

THE INFLUENCE OF COUNTRY-OF-ORIGIN SUSTAINABILITY PERCEPTION ON CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTION FOR CHINESE ELECTRIC VEHICLES IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines whether a country's environmental reputation influences consumer decisions to purchase its electric vehicles (EVs), focusing on Indonesian consumers' perceptions of Chinese EVs. Specifically, it investigates how perceptions of China's sustainability efforts affect purchase intention through the mediating roles of perceived quality and perceived environmental benefit. A quantitative approach was employed, surveying 218 Indonesian consumers familiar with or considering Chinese EVs using a five-point Likert scale questionnaire. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings reveal that positive perceptions of China's sustainability initiatives significantly enhance both perceived quality and perceived environmental benefit of Chinese EVs. However, while both factors improve with a stronger green reputation, only perceived quality directly and substantially increases purchase intention; perceived environmental benefit, though valued by consumers, does not independently drive buying decisions. This suggests that while sustainability matters to buyers, product quality remains the decisive factor in purchasing choices. Future research could explore different cultural contexts and employ mixed-methods approaches to gain deeper consumer insight.

Keywords: electric vehicle, purchase intention, perceived quality, country-of-origin, sustainability perception, environmental benefit.

INTRODUCTION

As the world deals with the serious effects of climate change, more people and governments are turning to cleaner energy and eco-friendly transportation, with the rise of electric vehicles (EVs) among the most visible changes. EVs are becoming more popular because they help reduce pollution, lower reliance on gasoline, and create healthier cities. EV sales are growing rapidly worldwide, driven by government support, improved technology, and rising public awareness (The Economist, 2024). Indonesia is also joining this global trend: the government has introduced tax breaks, built EV charging stations, and offered incentives to encourage adoption (Wall Street Journal, 2024).

Among the brands entering Indonesia's EV market, Chinese companies like BYD and Wuling are gaining attention due to their affordability and advanced EV technology (The Economist, 2024). However, even though their cars are available and relatively cheap, many Indonesian consumers still hesitate to buy them. Some worry about quality or long-term reliability, while others question whether China genuinely cares about the environment, which in turn affects consumers' sustainability perception of Chinese products.

These perceptions matter because they shape how consumers evaluate foreign products. A country's overall image, including technological advancement, environmental responsibility, and product standards, can significantly influence consumer trust. At the same time, a country's reputation for sustainability plays a growing role in shaping how eco-conscious buyers judge imported products, especially in the green-tech space. In addition, perceived quality, how reliable, safe, and well-made a vehicle is, plays a key role in major purchase decisions such as buying a car, as does perceived environmental benefit, or how much consumers believe these cars will actually help reduce emissions and environmental harm. Modern consumers increasingly expect companies to take real, visible action on sustainability, and this directly affects their purchase decisions (Harvard Business Review, 2023).

This study aims to understand how Indonesian consumers form their purchase intentions toward Chinese EV brands by examining five key constructs: country-of-origin image, country's reputation for sustainability, perceived quality, perceived environmental benefit, and purchase intention. Specifically, the study asks whether country-of-origin image and a country's sustainability reputation influence perceived quality and

perceived environmental benefit, whether perceived quality and perceived environmental benefit influence purchase intention, and whether perceived quality and perceived environmental benefit mediate the relationships between the two country-level constructs and purchase intention. Understanding these relationships is valuable not only for Chinese automakers, but also for policymakers and marketers seeking to support cleaner, more sustainable transportation in Indonesia, and contributes to the academic discourse on consumer behavior, sustainability perception, and green marketing in emerging markets, an area that remains underexplored with respect to Chinese EVs in Southeast Asia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Country-of-Origin Image, Country's Reputation for Sustainability, Perceived Quality, and Perceived Environmental Benefit

Country-of-Origin Image (COOI) concerns how people see and judge a product based on the country it comes from (Lascau et al., 2020). This image can strongly influence what consumers think about a product's quality, reliability, and how likely they are to make a purchase (Budiono et al., 2020), and involves both beliefs about a country's economy or technology and emotional or cultural connections to that country (Nguyen et al., 2024). In a real-world situation, especially when consumers are unfamiliar with a product, COOI often acts as a mental shortcut: a product from a country known for poor manufacturing might not even be considered, while one from a country associated with innovation and environmental progress could be seen as more appealing (Islam & Hussain, 2022). This is relevant for the EV market in Indonesia, where electric vehicles are still relatively new and consumer trust is still forming (Li & Setiowati, 2023). When a country has a strong, positive image, particularly one aligned with sustainability and innovation, it not only improves how people see the brand but also reduces hesitation, making consumers more open to purchasing (Li & Setiowati, 2023; Islam & Hussain, 2022; Budiono et al., 2020).

A country's reputation for sustainability reflects how people judge its efforts in protecting the environment, developing green technology, and meeting global sustainability goals, including performance in energy efficiency, pollution control, and responsible production (Li et al., 2021). When consumers know a product is recyclable or environmentally friendly, they are more likely to trust it, and that trust can extend to how they view the country of origin, especially when that country has a strong sustainability track record (Khan et al., 2022). For many consumers who lack in-depth knowledge of how a product is made, a country's sustainability image works as a decision-making shortcut (Blas, 2020), and countries seen positively in environmental terms tend to give their industries a competitive edge, making consumers more open to innovative, eco-friendly products in fast-evolving sectors such as electric vehicles (Fernández-Gómez et al., 2020). Because this image evolves with a country's actions on climate change and international commitments (Nguyen et al., 2021), companies that align with their country's sustainability goals and remain transparent about their products can build credibility and drive purchase decisions.

Perceived quality reflects a consumer's subjective sense of how reliable a product is compared to other market options, rather than objective technical standards (Oppong & Phiri, 2019), and is shaped by prior experience, expectations, and impressions. Consumers weigh both intrinsic features such as performance, durability, and design, and extrinsic cues such as brand reputation, packaging, and price (Cui et al., 2022); for unfamiliar or high-involvement products, they often rely more heavily on these extrinsic cues. Companies seeking to raise perceived quality therefore need to go beyond technical improvements toward innovative design, customer experience, and brand storytelling (Amrullah & Purnomo, 2023).

Perceived Environmental Benefit (PEB) refers to how eco-friendly a product feels to the consumer, rather than to technical or scientific proof of its environmental impact (Yang et al., 2020), and is shaped by consumers' environmental awareness and values. Trust in companies' green claims is central to PEB, particularly as consumers grow more skeptical of terms like "eco-friendly" and "sustainable" (Zang et al., 2022). When consumers believe a product genuinely helps the environment, whether through reduced emissions, energy conservation, or recycled materials, they are often more willing to support it even at a higher cost (Tan, 2022). PEB also depends on how clearly and honestly companies communicate environmental benefits (Hussain et al., 2023), and is reinforced or challenged by external forces such as government policy and environmental campaigns (Chin et al., 2024).

Purchase Intention

Purchase intention refers to how likely a consumer is to buy a product and is commonly used to predict actual buying behavior (Alberto & Riza, 2023), shaped by a combination of attitudes, personal perceptions, emotions, and social meaning attached to a product. When consumers view a product positively, whether as environmentally friendly, technologically advanced, or financially worthwhile, they are more likely to consider buying it and perceived benefits shape attitudes that in turn strengthen purchase intention (Yang et al., 2020). Brand image also plays a significant role: a well-known, trusted brand reduces uncertainty and strengthens belief in a product's quality and reliability (Jiang et al., 2021), which in turn shapes how consumers perceive overall product value. There is also an emotional and psychological dimension to purchasing, as people are more likely to buy products that reflect their identity or values, such as environmental responsibility or innovation, with purchases sometimes carrying symbolic meaning tied to pride, self-expression, or social acceptance (Aravindan et al., 2023).

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

Building on the constructs above, this study proposes that both country-of-origin image and a country's sustainability reputation influence perceived quality and perceived environmental benefit, which in turn affect purchase intention, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Country-of-Origin Image		Perceived Quality		
				Purchase Intention
Country's Reputation for Sustainability		Perceived Environmental Benefit		

Note: Arrows indicate hypothesized directional effects: Country-of-Origin Image and Country's Reputation for Sustainability → Perceived Quality; Country's Reputation for Sustainability → Perceived Environmental Benefit; Perceived Quality and Perceived Environmental Benefit → Purchase Intention.

Figure 1. Research Conceptual Framework

Based on the literature reviewed, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

- H1: Country-of-origin image influences perceived quality.
- H2: A country's reputation for sustainability influences perceived quality.
- H3: A country's reputation for sustainability influences perceived environmental benefit.
- H4: Perceived quality influences purchase intention.
- H5: Perceived environmental benefit influences purchase intention.
- H6: Perceived quality mediates the relationship between country-of-origin image and purchase intention.
- H7: Perceived environmental benefit mediates the relationship between a country's reputation for sustainability and purchase intention.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a quantitative approach. Following Mulisa (2022), the study employs random sampling, ensuring that every member of the population has an equal chance of being selected, which raises the accuracy and reliability of the findings. Primary data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed to the general public in Indonesia via Google Forms, shared across social media platforms including Instagram, WhatsApp, and LINE. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended items using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

The study consists of 24 measurement indicators; based on Hair et al. (2010), the ideal sample size is 5 to 10 times the number of indicators, yielding a minimum of 120 and a recommended maximum of 240 respondents. A total of 233 responses were collected, of which 218 valid responses were used for analysis after excluding 15 invalid responses based on zero-variance response patterns, contradictory or illogical

answer combinations, and self-reported lack of awareness of electric vehicles. A nonresponse rate analysis indicated negligible bias, as all retained responses were complete.

Of the 218 respondents, gender distribution was equal at 50% male and 50% female. Most respondents (62.8%) were aged 21–28, followed by 14.2% aged 45–55, 12.8% aged 29–44, and 10.1% aged above 55. By occupation, students made up the largest group (45%), followed by entrepreneurs (20.6%) and employees (19.3%), with freelancers (6%), other occupations (5.5%), investors (1.8%), and unemployed respondents (1.8%) comprising the remainder. Regarding monthly income, 69.3% earned below IDR 15,000,000, 12.8% earned IDR 15,000,000–25,000,000, 11.5% earned IDR 25,000,000–50,000,000, and 6.4% earned above IDR 50,000,000, indicating that while most respondents were in lower income brackets, likely reflecting the high proportion of students, the sample still captured a range of economic backgrounds.

Following Hair et al. (2021) and using operationalization to translate theoretical constructs into measurable indicators (Bollen, 1989; Podsakoff et al., 2016), this study measured five constructs. Purchase Intention was measured with 3 items capturing willingness and likelihood to purchase an EV. Country-of-Origin Image was measured with 5 items capturing perceptions of the quality, innovativeness, value, competitiveness, and reliability of Chinese high-tech products. Country's Reputation for Sustainability was measured with 5 items capturing perceptions of China's sustainability commitment, environment for sustainability-minded work, future sustainability prospects, sustainability innovation, and support for sustainability causes. Perceived Quality was measured with 4 items capturing the perceived quality, functionality, reliability, and overall goodness of EVs. Perceived Environmental Benefit was measured with 7 items capturing beliefs about EVs' contribution to reducing environmental impact, cleaner air, reduced pollution, reduced reliance on fossil fuels, and their role as a responsible, climate-conscious choice.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Table 1 presents the inner model Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values, all of which fall below the critical threshold, confirming the absence of multicollinearity. Table 2 presents construct reliability and validity results: Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs exceed recommended thresholds, indicating strong reliability and convergent validity. Table 3 presents Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios and bootstrapped confidence intervals confirming discriminant validity between constructs. Table 4 presents the path coefficients used to test the hypothesized relationships.

Table 1. Inner Model Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

Path	VIF	Interpretation
COOI → PQ	1.675	No multicollinearity
CR → PB	1.000	No multicollinearity
CR → PQ	1.675	No multicollinearity
PB → PI	1.569	No multicollinearity
PQ → PI	1.569	No multicollinearity

Table 2. Construct Reliability and Validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
COOI	0.830	0.837	0.880
CR	0.906	0.910	0.930
PB	0.933	0.939	0.946
PI	0.871	0.872	0.921
PQ	0.820	0.827	0.882

Table 3. HTMT Bootstrapping

Construct Pair	HTMT	Sample Mean	2.5% CI	97.5% CI
CR ↔ COOI	0.728	0.728	0.595	0.847
PB ↔ COOI	0.608	0.602	0.446	0.729
PB ↔ CR	0.544	0.543	0.387	0.682
PI ↔ COOI	0.296	0.300	0.148	0.451
PI ↔ CR	0.272	0.276	0.114	0.442
PI ↔ PB	0.412	0.413	0.253	0.564
PQ ↔ COOI	0.691	0.684	0.495	0.828
PQ ↔ CR	0.655	0.651	0.496	0.779
PQ ↔ PB	0.691	0.685	0.538	0.801
PQ ↔ PI	0.602	0.605	0.459	0.741

Note: HTMT = Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (original sample); Sample Mean, 2.5% CI, and 97.5% CI are from bootstrapping. All HTMT values are below the conservative threshold of 0.90, supporting discriminant validity.

Table 4. Path Coefficients

Path	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	STDEV	T-statistics	P-value
COOI → PQ	0.366	0.368	0.086	4.238	0.000***
CR → PB	0.509	0.511	0.071	7.169	0.000***
CR → PQ	0.330	0.323	0.079	4.168	0.000***
PB → PI	0.098	0.105	0.093	1.060	0.289
PQ → PI	0.455	0.456	0.094	4.869	0.000***

Note: *** $p < 0.001$. All hypothesized paths were supported except PB → PI.

Country-of-Origin Image and Country's Reputation for Sustainability on Perceived Quality

Country-of-origin image significantly and positively influenced perceived quality ($\beta = 0.366$, $t = 4.238$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1. When Indonesian consumers view China positively, particularly regarding sustainability, they are more likely to perceive Chinese EVs as higher in quality. This is consistent with Merabet (2020), who found that country-of-origin influences perceived product quality even when the brand itself is not globally dominant. Similarly, a country's reputation for sustainability significantly and positively influenced perceived quality ($\beta = 0.330$, $t = 4.168$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H2. This corresponds with Cowan and Guzman (2020), who found that national environmental performance builds reputational capital that benefits domestic brands internationally; as China is widely regarded as a global leader in green innovation, this reputation appears to lend credibility to its EVs.

Country's Reputation for Sustainability on Perceived Environmental Benefit

A country's reputation for sustainability also significantly and positively influenced perceived environmental benefit ($\beta = 0.509$, $t = 7.169$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H3, with no multicollinearity concerns ($VIF = 1.000$). In the context of Chinese EVs in Indonesia, perceiving China as environmentally responsible leads consumers to view its EVs as more environmentally beneficial. This is consistent with Nguyen (2023), who found that sustainability-aware consumers respond more strongly to green signals, and is further supported by Yang et al. (2020), who showed that perceived benefit and brand trust together shape purchase intention. This suggests that China's investments in green technology and policy positively affect its perceived eco-value among Indonesian consumers.

Perceived Quality and Perceived Environmental Benefit on Purchase Intention

Perceived quality significantly and positively influenced purchase intention ($\beta = 0.455$, $t = 4.869$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H4 and confirming model stability ($VIF = 1.569$). This indicates that when Indonesian consumers

view Chinese EVs as high quality, they are considerably more likely to consider purchasing them, underscoring the critical role of perceived quality in encouraging adoption of sustainable technologies. This aligns with Merabet (2020), who found that for products involving complex functionality or high commitment, perceived quality often outweighs price as a purchase driver.

In contrast, perceived environmental benefit did not significantly influence purchase intention ($\beta = 0.098$, $t = 1.060$, $p = 0.289$), and H5 was not supported. Although Indonesian consumers recognize the environmental advantages of Chinese EVs, this awareness alone is not sufficient to drive purchase decisions. This contrasts with Yang et al. (2020), who found environmental factors to significantly affect purchase behavior, but aligns with Cowan and Guzman (2020), who suggested that the relatively high cost of EVs, limited charging infrastructure, and limited consumer knowledge can weaken the link between environmental perception and purchase behavior. Nguyen (2023) similarly found that sustainability values must align with perceived practical benefit to drive actual purchasing, pointing to a possible gap in local value alignment. Indonesian consumers may treat environmental benefit as a bonus rather than a primary motivator, with affordability, brand recognition, and perceived quality weighing more heavily in the decision-making process. From a marketing standpoint, this suggests that promoting environmental benefits alone is insufficient; companies should also emphasize practical and emotional value points, and account for cultural norms that may favor practical outcomes and collective wellbeing over abstract environmental principles.

Mediating Roles of Perceived Quality and Perceived Environmental Benefit

Mediation analysis indicated that perceived quality partially mediates the relationship between country-of-origin image and purchase intention ($\beta = 0.167$, $p = 0.002$), supporting H6. Indonesian consumers who view China positively are more inclined to perceive Chinese EVs as high quality, which in turn increases purchase intention; because the mediation is only partial, other factors such as pricing, brand familiarity, and environmental values likely also contribute. This supports Merabet (2020), who described product evaluation as a cognitive link between national image and consumer behavior, suggesting that policymakers and brand managers should convert a positive country image into a perception of quality through certifications, user reviews, and transparent product testing.

By contrast, although country sustainability reputation significantly shaped perceived environmental benefit ($\beta = 0.509$, $p < 0.001$, $\alpha = 0.933$), this perception did not translate into purchase intention, as the PB \rightarrow PI path was not significant ($\beta = 0.098$, $p = 0.289$). H7 was therefore not supported: perceived environmental benefit does not mediate the relationship between sustainability reputation and purchase intention. This contradicts Yang et al. (2020), who found perceived environmental benefit to directly influence purchase intention, but is consistent with Nguyen (2023), who observed that perceived green value alone may be insufficient to overcome performance, cost, or usability concerns in certain markets. Indonesian consumers may perceive Chinese EVs as eco-friendly because of China's green image, but this recognition does not strongly shape their buying decisions.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how Indonesian consumers' perception of China's sustainability reputation affects their intention to purchase Chinese electric vehicles, and whether this relationship is shaped by perceived quality and perceived environmental benefit. Based on data from 218 Indonesian respondents analyzed using PLS-SEM, both country-of-origin image and country sustainability reputation positively influenced perceived quality, and sustainability reputation positively influenced perceived environmental benefit. However, only perceived quality significantly and directly influenced purchase intention; perceived environmental benefit did not, and did not mediate the effect of sustainability reputation on purchase intention. This indicates that Indonesian consumers are more motivated by quality than by environmental benefit alone, even when both are rooted in sustainability perceptions, and that perceived environmental benefit can strengthen a brand's reputation without substituting for tangible product value.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the country-of-origin and sustainability literature by introducing country-of-origin sustainability perception as a relevant construct for understanding purchase intention toward EVs in an emerging market, and by positioning perceived quality and perceived environmental benefit as mediators

linking macro-level national image to micro-level purchase behavior. The findings show that perceived quality is the stronger link between country sustainability perception and purchase intention, while environmental benefit operates more indirectly, suggesting that consumers in developing markets such as Indonesia evaluate products against both environmental values and functional quality rather than eco-labels alone.

Practically, the results suggest that promoting sustainability alone is insufficient for Chinese EV brands; campaigns should pair environmental messaging with tangible benefits such as improved safety features, reduced operating costs, and extended battery life, while strengthening perceived quality through certification, innovation incentives, and visible eco-initiatives. For Indonesian policymakers, public awareness campaigns should frame sustainability in accessible, outcome-driven terms, such as cost savings, cleaner urban air, and local green job creation, rather than purely as moral responsibility. Marketers can further build trust through third-party certifications, localized influencer partnerships, and advertising that speaks directly to local pain points. For investors and sustainability strategists, market growth depends not only on green signaling but on aligning product delivery with consumer expectations for cost-effectiveness and reliability.

This study has several limitations that suggest directions for future research. First, it focuses solely on Chinese EV brands within the Indonesian market, so findings may not generalize to EVs from other countries of origin or to other consumer markets. Second, by examining a single country and product category, the study cannot capture how cultural differences or other industries, such as fashion or food, might shape sustainability perceptions differently. Third, because the study relies on survey data, it measures stated intention rather than observed purchase behavior, which may diverge in practice. Finally, the survey format limits insight into the underlying reasons behind consumer responses. Future research could broaden the scope to other countries of origin and brands, compare sustainability perceptions across cultures and product categories, examine actual purchasing behavior rather than intention alone, and incorporate interviews or focus groups to better understand the motivations behind consumer attitudes toward sustainability.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the broader conversation on sustainable consumption by showing that a positive country image and sustainability reputation can shape perceived quality and environmental benefit, but that perceived quality remains the decisive driver of purchase intention. For Chinese EV brands operating in Indonesia, and for policymakers seeking to encourage sustainable transportation adoption, these findings indicate that a strong sustainability reputation must be matched with demonstrable product value to translate positive perception into actual consumer demand.

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