term brand equity. However, because these models/measures/frameworks are often viewed as tools for marketers, much of this research has not been incorporated into broader approaches or strategy issues. In the masstige scale, brand knowledge and awareness (Keller, 1993, 2001; Pappu et al., 2005; Yoo & Donthu, 2001) as sources of brand equity have been retained. Along with it, other factors such as perceived quality, excitement and status are also incorporated. As a result, we suggest that masstige approach is promising in terms of future research potential as it integrates marketing and strategy to understand the sources of strategic marketing and brand management with a broad and interdisciplinary perspective. Masstige approach and scale (See factors/components in Table 1) would also be useful to examine whether an expensive brand has succeeded in creating higher mass prestige value, compared to competing brands that are priced at low level. The above discussion on theoretical development of brand equity establishes mass prestige associated with brands or masstige marketing as an important measure of brand equity.

## 3. Review of literature

It is well documented in literature that purchase of prestige items is associated with conspicuous consumption. At the same time, usability, quality, life enrichment are also important factors that affect the purchase of prestige brands (Wiedmann, Hennigs, & Siebels, 2009). Consumer would purchase a prestige product for satisfying common needs like status (Geiger-Oneto et al., 2013) to more abstract not generally talked about needs like 'to defend the self-threat' (Batra & Ghoshal, 2017). The argument that consumers today have become value conscious and prefer to choose brands over counterfeit products, highlight the importance of brands in their mind for communicating status or prestige. It is also important to note that a consumer perceives a brand as a prestige brand when it has symbolism; congruency in user and brand image; usability for status and conspicuous consumption (O'Cass & Frost, 2002); which results into clear identification and also generate word of mouth publicity (Kuenzel & Halliday, 2008) for the brand. Prestige associated with brands can also be looked as an important positioning idea (Bhat & Reddy, 1998). Therefore, selling prestige products is about creating a perception in the mind of consumers that the product is rare (Catry, 2003; Kapferer, 2012). Therefore, understanding, exploring factors responsible for these perceived differences in prestige products is an important contribution to the less researched field of masstige, which this article is trying to address.

Studies attempting to understand the perceptual differences about constructs across countries have cited multiple sources for perceived difference. Among these, especially for cross country studies, culture is cited as an important factor. It is not an exception for mass prestige also. Culture is found out to be impacting the customer equity drivers. For example, customer equity drivers primarily influence the western culture compared to eastern cultures (Zhang, Doom, & Leeflang, 2014). Thus, it is important to consider culture for desired results of masstige marketing. Other scholars, like Brandt, Mortanges, Bluemelhuber, and Riel (2011) have also advocated considering culture at the initial level of measurement of prestige and related constructs associated with brands. They routed the measurement of brand reputation through associative networks (picture analysis and metaphor-based elicitation techniques are used). The argument of cultural importance while measuring prestige have found support in studies like Adams (2011) who found that cultures like China relates prestige goods more with utilitarian use which is in contrast to the United States which has a different culture. Studies also confirmed that Asian consumers feel better in having prestigious western brands (Kapferer, 2012). Particularly, consumers in emerging economies prefer foreign brands (Zhou, Yang, & Hui, 2010) high on awareness level. For example, Lenovo (one of the brand in this study) has an innovative strategy of "Dressing itself as foreign" which is very effective in some of the emerging economies. Lenovo is local for china and strongly built up using this strategy (Zhou et al., 2010). This entice us to question- how consumers in India see the brands of different countries/culture in terms of prestige associated with them. The dynamic culture of India along with the status of second fastest growing economy, motivated us to carry out this study as literature is devoid of prestige brand studies in the context of emerging markets, specifically India. Hence, the first research question is proposed as:

- RQ1: Is the mass prestige value of American and Asian Laptop brands in an emerging Asian market – India same or different?

As available in extant literature, factors affecting purchase of masstige and luxury brands may be divided in three broad categories: group level factors, individual and psychological factors (Eng & Bogaert, 2010). Further scrutiny of literature for factors influencing the prestige and luxury associated with brands results into aspects like surrounding environment (Hung et al., 2011); conspicuousness, uniqueness, social status, emotional attachment, quality (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999); social goals (Wilcox, Kim, & Sen, 2009; Bian & Forsythe, 2012); culture

(Bian & Forsythe, 2012); rarity (Nia & Zaichkowsky, 2000); globalness of brand (Steenkamp, Batra, & Alden, 2003); identity, symbolic meaning, brand image (Bian & Forsythe, 2012); trust and satisfaction (Paul, 2015) etc. Whereas plenty of work is reported on the factors cited above and there is unambiguous conformance to these factors and their role in impacting prestige of brands.

We tried to look at some rather less explored associations of prestige and luxury especially for the Indian market while extending first research question and developing the next two research questions. For example, for a long time prestige and luxury has been associated with rarity and if everyone has this brand it's not a prestigious brand (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). Conversely, there are some contrary views reported in the literature. For example, Kapferer, Klippert, and Lepruox (2014) reported in their article how Tiffany (luxury jeweler in America) has detached itself from the exclusivity but yet was perceived as luxury and prestige brand. Authors called it a good news for marketers as for luxury brands it will "*…find a balance between exclusion and inclusion…*"(p 10).

In addition to this, social status and social value associated with brand is a factor responsible for its purchase and it is considered as antecedent for prestige associated with brands. Researchers like Vigneron and Johnson (1999) have called bandwagon effect as motivation for association of social value with brands, which is supported by other researches also (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012). The Bandwagon effect states that people will purchase a prestige brand because others are purchasing it and it is popular (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012). This is absolutely opposite to the principle of rarity. Kastanakis and Balabanis (2012) proved negative relationship between uniqueness and bandwagon consumption. This study found that there are people who want to play safe by following what others are doing. These people are bandwagon consumers who follow "follow the Joneses" notion. This points out that prestige may be associated with a brand because it is the most used brand. Literature is yet to be successfully introduced to this aspect in Indian context. This persuades us to explore the relationship between the popularity of a brand and prestige associated with it. We propose to operationalize the exploration of this relationship with the following research question:

- RQ2: Find out the mass prestige value associated with best-selling laptop brands in an emerging market – India?

In continuation to the discussion over the principle of rarity for prestige brands, uniqueness is also an important factor resulting in their purchase. Theory of prestige and luxury for brands emphasizes on the perceived uniqueness, which consumers associate with brands. There are studies which argued that 'being first in market' and 'being original' is a value associated with social identity and uniqueness (Barnett, Feng, & Luo, 2012). Similar results are supported by Gao and Knight (2007) when their study proved that first mover brands are considered to be genuine and unique as compared to others. Whereas such indirect associations can be formulated for relationship between the first mover advantage and the prestige associated with brands, but no direct study is reported (as per our knowledge) on this association for Indian market. Therefore, we propose to explore this relationship through the following research question:

- RQ3: Examine whether there is evidence to establish the link between first mover advantage and mass prestige value.

### 3.1. Hypotheses development

To address the first research question, we operationalize the concept of country-of-origin for understanding the prestige value associated with brands from different country/cultures (America, China and Taiwan in this study). Bilkey and Nes (1982) argued that country-of-origin act as an important information cue for consumer which influences product decisions and plays an important role in the process of building brand equity. In fact country-of-origin is considered as antecedent of brand equity (Yasin, Noor, & Mohamad, 2007). We therefore use the conceptual framework of brand equity suggested by Yasin et al. (2007) which summarizes that country-of-origin influences brand equity dimensions and hence brand equity.[2] If masstige is taken as one the measures of brand equity than effect of country-of-origin of brand on masstige is an important proposition to emphasis.

Consumer-based brand equity is significantly associated with both the macro and micro images of the country-of-origin of the brand (Pappu, Quester, & Cooksey, 2007; Roth, Diamantopoulos, & Montesinos, 2008). Studies on varied impact of country-of-origin of brands on consumers have kept the attention of scholars alive for a long time (Bilkey & Nes, 1982; Chao, 2001; Hong & Wyer, 1989; Johansson, Douglas, & Nonaka, 1985; Laroche, Papadopoulos, Heslop, & Mourali, 2005; Leclerc, Schmitt, & Dube, 1994; Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). A product or brand's evaluation by consumer is impacted by the information of country-of-origin of this brand (Leclerc et al., 1994). Recent studies are extending this understanding by finding direct relationship between brands from specific country and prestige associated with them (Lee & Nguyen, 2017). Vohra and Gupta (2017) in the Indian context depicted that Indian consumers have predisposition towards foreign brands and it has a significant relation with materialistic value. The study highlighted "Reputation" as one dimension of predisposition towards foreign brands and it contributes towards the materialistic value (Vohra & Gupta, 2017). Moreover, Indian consumers stereotypes the products as per their country-of-origin (Bilkey & Nes, 1982). In case of laptops, research suggest that Indians prefer foreign brands as compared to Indian brands (Mukherjee & Sundararajan, 2012) and hence the effect of country-of-origin is wide and deep.

Following the prior research on the relationship between country-of-origin and brand equity (Phau, & Prendergast, 1999; Pappu et al., 2007; Pappu & Quester, 2010; Steenkamp et al., 2003), we specify hypothesis 1 (H1) as follows.

**H1.** There is significant difference in the mass prestige value associated with brands of different country of origin.

To address the second research question, it is assumed that prestige today is not limited to the concept of rarity. It is expanding its consumer base like never before. Kapferer and Laurent (2016) calls it luxury paradox. For instance,

> "*On the demand side, modern luxury has broadened its consumer base well beyond the 'happy few.'*" (Kapferer & Laurent, 2016; p 332). "*… For millennia, thus, the concept has been linked with the "happy few," the aristocracy, or the very rich and powerful (Castarède, 2009). This may today appear inconsistent with the high and continuous increase in sales of the luxury sector.*" (Kapferer & Laurent, 2016; p 333).

Such evidences point towards a potential link between increasing sales and prestige and makes such questions possible – can best-selling brands have prestige associated with it. A brand high on awareness level tends to perform better in sales figures. Foreign brands with well-known country-of-origin and brands with large market share are expected to be scoring high on prestige (Steenkamp et al., 2003). For example, concept of best-selling brands and prestige can also be understood by the evident linkage between the best-selling book and the prestige associated with it. For example, an author whose book is topping the sales charts might become prestigious author because of increased sales.

Another perspective of this dimension of prestige is the

[2] Yasin et al. (2007) started building the argument taking information processing theory as base and said that information cues becomes the base for generating beliefs towards products. Country of origin as information cue plays important role in formulation of brand equity.

consideration that consumers operationalize luxury or prestige associated with brands through the lens of the society that they are living in. In other words, they want to achieve social recognition through prestige brands. Hence, for Indian consumers, it is not only that the consumer sees the brand to be a prestige brand but also it is the society, which should accept the brand as prestige brand (Shukla & Purani, 2012). All brands under this study are best-selling brands with good awareness level in India. In this context, Paul (2015) showed that a best-selling brand would have higher masstige value in terms of MMI with the example of Louis Vuitton in Japan.

Thus, we propose the second hypothesis as follows.

**H2.** Best-selling brands would tend to have higher mass prestige value in that market.

To address the third research question, we reviewed the literature for studies exploring relationship between premium/prestige brands and exclusiveness of brands with first mover advantage. This review revealed that there are few studies which states that first mover advantage is an important reason for brands becoming premium (Steenkamp, 2017). Being first mover not only gives identity to organizations and enhances the idea of originality in mind of consumers (Barnett et al., 2012) but also positively influence market share (Robinson, 1988; Michael, 2003), competitive advantage (Kerin, Varadarajan, & Peterson, 1992), cost reduction (Mueller, 1997), performance (VanderWerf & Mahon, 1997), sustainable pricing advantage (Makadok, 1998), high potential returns (Robinson, Kalyanaram, & Urban, 1994), profit (Michael, 2003), favorable decision making process (Grewal, Cline, & Davies, 2003), broader product lines (Kalyanaram, Robinson, & Urban, 1995) etc. Many of the advantages listed above are directly or indirectly associated with prestige brands. General conceptions recorded in literature states multiple advantages of being a first mover in market but there is absence of studies exploring its impact on prestige of brands with few exceptions like Paul (2015) where he propounded that the first mover brands tend to create higher masstige value than late movers into a market. This study will attempt to explore the proposition of first mover advantage leading to formulation of brand preferred by customers (Kerin et al., 1992) for laptop category. Therefore, hypothesis 3 (H3) is formulated as follows (Fig. 2).

**H3.** First mover brands are likely to have higher mass prestige value in a society.

## 4. Method

### 4.1. Selection of laptop brands

This study is an effort to measure the mass prestige, which Indian consumers associate with American and Asian laptop brands. Indian market is huge with over 1.2 billion people (Paul & Mas, 2016) with a potential of approximately 400 million laptop sales. Laptop brands in this study are selected in the following way: i) Four Best-selling laptop brands are identified as per the 2014-15 statistics, from Indian market; ii) Country-of-origin of these top selling laptop brands are identified. The process resulted into selection of following laptop brands – HP and Dell (American), Lenovo (Chinese), and Acer (Taiwanese). These four brands are the top 4 best-selling laptop brands in India. HP has the largest marker share (26%) followed by Dell (23.4%). Lenovo is at number three (19.8%) and Acer is at number four (10.1%) (Business Line, 2015; Mishra, 2015). Among these four brands, two brands are of American origin (HP and Dell) and the other two are put under the category of Asian brands (Lenovo – Chinese origin Brand, and Acer – Taiwan origin Brand).

### 4.2. Data collection and analysis

A review of the literature showed that despite the efforts to measure brand equity in the past, no major effort is documented to measure the mass prestige associated with a brand except two major studies, i) Masstige Mean Score Scale (MMSS) propounded by Paul (2015) and ii) the study by Truong et al. (2009). MMSS consist of 10 items measuring the prestige value on a seven point likert scale is operationalized to measure mass prestige in current study. The responses across 10 items can be summed up to arrive at Masstige Mean Index (MMI). The value of MMI depicts the extent of prestige which consumers are perceived to be associating with a brand. Higher the masstige value, greater the awareness, prestige and vice versa. The benchmark values suggested while constructing the MMI to interpret the findings regarding the prestige value of brand using MMI score are strictly followed in this study. Questionnaire for the current study was prepared in line with the 10 items Masstige scale (See Table 1). In addition, demographic variables were also added to carry out the study at various levels. This questionnaire was floated live using the internet and some people also filled up in person. As MMI is used to operationalize the masstige value, so the comparison of masstige value of brands is done by comparing the mean of brands under study in accordance with the research questions and hypothesis as suggested by Paul (2015).

### 4.3. Sampling

Convenience sampling method was adopted to collect the responses. Online link of the questionnaire prepared using web survey tool (Google Forms) was placed on social media (Facebook and WhatsApp) and sent to e-mail ids of potential respondents using which they submitted their responses. Respondents were also approached with physical questionnaire. Anyone who own and uses a laptop among these four brands can be a participant in this study. In total 260 responses were received. All the respondents answered the same questions from the masstige questionnaire for four brands.

Responses on the Masstige Questionnaire of 260 respondents revealed that 107 and 81 people owned Dell and HP respectively. There were 41 Lenovo and 31 Acer laptop owners among the respondents. Almost 74% of the respondents in this study were male and 26% were female. Majority of respondents in the study were young adults below 30 years of age (67.3%). Around 30% of respondents were above 30 years of age. We carried out T-test, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Discriminant analysis in this study.

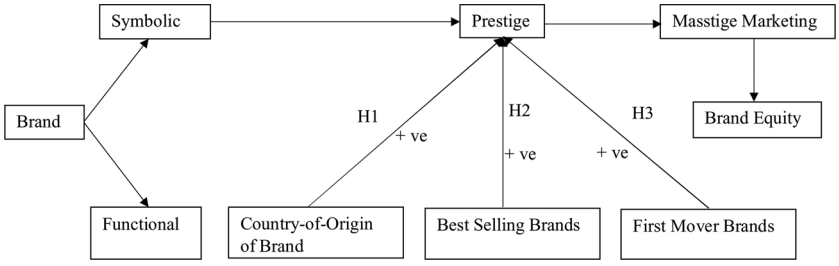



**Fig. 2.** Hypothesis and Scope of this Study.

## 5. Findings

The data collected through this research revealed that American brands HP and Dell are the most preferred laptop brands in India. This corroborated with the real industry market share statistics. It further depicts that American brands are preferred as compared to Asian brands of laptops in India.

Reliability and validity are essential components of any scale. Any scale should be first checked for both reliability and validity before accepting the results generated from the scale (Netemeyer, Bearden, & Sharma, 2003). Hence, the masstige questionnaire was tested for its reliability and validity both. Reliability test for the questionnaire was carried out using correlation analysis. Under correlation analysis, cronbach alpha and item-total statistics were estimated to analyze the reliability of the scale. Application of cronbach alpha returned a value of 0.86 for MMSS. As reliability is a measure of, whether all items in the scale are measuring one and same construct or not, each item of questionnaire is analyzed for its contribution in the reliability of the scale using "cronbach alpha if item deleted". The value of "cronbach alpha if item deleted" is found out to be less than 0.86 for all items of the scale depicting that no item of the scale is advancing away from the cohesiveness of measuring one construct and hence the scale is taken ahead without any change. This establishes the independent contribution of each and every item to the reliability of the scale concluding that the scale is reliable.

Validity of the Masstige Questionnaire is examined using factor loading. Sum of squared factor loading for the scale is checked for its value. A value above 0.5 establishes the construct validity of the scale. All items of the scale were subjected to factor analysis using principal component analysis as extraction method. The factor loading for each item was squared and added. The resulting value was divided by the number of items (10). This resulted in a value of 0.51 (which is above 0.50) establishing the construct validity of the masstige questionnaire for this study (See Table 1).

After establishing the reliability and validity of the masstige questionnaire, the masstige score for all the four brands of laptop was calculated. MMI score was calculated by taking the mean of items individually using the data of all respondents and summing this mean for all the 10 statements. Of all the four brands under study, American brand HP is found to have the highest score (40.65) on masstige mean index (MMI). Dell, another American brand followed the HP in term of MMI with the second highest score (39.09). Acer, Taiwanese brand, was found in the third position with a score of 36.08 and Chinese brand Lenovo stands last with a MMI score of 34.78 (Table 2). This is in accordance with hypothesis 1.

These results reveal that the best-selling laptop brands in India do have higher masstige value as outlined in hypothesis 2. However, abiding by the benchmark for MMI score suggested by Paul (2015), HP and Dell have not been able to build the real mass prestige in the mind of people but there is a possibility that both these brands may do so in the future. (A brand needs to have a minimum score of 50 out of 70 on MMI to rate it as a prestigious brand in the study market and a total index score of 60 is required to be classified as a top-of mind brand). It can be inferred that HP and Dell are not yet perceived as the top of mind prestige brands in Indian market even though their masstige value is much higher than their competitors Acer and Lenovo. MMI score of Lenovo and Acer depicts that they have not been well received in the study market and these brands are way behind HP and Dell. This implies that there are more opportunities and potential for managers of these brands to create mass prestige and build brand equity. Table 2 reveals that there is substantial difference between the MMI score of American brands and Asian brands of laptop. But this difference is minimal within the brands of same country-of-origin (for instance, American brands). The masstige values of HP and Dell (both American brands) in terms of MMI score are very close to each other (40.65 and 39.09 respectively). The difference between the MMI score of two Asian brands (Lenovo – 34.78 and Acer – 36.80) under study is 2.02.

To report a better understanding about this narrow difference

**Table 1**
Construct Validity of Masstige Questionnaire.

| Statement | Factor Loading | Factor Loading Squared | Factor Loading Squared/Number of Statements |
|---|---|---|---|
| I like my Laptop Brand | 0.52 | 0.28 | 0.51 |
| I feel, I like to buy this lafigptop brand because of mass prestige. | 0.66 | 0.44 | |
| I tend to pay high price for my laptop brand for maintaining my status in society. | 0.80 | 0.64 | |
| I consider my laptop brand as a top of mind brand in my country/state/district. | 0.65 | 0.42 | |
| I would like to recommend my laptop brand to friends and relatives. | 0.71 | 0.51 | |
| Nothing is more exciting than my laptop brand. | 0.67 | 0.45 | |
| I believe my laptop brand is known for high quality. | 0.80 | 0.64 | |
| I believe my laptop brand is of international standard. | 0.79 | 0.62 | |
| I love to buy my laptop brand regardless of the price. | 0.69 | 0.47 | |
| I believe that people in my country/state/district consider my laptop brand as a synonym for prestige. | 0.79 | 0.62 | |

**Table 2**
Masstige Mean Index.

| Statements | Brand | Dell | HP | Lenovo | Acer |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I like my Laptop Brand | Mean | 3.93 | 4.01 | 3.44 | 3.42 |
| I feel, I like to buy this laptop brand because of mass prestige | | 3.85 | 3.84 | 3.32 | 3.32 |
| I tend to pay high price for my laptop brand for maintaining my status in society. | | 2.57 | 3.15 | 2.66 | 2.74 |
| I consider my laptop brand as a top of mind brand in my country/state/district. | | 3.96 | 3.95 | 3.10 | 3.39 |
| I would like to recommend my laptop brand to friends and relatives. | | 4.64 | 5.00 | 4.49 | 4.58 |
| Nothing is more exciting than my laptop brand. | | 3.18 | 3.35 | 2.83 | 3.45 |
| I believe my laptop brand is known for high quality. | | 4.73 | 4.88 | 4.27 | 4.48 |
| I believe my laptop brand is of international standard. | | 5.10 | 4.78 | 4.22 | 4.16 |
| I love to buy my laptop brand regardless of the price. | | 3.62 | 3.86 | 3.24 | 4.00 |
| I believe that people in my country/state/district consider my laptop brand as a synonym for prestige. | | 3.51 | 3.84 | 3.22 | 3.26 |
| MMI Score | | 39.09 | 40.65 | 34.78 | 36.80 |

**Table 3**
Mean Difference Test within Brands of Same Region.

| Region | Mean Difference Test within Brands of Same Region | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Laptop Brands | Mean | T | df | Sig. |
| America | Dell | 39.09 | −1.07 | 186 | 0.285 |
| | HP | 40.65 | | | |
| Asia | Lenovo | 34.78 | −0.696 | 70 | 0.489 |
| | Acer | 36.80 | | | |

**Table 4**
T test for Country of Origin of Brands.

| Mean Difference Test for Region | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Region | N | Mean | t | Df | Sig. |
| America | 188 | 39.76 | 2.544 | 110 | 0.01 |
| Asia | 72 | 35.65 | | | |

between the laptop brands of same country-of-origin/region, *t*-test is applied for MMI scores of HP and Dell; Lenovo and Acer separately. The application of *t*-test is to investigate whether the two brands being so close to each other in their masstige value actually differs from each other or not.

*T*-test is applied taking masstige score as testing variable and HP and Dell as grouping variable. Results of *t*-test applied to HP and Dell revealed that MMI score of HP and Dell is not significantly different from each other. This depicts that the masstige value of HP and Dell is not different in the minds of people in India. None of these two brands are perceived as prestige brands in India. T test application on the MMI scores of Lenovo and Acer also gave similar results depicting that Lenovo and Acer are no different from each other in terms of their masstige value (Table 3). Overall assessment of Lenovo and Acer shows that none of these brands have been able to establish themselves as prestige brands. The difference in scores of MMI in American (HP and Dell) and Asian (Lenovo and Acer) brands concludes that though none of the four brands in the study are accepted as prestige brands in India but still the American brands (HP and Dell) have the potential to be perceived as prestige as well as top of mind brands among the consumers in India. Above analysis did not result into any difference between the prestige values of laptop brands of the same region.

Addressing our goal of comparing the American and Asian brands for their masstige value, *t*-test is again applied keeping the region (American and Asian) as grouping variable and masstige score as testing variable. The results of application of *t*-test depicts that there exists a significant difference between MMI scores of American and Asian brands. Mean value of MMI scores reveals that American brands (HP and Dell) are potentially prestige brands as compared to Asian brands (Lenovo and Acer); still, it should be noted that this difference is not too much (Table 4). American brands being preferred to Asian brands and perceived as better than their Asian counterparts is important to note. The scores of MMI for all the four brands states that laptop brands under study targeted to middle class Indians are not seen as prestige brands. This strongly supports the hypothesis 1 as the brands having American country-of-origin are comparatively more prestigious than their Asian counterparts. It can be concluded that the country-of-origin of a brand have an impact on its perception about its prestige.

To have a clear and deeper understanding of the perception of Indian consumers for top four laptops brands regarding their prestige value, the results were analyzed for different demographics (gender and age). In order to understand the difference – if any – in the opinion of Indian respondents regarding the prestige value for the brands of laptop under study between male and female, *t*-test is again used with gender as a grouping variable. The result of *t*-test for all the brands showed

**Table 5**
T test for Gender.

| Brand of the Laptop | Gender of the Respondent | Mean | Std. Deviation | t-test for Equality of Means | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | T | df | Sig. |
| Dell | Male | 38.37 | 11.08 | −1.165 | 105 | 0.24 |
| | Female | 41.22 | 10.66 | | | |
| HP | Male | 41.09 | 7.72 | 0.625 | 24.30 | 0.53 |
| | Female | 39.30 | 12.08 | | | |
| Lenovo | Male | 34.00 | 12.15 | −0.609 | 39 | 0.54 |
| | Female | 36.66 | 14.16 | | | |
| Acer | Male | 37.27 | 11.91 | 0.343 | 29.00 | 0.73 |
| | Female | 35.66 | 11.64 | | | |

non-significant results stating that male and female respondents do not see the prestige value associated with four brands in this study differently. Whereas the earlier results states that the brands of the same region are not seen as differently from overall perspective, current results depict that the same is true at the gender level. Further detailed analysis of this difference revealed that male who own a HP laptop do have more converged opinion about the prestige value of HP brand than those male or female who own other brands of laptop (standard deviation for male owning HP brand is minimum among all the possible combinations of male and female for brands of laptop). This means that the number of people whose opinion vary from the average opinion of the users are the least for HP brand. On the other hand, the same analyses gave opposite picture for Lenovo brand. Females who own Lenovo laptops are having more difference of opinion about the prestige value of Lenovo (Standard deviation is maximum for the females having Lenovo brand) (See Table 5).

This opinion of respondents about the prestige for the laptop brands is also analyzed under age category. T test is applied for two groups of age as grouping variable (below 30 years and above 30 years) for all the four brands of laptop to find out if the opinion differs for different age group individuals or not. The results of *t*-test state that significant difference exists in the opinion about the prestige value of Dell and Lenovo between the tested age groups of respondents. The results reported non-significant difference for HP and Acer (See Table 6).

Meanwhile, people below the age of 30 years found Dell to be having the potential of building itself into a prestige brand while the consumers above 30 years of age think differently. People above 30 years perceive that Dell is not a prestige brand and they do not think that it can be a prestige brand. It can be concluded that the young people associate the probability of prestige with Dell, but older people do not feel so. The results for HP were not significant. This concludes though young consumers below 30 years treat HP to be comparatively more prestigious than older consumers but this difference should not be treated as different. T test on age further substantiate the findings of Lenovo for the most differentiated responses about its prestige status, as it reveals that this difference in opinion is because of respondents above 30 years of age. The results depicts that for Lenovo, respondents below 30 years are less converged for their opinion about the prestigious status of Lenovo. Lenovo as mentioned above, is not perceived as a prestige brand and it is not perceived to be among the category, which is marked as the potential prestige brand. Still significant results are reported for age suggesting that the young respondents (below 30 years) are slightly less rigid in their opinion about the Lenovo being a non-prestige brand of laptop.

*T*-test revealed that American and Asian laptop brands have different mass prestige associated with them. As part of detailed analysis, *t*-test is applied at micro level (for demographics like age and gender) to understand the masstige scores across demographics. T test gave significant results for region (American/Asian) and age.

To validate the results of *t*-test on region (American and Asian) and age, ANOVA was applied taking MMI score as dependent variable and

**Table 6**
T test for Age.

| Brand of the Laptop | Age Category | Mean | Std. Deviation | t-test for Equality of Means | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | t | df | Sig. |
| Dell | Below 30 Years | 43.25 | 9.46 | 5.934 | 105.00 | 0.00 |
| | 30 Years and Above | 31.84 | 9.75 | | | |
| HP | Below 30 Years | 41.43 | 9.51 | 1.331 | 79.00 | 0.18 |
| | 30 Years and Above | 38.42 | 6.78 | | | |
| Lenovo | Below 30 Years | 38.25 | 13.25 | 2.18 | 39.00 | 0.03 |
| | 30 Years and Above | 29.88 | 10.21 | | | |
| Acer | Below 30 Years | 38.39 | 11.89 | 1.29 | 29.00 | 0.20 |
| | 30 Years and Above | 32.25 | 10.29 | | | |

laptop brands as factor variable. Application of ANOVA gave significant results depicting that there is difference between the MMI score of four brands under study (Table 7). To understand where this difference actually lies, post hoc test (Games-Howell) was applied. Results revealed that among the four brands, MMI score of HP is different from that of Lenovo. This result is in support of the earlier result which depicts that there is difference in prestige associated with American (HP) and Asian (Lenovo) brands.

To further validate the results of *t*-test and ANOVA, a more robust analysis tool – Discriminant Analysis was applied taking the region (American/Asian) as dependent variable and MMI Score along with income, age of respondent as predictor variables. (Discriminant analysis is a tool, which makes linear combination of independent variables in such a way that it discriminates the groups in dependent variable in best possible way in terms of independent variables). Application of discriminant analysis here would generate a discriminant function, which would conclude about the difference in groups being tested (American and Asian Laptop Brands) in terms of independent variables (Masstige Score, Income and Age collectively).

Application of discriminant analysis can be substantiated from the documented literature (Malhotra & Satyabhushan, 2016), which advocate it to be a great tool to examine the differences between groups in terms of some specific variables (Masstige Score, Income and Age collectively in this study). To apply discriminant analysis, 70% of total responses (260) were randomly selected as analysis sample, rest 30% was reserved as validation sample. As a result, SPSS selected 187 responses (71.9%) as analysis sample. The discriminant function generated from analysis was found to be significant. The results showed that among the three predictor variables (Masstige score, Income and Age), only Masstige score is contributing significantly to the discriminant function. Moreover, the coefficient value (Standardized and unstandardized) for Masstige Score is maximum among the three predictor variables in discriminant function (Table 8). Comparison of three applications (t-test, ANOVA and discriminant analysis) has one result in common that the laptops of two regions can be differentiated on the basis of masstige score (As *t*-test, ANOVA and discriminant analysis generated significant results for masstige score for laptops of these two regions).

## 6. Discussion

Many consumers in India perceive the brand “America” as a role model country. The results of the study show high masstige score for American brands (See Table 2), which are also the top best-selling laptop brands in India. Hence, hypothesis 1 (H1) and hypothesis 2 (H2) are supported. The empirical evidence for accepting hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2 corroborate with the generalized findings of prior research (Pappu & Quester, 2010; Pappu, Quester, & Cooksey, 2006; Roth et al., 2008; for hypothesis 1 and Paul, 2015 for hypothesis 2). The preference towards American brands as far as prestige associated with brands are concerned is linked to the legacy of country-of-origin. After the implementation of structural adjustment programs grounded in liberalization, privatization and globalization policies, in 1991, many cultural changes are observed in India (Ghosh, 2011) and it is true even for future (Arnett, 2002). These liberalized policies have led to westernization (Nadeem, 2009) of Indian culture. Westernization as a concept represents America and its culture. This is a possible explanation of perceiving the brands originating from America as to be potential

**Table 7**
ANOVA on Masstige Scores of Laptop Brands.

| Laptop Brands | MMI Score | Levene Statistics | Robust Test of Equality of Means | | Post-Hoc test | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Sig | Welch | Brown-Forsythe | Games-Howell (Sig) | | | | | |
| | | | Sig | Sig | HP-Dell | HP-Lenovo | HP-Acer | Dell-Lenovo | Dell-Acer | Lenovo-Acer |
| HP | 39.09 | 0.02 | 0.04 | 0.04 | 0.70 | 0.04 | 0.35 | 0.22 | 0.76 | 0.89 |
| Dell | 40.65 | | | | | | | | | |
| Lenovo | 34.78 | | | | | | | | | |
| Acer | 36.80 | | | | | | | | | |

**Table 8**
Discriminant Analysis.

| Independent Variables | Canonical Discriminant Function | | Test of Equality of Group Means | | Canonical Discriminant Coefficient for Discriminant Function | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Chi-Square | Sig. | F | Sig | Unstandardized | Standardized | Structure Matrix Coefficients |
| Masstige Score | 19.31 | 0.000 | 9.215 | 0.003 | 0.098 | 1.015 | 0.670 |
| Age of Respondent | | | 0.443 | 0.507 | 0.001 | 0.009 | 0.392 |
| Annual Income | | | 3.157 | 0.077 | 0.000 | 0.812 | 0.147 |

prestige brands. Moreover, the top brands list released by Inter-brand every year have many American brands in its top 100 lists. The same is the story for the top global brands of 2015. One of the brand in current study (HP) lists in the top 20 global brands by Inter-brand in 2015 (Frampton, 2015). Similar results have already been reported in literature as Hellofs and Jacobson (1999) revealed that for the premium brands, customer might link high selling figures with better quality. The same might not be true for general brands (Hellofs & Jacobson, 1999). It can be inferred that American brands are perceived to be better on quality and hence prestige in Indian market.

Another dimension of understanding the support for hypothesis 2 (H2) from literature perspective takes us back to the work of Keller and Lehmann (2003) where he proposed a link between the perception which a consumer holds towards marketing mix elements and brand equity. Marketing mix is related with the dimensions of brand equity and hence brand equity itself. Not a surprise that higher the presence in advertising, higher the brand equity for a brand (Yoo et al., 2000). A top selling brand (American brands) is expected to have more awareness in the minds of people (brand awareness which includes advertising is a part of marketing mix). This might increase the brand equity for these brands as Keller and Lehmann (2003) argued. Brands name and prestige associated with it have long association as brand is documented to be a reference to the prestige associated with brand (Brucks, Zeithaml, & Naylor, 2000). The results of this study can be considered as empirical evidence to the indirect association discussed above. The results of this study can also be seen as support to the findings of Steenkamp et al. (2003) where they concluded relationship between the brand prestige and globalness of brand. HP is a global brand with the brand image of American country-of-origin. And hence, the prestige associated with HP is relatively high.

HP is also the oldest brand in India starting Indian operations from 1989. Being the first laptop brand to enter without competition (only IBM was in computer hardware business when HP entered India), HP soon became the market leader (Prasad, 2011). HP always had first mover advantage. The popularity and brand image of HP might have played a role in making HP to be topping the MMI score. This strongly supports the third hypothesis. Supporting the third hypothesis in this study seems to be filling an important gap in literature.

The other American brand in this study was Dell, after entering India in 2007, it became the first market player to defeat all others to achieve number one position in 2010 with 15.3% market share (Prasad, 2011), although HP had the highest market share in 2015. Dell has been one of those laptop brands in India, which has gained popularity at mass scale. It is possible that this could explain the fact that Dell is the second most preferred brand in this study. Studies relating the prestige value of brands with the first mover's advantages are miniscule. This current study extends the understanding of first mover's advantage to masstige marketing.

It can be inferred from this study that young people are contributing the maximum in establishing American brands as potential prestige brands. This can be explained by the demographic status of India. For example, India today is considered as a young nation with majority of its population being below 35 years of age. These young people are culturally more diverted to westernization. Moreover, the younger generation is more computer friendly and conscious about the development taking place in technological environment (Bennett, Maton, & Kervin, 2008) as compared to the older generation. These people explore the technological products like laptops more and hence they might unconsciously be carrying the country-of-origin factor to the brands of laptop. On the other hand, Asia is dominated by China, Japan and South Korea in terms of economy. But still, these countries are not equivalent to America when it comes to preference.

Another aspect of preferring American brands may be the perceptions of consumers for Asian brands. Brands originating from Asia are somewhat having negative country-of-origin perceptions (Cayla & Eckhardt, 2007). Consumers have reservations in perceiving Asian brands as status symbol and as truly international brands (Henderson, Cote, Leong, & Schmitt, 2003). There are evidences to support this point too. Makovsky (2012) showed that Lenovo has perception problems among the consumers. The low level of brand equity arising out of perception may have an impact on the sales.

Some literature suggests that China specifically had problems in producing a global brand (Fan, 2006; Makovsky, 2012). There are evidences suggesting the impact of country image on the purchase of specific brands (Hsieh, Pan, & Setiono, 2004). This is further found out to be moderated by the socio demographics factors. Hsieh et al. (2004) highlighted the fact that for economically better-developed countries, the relationship becomes even stronger. This can explain that the poor brand image of Chinese brands might have translated to the Lenovo brand of laptop. Moreover, global consumers have image of Chinese products as being cheap, not dependable, not original and away from quality (Ille, 2009) especially for low involvement products. There are problems with image of Chinese brands in India (Srivastava, 2014). The impact of this perception on the high involvement products is not well researched. Such negative impressions of consumers might impact other good brands coming out of that country. This was documented by Pullig, Netemeyer, and Biswas (2006) when they found attitudes towards brands coupled with low certainty are highly sensitive towards negative publicity of brand.

On the other hand, there are studies highlighting Lenovo as a successful brand (Ille, 2009). More work is required to do away with the ambiguity over the perception of Chinese brands including Lenovo. This can be done in terms of the concepts like perceived brand foreignness and confidence in brand origin identification (Zhou et al., 2010). With this history behind, Lenovo's association with China might be a potential reason in the mind of respondents in India to not see it as a prestige brand. Popularity, brand value and image, deflection towards westernization and its culture, dominated the country brand equity of America. It could be the potential reasons for American brands being preferred and scoring more on prestige value as compared with Asian brands.

Literature is not void of studies depicting that foreign products are preferred in emerging markets. This current study is supporting this aspect. Originality and contribution of the current study and its results can be evaluated by two points: a) majority of studies in literature which are reporting the preference of foreign products against local products are carried out at aggregate level. For example – ranging from highly cited study of Batra, Ramaswamy, Alden, Steenkamp, & Ramachander (2000) to the most recent study of Lee and Nguyen (2017) on foreign vs local brands are carried out with multiple brands. In addition, these studies do not make it clear if the respondents were actual users of these brands or not (For more such studies world over, see Davvetas, Schtmann, & Diamantopoulos, 2015; Steenkamp et al., 2003). Studies comparing the preference of local vs foreign brands with Indian data like Holt, Quelch, and Taylor (2004); Mukherjee, Satija, Goyal, Mantrala, and Zou (2012), Kumar, Lee, and Kim (2009), Kinra (2006) have reported results at aggregate level; and b) Though, there are studies like Bhardwaj, Kumar, and Kim (2010) which test the preference for individual brand but here also it is not clear whether the respondents were users of the brand (Levi) under study or not?

The present study is about individual brand and the respondents are users of those brands. Their opinions about prestige associated with their brand might vary from the opinion of someone who would just give perception about a brand as he/she has never actually used it. Therefore, results in this study are user based results which is important contribution to the existing literature. For a subject like brand-equity which is operationalized here in terms of mass prestige, results at aggregate and individual level for brands may be different. It is further supported by the work of Christodoulides and de Chernatony (2010) where they conclude that for a construct like brand equity, the variation in nature of brands and the different product categories they belong to, separate measures of brand equity are required.

### 6.1. Limitations and directions for future research

This research was carried out using the responses from any person who owns and uses any of the four laptop brands selected. Responses from sample of 260 respondents may not be sufficient enough to generalize the findings of this study for the whole country –keeping in mind the diversity associated with India. It may give different results if we carry out a similar study through different states in India. Researchers can attempt the region/state/district-wise study of masstige associated with brands. The results can also vary if the similar type of study is done for various product categories, for example luxury vs. non-luxury, utilitarian vs. hedonic, country-of-origin vs. country-of-brand etc. Hence, this study may be replicated considering different types of product categories and different context. This is the first study attempting the measurement of masstige value of laptop brands in the world. With the absence of earlier work and literature, this paper seeks to contribute to the formulation of the subject matter of masstige theory and approach for brand management and strategic marketing. It could be possible that research on new construct like this one may be exposed to certain errors, which might have been overlooked. It would need more work on this topic to validate the findings of this research in different country contexts. This field of literature should witness more attempts even for the same product category to take the masstige scale and the findings of this study to the level of maturity. For example, understanding the reasons of the difference in mass prestige among American and Asian brands would be an important contribution. Understanding the latent hidden reasons for perceiving a brand as masstige brand should also be explored. Scholars may also attempt to substantiate the arguments developed in discussion section.

As mentioned in the discussion section, there are opportunities to study the degree of relationship/causality between country-of-origin and mass prestige value with brands from specific country of origin (for example, Chinese brands versus Japanese brands or Korean brands versus German brands) and formulate hypothesis accordingly in future research. In continuation to this, future research should also try to explore that what potential impact would other brand related variables have on the relationship between masstige and brand origin. These type of studies can be carried out in the context of developing and developed countries. It also makes sense to carry out such cross-country studies in culturally different countries as well.

One of the limitations of our study is that we confined to four best-selling laptop brands. It would have more appropriate if we had included Apple, as the concept of mass prestige is better associated with the brands that sell regular products with moderately high prices (such as Apple, Starbucks or Bodyshops). Therefore, future researchers could undertake studies comparing and analyzing the mass prestige value and competition between Apple and other brands, not only in laptop segment, but also in smart phone segment in the context of developing as well as developed countries.

Likewise, there are some possible areas for future research in this subject as, investigations to examine the effectiveness of masstige marketing strategy in terms of masstige mean score and masstige index in an industry. There are opportunities to carry out such studies in most of the industries such as personal computers, smart phones, television, perfume, luxury clothing, jewellery etc. Single-brand studies or comparative studies of different competing brands in a specific industry can be undertaken. The scope of masstige marketing research is much more in emerging countries as there are more number of products that are generally considered as 'expensive' but attainable from the point of view of 'middle class' and upper low-income group consumers. These products include cars, diamonds, laptops, smart phones, cosmetics, perfumes, television etc. Therefore, researchers can carry out studies estimating masstige values of such brands in any of those industries with data from a developing country. There are many opportunities for undertaking cross-country studies as well.

In order to facilitate future theory development and intellectual dialogue, some propositions are desirable. Thus, we posit the following propositions, which can be tested as hypotheses in future studies:

- Proposition 1: The higher the Masstige value of a brand, the higher the likelihood to succeed in a distinct market.
- Proposition 2. The higher the brand's market orientation targeting the middle and bottom of the pyramid segments, the higher the likelihood of sustaining the success in the long run.
- Proposition 3: The better the marketing mix with reference to product, promotion and place, the higher the likelihood to increase sales and thereby the MMS.

## 7. Conclusion

Our study established four facets of masstige marketing: (1) Brands from different countries of origin tend to have different prestige associated with it; (2) Best-selling brands tend to have higher masstige value; (3) First mover brands to a foreign market are likely to have higher masstige value; and (4) Competition induces the brands to formulate strategies to create higher masstige value. However, findings of this study show that none of the top selling Laptop brands in India (HP, Dell, Lenovo and Acer) are considered as the highly prestige brands for masses. It is found out that the American brands (HP and Dell) are more popular than Asian brands (Lenovo and Acer). Among all the brands under study, HP was found to be having the top MMI score followed by Dell, Acer and Lenovo. Though, HP leads in the score but it is very close to the score of Dell and there is no difference between the prestige value of HP and Dell. Yet, the score is not sufficient enough to call HP and Dell as really prestigious brands but they have potential for the same. At the same time, those American brands are far ahead than Asian brands (China's Lenovo and Taiwan's Acer) on the mass prestige index while Asian brands are not at all perceived as prestigious brands by consumers in India. Both the Asian brands are perceived almost equally by the respondents as far as prestige associated with these brands are concerned. It can be concluded that American brands have the potential to be accepted as the brands having prestige among its users in a developing country like India. The reason behind it could be partly because of brand equity associated with the country of origin of United States of America.

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