The Effects of Brand Perception in the Purchase of "Made in Italy" and "Made in China" Fashion Products in Nigeria

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Abstract: Products' perception is a critical part of the consumer attitude and has significant impact on buying behaviour. Consumer attitude which reflects in buying behaviour is a corollary of the decision making process where consumers interpret information inputs and make meaningful choices among alternative products. These are formulated into marketing strategies intended to enable the seller establish a market either locally or internationally. The present study attempts to examine how the Nigerian consumer perceive branding strategies used by fashion manufacturers of Italian and Chinese country of origin (COO). Convenience sampling was conducted on a sample of 300 consumers in a cross-sectional survey (223 valid responses). Using T-test, the study found that consumers perceive a significant difference (Italy superior to China) in terms of attributes, values and product benefits between the products labelled from these two countries and closely correlated in terms of cultural dimensions of craftmanship and business tradition.

1. Introduction

Consumers purchase behaviour especially in multinational marketing depends on the "Made in" consideration or the Country-of- Origin (COO) concept and the firms marketing strategies such as branding. COO effect is one of the several extrinsic attributes that potentially influence consumer attitudes towards a product. Evidence from international marketing literature also indicated that approximately one-quarter of consumers makes purchase decisions on the basis of COO information which is used to predict product quality (Bilkey, & Nes, 1982; Melnyk, Klein & Völckner, 2012)

Khan and Bamber (2008) in Krupka, Ozretic-Dosen, and Previsic (2014) noted that another extrinsic attribute that influences consumers' perception of a product is the brand name. This is because brand name as a cue evokes not only beliefs about the brand itself but also triggers recall of the country associated with it as its COO. Potential consumers in Nigeria would seemingly recall the perceived countries of reputed fashionable products in order to make a purchase decision. Readily, "Made in Italy" and "Made in China" are products that actively come to mind relative to alternative and competing branding elements.

This study attempts to examine the concept of country-of-origin (COO) in relation to branding characteristics for the quality of fashion brands by the two COOs - "Made in Italy" and "Made in China" in Nigeria and how these influence consumers' purchase. The study conducted a comparative analysis of the two countries by assessing the perception of Nigeria consumers on the branding characteristics of fashion products imported from these countries in the marketplace.

2. Statement of the Problem

Branding strategy provides the stimuli for consumer perception of product or service quality. The brand is usually communicated through branding elements such as the name, term, logo, packaging, design, symbols and or a combination of these elements to create an identity and to differentiate the maker or manufacturer of a product or service (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008). Consequently, brands are communicated using these salient marketing variables at target markets.

Caller (1996) suggests that as international markets evolve and become more closely interlinked, firms need to pay closer attention to the coherence of branding decisions across national markets. They also need to build an effective international brand strategy that transcends national boundaries as well as decide on how to manage brands across different geographic markets and product lines. O'Neill and Xiao (2006) found that brand affiliation, name recognition, and reputation for high quality service together can contribute as much as between 20 and 25 percent to the going concern value of a successfully operating business.

Branding also serves as a critical factor in a firm's overall marketing and corporate strategy mainly for the sake of corporate identity and to establish a solid customer

franchise as well as the basis for brand and line extensions, which further strengthens the firm's position and enhance its value (Aaker, 1996; Aaker & Keller, 1990; Kapferer, 1997). Douglas, Craig, and Nijssen (2001) found that the critical issues faced by firms in developing an international branding strategy are how its expansion level can attain international height and how its international operations are organized. In effect, they suggest that as firms seek to expand further, they must consider whether to develop brands geared to specific regional or national preferences and how to integrate these into their overall branding strategy.

Branding therefore offers a better basis for the consumer's choice in the marketplace. It is a crucial phenomenon in the country of origin (COO) phenomenon as country-of-origin is often used by consumers to predict quality and performance of products (Hamin & Eliot, 2006; Olins, 2004) and to determine why and how they buy. With 43 percent of total imports from Asia and 34 percent from Europe (NBS, 2015), the Nigerian marketplace in terms of fashion products is dominated by "Made in Italy" and "Made in China" goods. The Chinese dominance has been alleged to be based on cheap and smuggled fashion goods (AFP, 2015) and on the other hand, Italy has been reputed to be the biggest business partner of Nigeria in the area of hides and skin (Awolowo, 2014). The trend of patronage of these countries' fashion products is not far from the stereotyping attitude of the Nigerian consumer who tends to assign greater value for foreign products than the locally produced ones. The foreign fashionable products are reputed to possess attributes like good quality, effective design, innovation, dependability, originality, and management especially for developed economies whereas goods from the developing countries as Nigeria are viewed as inferior in these criteria (Muchbalcher, Dahringer, Leihs, 1999; Usunier & Lee, 2005; van Gelder, 2003).

The bases of branding as listed above and which differentiates the products from these two countries provide the opportunity to undertake the present study in view of consumers purchase behaviour in Nigeria. Moreover, the reclassification categories between advanced and developing/emerging economies that puts Italy and China at opposite ends with Italy superiorly rated as an advanced economy by IMF (2010) informs a significant brand perception issue for the consumer with anticipated salient marketing implications. Awolowo (2014) confirmed the promotional efforts of the Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC) to support the Nigerian fashion industry, which is at the budding stage, in view of its enormous potential to generate foreign exchange from the non-oil sector of the economy. International markets such as the United States is a prime target for the industry and trade windows such as the GSP and AGOA 2.0 will serve as successful platforms for the marketing of Nigerian apparels, leathers and textiles goods which will also help to develop the fashion industry value chain in Nigeria (Awolowo, 2014). Previous studies with respect to this phenomenon in Nigeria examined issues on foreign products generally without any specific focus on fashion products and particularly a comparative analysis of "Made in Italy" and "Made in China" country of origin (COO) dimension.

3. Objectives of the Study

The study aim is to evaluate the brand perception of Nigerian consumers about the fashion products manufactured in Italy and China. The specific objectives therefore are to evaluate the following hypotheses:

H_0i: Consumers do not perceive any significant difference in product attributes in the purchase of 'Made in Italy' and 'Made in China' fashion products in Nigeria.

H_0ii: The perception of Italian and Chinese cultures does not differ among consumers in the purchase of fashion products in Nigeria.

H_0iii: Consumers do not perceive any significant difference in the brand personality traits of 'Made in Italy' and 'Made in China' fashion products in Nigeria.

H_0iv: There is no difference in the values consumers consider in the purchase of 'Made in Italy' and 'Made in China' fashion products in Nigeria.

H_0v: The benefit level consumers derive from the purchase of 'Made in Italy' and 'Made in China' does not differ in the purchase of fashion products in Nigeria.

4. Literature Review

4.1. Theoretical Framework.

The dimension of country of origin (COO) theory usually serves as the platform for the effective comparison and assessment of the consumer perceived value of a product in multinational marketing. This is relevant in view of the fact that COO phenomenon serves as a critical basis for consumers' prediction of quality performance in the international marketplace. The COO evaluation includes the branding effect relative to the country of manufacture (COM) or COO as the case may be.

The Country of Origin (COO) theory by Schooler (1965) and Expectancy-value model by Fishbein (1967) model underscore the effects of the attendant variables of the present study. The Expectancy-value model for instance underlies how the total evaluation or attitude of the consumer is related to the beliefs about the alternative product or services and perhaps how they are differentiated through branding and COO. Consequently, product attributes and strength of perception are critical factors in consumers' choice pattern. Schooler (1965) however opined that the country-of-origin of a product can have an effect on a consumer's opinion of the product. The consumers' opinion is what they believe about the product perhaps through perceptual cues.

Conceptual Framework.

A reflection of the consumer preference theory in relation to a brand indicates that products are identified according to identifiable attributes of quality. This according to Kotler (1994) determines the classification

of either a deep or shallow brand. This is based on the consumers perception of the branding qualities. The standard of evaluation based on the qualities of a deep brand as proposed by Kotler (1994) possesses six levels of meaning. These include attributes, benefits, values, culture, personality and user which can be visually perceived by the customer whereas a shallow brand has just some of these qualities. Smith, Berry, and Pulford (1999) suggested that where quality is more difficult to assess by the customer, then the marketer needs to deepen the brand with well developed personalities. They also added that when products are commoditized, the consumer perceives all products as generic having almost equal quality and features, but perceived differences come with the introduction of branding. This

consequently determines part of the consumer search and choice process.

The Encarta dictionaries (2009) x-rayed the concept of fashion from differing perspective such as: Clothing Styles (style in clothing, hair, and personal appearance generally); Business Styles (creativity and promotion of the latest products); Currency (style of dress, behaviour, lifestyle, and way of speaking or expression that is popular at present). The more commonly used slangs by Nigerians for attributes of fashion as enumerated above are "What is in Vogue Now", "What is Reigning Now" and "The Latest in Town".

Figure 1- Consumer Evaluation of Brand Characteristics.
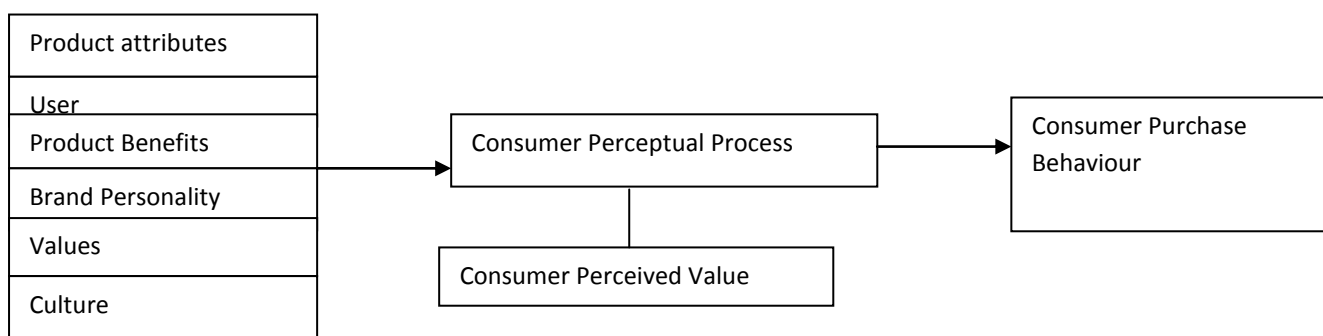
Adapted from: Kotler, P. (1994). Marketing management, analysis, planning, implementation and control.

4.2 Empirical Review

Okechuku and Onyemah (1999) examined the attitudes of the Nigerian consumer in respect of cars and television sets and found that the Nigerian consumer is obsessed with foreign-made goods and have a negative image of the "Made in Nigeria" label, rating it lower than labels from more economically developed countries.

A comparative study by Lantz and Loeb (1996) examined the relationship between consumer ethnocentrism and the evaluations of foreign sourced products and found that highly ethnocentric consumers have more favourable attitudes toward products from culturally similar countries than countries that have dissimilar cultures. Consequently, by extensive review of literature on the concept of COO, Watson and Wright (1999) argued that in spite of all the studies on COO, yet, most, if not all, of the research is only applicable to decision situations in which a domestic alternative is available.

According to Seringhaus (2005), France and Italy are the sources of the most important luxury fashion brands in the world. These two countries command more than one-half of the global consumer luxury brands - Italy with 30 percent and France with 25 percent of the market.

Available statistics accordingly point to the fact that Italy and China seem to compete on the contemporary international markets in similar sectors such as low-tech

(textile, clothing, furniture) even when Italy seems to differ in industrial specialization to peers in European countries but paradoxically pairing up with an emerging economy like China (Tommaso & Dragomirescu, 2009).

Country of Origin Brand Consideration in Consumer Purchase Decision

An internationally agreed legal definition for brands states that a brand is 'a sign or set of signs certifying the origin of a product or service and differentiating it from competition' (Kapferer, 2008). In other words, country of origin relating to products is imperative in a firm's multinational marketing and branding strategy. Distinctive attributes or features situates the products within perceived geographical indications (GIs) and forms the basis of purchase evaluation. This equally ingrains the threads of culture emblazoned in the quality of products especially in the manufacturing and sales of fabrics/textile and fashion products. The success around the world in terms of items "Made in Italy" is mostly due to the Italian brand's ability to transfer a certain sense of product quality in concert with values and experiences of beauty, elegance, tradition, luxury, and life quality (Snaiderbaur, 2009).

The distinctive power of a brand is in its name. Kapferer (2008) indicated that since a brand is a name with the power to influence the market, its power increases as more people know it, are convinced by it, and trust it.

Brand management is about gaining power, by making the brand concept more known, bought, and shared. Furthermore, a brand is a shared desirable and exclusive idea embodied in products, services, places and/or experiences.

Levels of Branding and Brand Characteristics

As mentioned Figure 1 above about Kotler's (1994) classification of brands as deep and shallow brands, it is instructive for marketers that consumers would view the characteristics of deep brands as strong factors in their preference pattern. Consequently, Smith, Berry, and Pulford (1999) suggested that where consumers find it more difficult to assess the distinctive quality of product then the marketer needs to deepen the brand with well developed personalities.

In effect the characteristics of a deep brand are typical of the branding strategy and thus the different levels suggest the level of customer expectation and perception. The attribute level will include design and durability of the product; benefit level will include functional and emotional benefits; the values level defines the consumer's taste for quality; and culture benefits level reflects the tradition of innovation, quality, and technology. Personality level projects a certain pattern of behavior, appearance or title, and finally the user level depicts the type of user and the related activity (Kotler, 1994)

The more the above ideas are shared by a larger number of people and countries, the more power the brand will have. This is reflected in popular brands of multinational marketing outreach in terms of what values they project and sustain such as BMW (Kapferer, 2008) and others like Coca-Cola, Honda and Toyota. A brand is significantly a name that influences buyers originating from a set of mental associations and relationships built up over time among customers or distributors. These form the basis for brand management and the measurement of the sources of brand power thereby making an argument for the expectations that the role of marketing managers is to build the brand and business within the qualities of the brand name. The brand evokes benefits such as saliency, differentiability, intensity and trust attached to these mental associations (Kapferer, 2008).

The pattern of mental association of consumers' purchase decision process with brand names as well as COO factors and GIs indicate that most consumers from developed countries follow a pattern whereby they tend to prefer products from their own countries first and foremost, then products from other developed countries and, lastly, products from less developed countries (Okechuku 1994; Wang & Lamb 1983). However, the converse is the case for consumers in developing countries such as Mexico, Jordan, and Nigeria as literature suggests that consumers in developing economies view products from developed countries more favourably than products from their own country (Okechuku & Onyemah, 1999).

Related literature on the COO concept by Kalicharan (2014), suggested that when consumers are aware of certain country characteristics, they become more inclined to use country-of-origin as an external cue in evaluating product quality and in ordering their purchase decision process. Accordingly, consumers conferred a higher evaluation of product quality on products produced in developed countries, owing to the technological advances and competitive nature of the markets in these countries. However, in some cases, consumers prefer products manufactured locally, owning to ethnocentrism and patriotism. Kalicharan (2014) moreover suggested that with increasing globalization and the narrowing of markets, it is possible to neutralize or lessen the effect of country-of-origin effects by emphasizing and accentuating other branding elements apart from the COO through promotional activities.

Consumers purchase decision is based on both intrinsic and extrinsic product or service cues or values depicted by the physical composition of a product and product related features respectively. According to Meng, Nasco and Clark (2007) extrinsic product attributes such as brand name and manufacturers reputation may indicate the country where a product was made, assembled, or both. Consequently, the brand name, retailer reputation, and products' country of origin constitute the extrinsic cues and can be manipulated without physically changing actual products (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999).

Branding of Fashion Products and Consumer Characteristics

Fashion products by extension are defined as consumer goods where style holds the primary importance, and the price is secondary and such goods include clothing, jewellery, handbags, sun shades, and shoes (Business Dictionary.Com, 2015).

Kapferer (2008) argued that the ability of a brand to exert power which can significantly influence the market seeks to determine the brand existence. This equally shows the distinctive competence of the brand and its manufacturer in view of rivals. However, this ability to harness enormous power takes time and tends to be short in the case of online brands, fashion brands, and brands for teenagers, but longer for example, car brands and corporate brands. However, the power can be lost, if competition strategy is mismanaged. This is so much that even if the brand still possesses brand awareness, image and market shares, it might not influence the market any more because consumers and distributors may be buying because of price only not because they are conscious of any exclusive benefit from the brand (Kapferer, 2008), i.e., when a brand losses its power the good becomes a commodity that only the price can differentiate in the market.

Krupka, Ozretic-Dosen and Previsic (2014) citing Jackson (2004) identified luxury fashion brands to possess qualities such as symbolic values arising from exclusivity, premium prices, image, and status. This well illustrates the differing motive and choice bases for either to buy a "Made in Italy" or a "Made in China" fashion products by the consumer and in effect synchronizing these with the need for the season and the event/occasion.

As a corollary, Piron (2000) argued that a product's country of origin has a stronger effect when considering luxury products than considering essential products. This reinforces the notion that for luxury fashion brands, COO is a strong component of the brand perception by consumers and can constitute a "make-or-break of brand's market success" (Krupka, Ozretic-Dosen & Previsic, 2014).

5. Methodology

5.1. Research Design
The study adopts descriptive design through a cross-sectional survey research. Two fashion products categories were selected (clothes and shoes). The selected fashion products categories represent the usual fashion products imported from these two countries (clothes and shoes).

Sampling and Data Collection Procedure

Data collection which was facilitated through the cross-sectional survey made use of a structured questionnaire administered to 300 respondents that 223 returned correctly responded. Convenience sampling technique was adopted to select the relevant respondents who could be reached as much as possible. The study took place in Lagos, Ogun and Osun states in Nigeria. These states were convenient for the researchers to avoid unnecessary constraints in terms of data collection. Although there is no absolute guaranty that the sample is statistically representative of the average Nigerian consumer, our sample seems reasonable as these states provide an enormous accommodation for Nigerians and other nationals as residents to transact business and other social activities in Nigeria hobnobbing around the commercial nerve centre of West Africa (Lagos State). The population comprises of adults from 18 and above and includes both male and female categories as shown in Table 1 below.

Study Instrument

The study made use of a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into two groups (Group 1 - Contry of Origin is Italy and Group 2 – Country of Origin is China) that each person responds and has three sections.

The first section captures data on the criteria of deep brands category (Kotler, 1994) with respect to clothes and shoes made in China and Italy (2 groups) using 26 questions to test the five hypotheses (H_0i to H_0v, see Appendix A).

In the second part of the instrument the respondents are questioned about their demographic characteristics (see, Table 1).

The last part elicited responses in terms of the preference rating by COO qualities.

The pattern of questions is designed to indicate comparison in the consumers' preference between "Made in Italy" and "Made in China". Responses rating were delineated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from highly preferred (5) to not preferred (1). The brand perception evaluation criteria were delineated between two to three levels for each of the brand characteristics. The breakdown of the levels enabled the respondents to easily identify the specific product feature that they rate according to their respective preference levels.

The instrument was also tested for validity and reliability. Reliability test yielded Cronbach Alpha overall coefficient of $\alpha = 0.84$ which is considered a sufficient proof of the instrument's reliability (Nunnally, 1978).

5.2 Procedure for Data Analysis
Althought the the variables are ordinal, the statitics that we used to test H_0i, H_0ii, H_0iii, H_0iv and H_0v was on the average of 3, 2, 3, 3 an 2 variables, respectively, to each one of the two groups (Italy and China), and the procedure has some degree of justification in the literature (see, Vieira, 2016).

In statistical terms, first we will use a standard Two Paired Groups T-test that was complemented with a random re-sampling metodology using (bootstrapping) replicated from Vieira (2016). The program used has been (for $H_{0.}i$, see Appendix B).

6. Results
The result showed the pattern of buyers' characteristics and findings from hypotheses tested in the study. Buyer characteristics showed a cross-section of buyers in terms of age range and the type of occupation (see, Table1). Buyers between the ages of 18 to 27 constitute the major type of consumers in the study and are students which depict the type of user and the related activity (Kotler, 1994).

Hypotheses tested showed that consumers perceive a significant difference in terms of attributes, culture, personality, values and benefits (at a significant level of 0.1%) being fashion products labeled "Made in Italy" percept as superior to those labeled "Made in China" (see, Table 2).

The mean difference in all dimensions between China and Italy, on average 0.57 points, indicates the global

perception of consumers on the exclusive quality of Italian fashion brand's ability to transfer a certain sense of product quality in concert with values and experiences of beauty, elegance, tradition, luxury, and life quality (Snaiderbaur, 2009). However, a cursory concern should be made about the close marking by China in terms of competition in the area of culture and benefits levels (based on business tradition and craftsmanship) and (affordability and durability) respectively especially in textile and clothing in the international marketplace (Tommaso & Dragomirescu, 2009).

7. Conclusion

The study evaluated the perception of consumers about fashion products with specific focus on those labeled as 'Made in Italy" and labeled as "Made in China". From data we can conclude that the Nigerian consumers perceive as superior fashion products labeled as "Made in Italy" than labeled "Made in China". The findings helped to highlight clear areas of marketing strategies in terms of establishing the products as deep brands in the marketplace. The results suggest that marketers need to strategically manage consumers' preferences especially

between Italian and Chinese fashion products on brand characteristics such as culture, personality, and benefits dimensions.

Table 1: User Characteristics in the Purchase of 'Made in Italy' and 'Made in China' Fashion Products.

Age	Frequency (n=223)	Percent.
18-27	181	81.16%
28-37	18	8.07%
38-47	21	9.42%
>=48	3	1.35%
Male	142	63.7%
Female	81	36.3%
Occupation		
Trader	32	14.3%
Student	97	43.5%
Administrator	15	6.7%
Entrepreneur	27	12.1%
Teacher	52	23.3%

Source: Study Authors

Table 2: Result of Independent Sample T-test on the Levels of Brand Perception of "Made in Italy" and "Made in China" Fashion Products in Nigeria.

Measures	Country	H_0i:Attributes	H_0ii:Culture	H_0iii:Personality	H_0iv:Values	H_0v:Benefits	Average
Mean	Italy	4.59	4.19	4.59	4.30	4.37	4.43
	China	3.74	3.96	3.71	3.96	4.01	3.86
	Italy – China	0.86	0.23	0.88	0.35	0.37	0.57
Standard deviation	Italy	0.46	0.70	0.51	0.68	0.56	0.36
	China	0.87	0.74	0.86	0.91	0.74	0.66
	Italy – China	0.97	0.89	0.98	1.17	0.83	0.65
Correlation	Italy, China	0.03	0.25	0.06	-0.06	0.20	0.29
t-value	*t-test*	13.1	3.92	13.5	4.42	6.58	13.2
	Bootstrapping	9.84	3.78	10.0	4.25	6.03	9.86
p-value	*t-test*	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	Bootstrapping	0/100000	6/100000	0/100000	3/100000	0/100000	0/100000

Source: Study Authors. Data and programs can be retrieved from

http://www.fep.up.pt/repec/por/emrpij/files/Patrick_Ladipo_Solomon2016_Data.zip

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Appendix A - Questionnaire

H_0i: Atributes

Q1.1: The Quality of design of clothes and shoes (Italy)

Q1.2: The Quality of design of clothes and shoes (China)

Q2.1: The Quality of texture of leather and fabrics (Italy)

Q2.2: The Quality of texture of leather and fabrics (China)

Q3.1: Fitness of clothes or shoes (Italy)

Q3.2: Fitness of clothes or shoes (china)

H_0ii: Culture

Q.4.1: Clothes and shoes produced with modem technology (Italy)

Q.4.2: Clothes and shoes produced with modern technology (China)

Q5.1: Manufacturers Consitent in making good quality shoes and clothes (Italy)

Q5.2: Manufacturers Consitent in making good quality shoes and clothes (China)

H_0iii: Pesonality

Q6.1: Shoes and clothes that makes me look confident (Italy)

Q6.2: Shoes and clothes that makes me look confident (China)

Q7.1: Shoes and clothes that can make me express myself better (Italy)

Q7.2: Shoes and clothes that can make me express myself better (china)

Q8.1: Shoes and clothes that boost my charisma (Italy)

Q8.2: Shoes and clothes that boost my charisma (China)

H_0iv: Values

Q9.1: Clothes that meet my taste of quality (Italy)

Q9.2: Clothes that meet my taste of quality (China)

Q10.1: Shoes and clothes that boost my status (Italy)

Q10.2: Shoes and clothes that boost my status (China)

Q11.1: Shoes and clothes that have stylish features (Italy)

Q11.2: Shoes and clothes that have stylish features (China)

H_0v: Benefits

Q12.1: Shoes and clothes that can last (Italy)

Q12.2: Shoes and clothes that can last (china)

Q13.1: Clothes and shoes that are affordable (Italy)

Q13.2: Clothes and shoes that are affordable (china)

Appendix B – Program that evaluates H_0i

```
data<-read.csv("quest1.csv", sep=";")
value.to.test<-mean(data[1:223,1]+data[1:223,3]+ data[1:223,5]-data[1:223,2]-data[1:223,4]-data[1:223,6])
t.test(data[1:223,1]+data[1:223,3]+data[1:223,5],data[1:223,2]+data[1:223,4]+data[1:223,6],alternative =
"greater",paired = TRUE)
# Bootstraping
result<-0
for (i in 1:100000)
  {x<-sample(1:446,223,rep=TRUE)
  case<-data[x,]
  result[i] <-mean(case[,1]+case[,3]+case[,5]-case[,2]-case[,4]-case[,6])
  }
t.statistics<-value.to.test/sd(result)
p = length(result[result>value.to.test]
```