THE EFFECT OF COUNTRY IMAGE ON BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS: PARALLEL MEDIATION EFFECTS OF PRODUCT AND SERVICE QUALITY[1]

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ABSTRACT

Consumers use the country image as not only heuristics to predict the quality of the products but also as a symbol of the self by which they affiliate themselves with certain groups and differentiate from others. This study intents to understand the effects of COI on product and service quality perceptions and a set of behavioral intentions through a holistic perspective in the automobile industry. Moreover, as a complementary element, some insights into the conceptualization and the measurement of the country image are meant to be gained. The findings of this study verify the assertions in the current literature on the two-dimensional country image construct, which consists of cognition and affect. The cognition-oriented country image scales threaten the validity of studies conducted in this area because the results obtained with cognition-oriented scales are inadvertently attributed to the (general) country image construct consisting of both cognitive and affective elements. In line with the service dominant logic, it is identified that a holistic approach is required predicting the effects of the country image on quality perceptions. Even in such a pure product category as automobiles, strong associations were identified between country image and perceived service quality. Therefore, regardless of the content of the market offering, it is important that quality must be evaluated under two separate dimensions as (physical) product quality and service quality. With the help of this two-dimensional conceptualization of country image and quality perceptions, country of origin element attached to the market offering can be transformed into actual behaviors.

Keywords: Country image, cognitive dimension, affective dimension, quality perception, behavioral intentions

ÜLKE İMAJININ DAVRANIŞSAL NİYETLER ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİSİ: ÜRÜN VE HİZMET KALİTESİNİN PARALEL ARACI ETKİLERİ

ÖZ

Tüketiciler, ülke imajını yalnızca ürünlerin kalitesini tahmin etmek için değil, aynı zamanda kendilerini belirli gruplarla ilişkilendirdikleri ve diğerlerinden farklılaştırdıkları bir benlik sembolü olarak da kullanırlar. Bu çalışma, otomobil endüstrisinde bütünsel bir bakış açısıyla ülke imajının ürün ve hizmet kalitesi algıları ve bir dizi davranışsal niyet üzerindeki etkilerini anlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Ayrıca, tamamlayıcı bir unsur olarak, ülke imajının kavramsallaştırılmasına ve ölçülmesine ilişkin bazı iç görülerin kazanılması amaçlanmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın bulguları, mevcut literatürün biliş ve duyuştan oluşan iki boyutlu ülke imajı yapısı üzerindeki iddialarını doğrulamaktadır. Biliş yönelimli ülke imajı ölçekleri bu alanda yürütülen çalışmaların geçerliliğini tehdit etmektedir, çünkü biliş yönelimli ölçeklerle elde edilen sonuçlar farkında olmadan bilişsel ve duyuşsal unsurlardan oluşan (genel) ülke imajı yapısına atfedilmektedir. Hizmet baskın mantık doğrultusunda ülke imajının kalite algıları üzerindeki etkilerini tahminlemede bütüncül bir yaklaşımın gerekli olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Otomobil gibi saf bir ürün kategorisinde bile, ülke imajı ile algılanan hizmet kalitesi arasında güçlü ilişkiler tespit edilmiştir. Bu nedenle, pazar sunumunun içeriği ne olursa olsun, kalitenin (fiziksel) ürün kalitesi ve hizmet kalitesi olarak iki ayrı boyutta değerlendirilmesi önemlidir. Ülke imajı ve kalite algılarının bu iki boyut altında kavramsallaştırılması sayesinde, pazar sunumuna eklenen menşe ülke unsuru gerçek davranışlara dönüştürülebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ülke imajı, bilişsel boyut, duyuşsal boyut, kalite algısı, davranışsal niyetler

1. Introduction

The increasing consumer demand for customization has been shaping the market structure. Goods and services have varied to the specific needs and want of the consumers' (Izmir, 2016a). This demand driven by the consumers paved the way for new categories and product ranges in these categories. The increased number of brands providing very similar products in the same product category created a huge problem for consumers in making an optimum purchase decision (Izmir, 2016b). Therefore, they started relying upon certain heuristics to predict the quality of the products. Country image (COI) is one of the tools that consumers consider when making a purchase decision to cope with the chaos resulting from both the convergence and increased number of brands offering very similar products. Although COI effects have been evaluated by cognitive theories such as the Theory of Reasoned Action, Theory of Planned Behavior (Han, 1989; 1990), Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Cakici and Shukla, 2017), Stereotype Content Model, and BIAS Map (Chattalas et al., 2008; Maher and Carter, 2011), COI cannot be only molded into pure cognitive oriented approaches because it also comprises of emotional connotations of the consumers to the products originating from certain countries.

In the literature, the effect of COI on product quality and purchase intention has been discussed for a long time. There is an agreement in the literature that the effect of COI on attitudes is stronger than on behaviors (Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999; Izmir, 2017). Depending on the involvement level, consumers try to reach as much information as possible to assess a brand to make a purchase decision among alternatives. As an extrinsic cue, COI is used as a sign of quality (Nebenzahl et al., 1997) even though consumers sometimes do not accept that they use country of origin (COO) information to evaluate the brands (Herz and Diamantopoulos, 2017).

According to Balabanis and Diamantopoulos (2011), the association between COI and behaviors is weak because COI is linked to behaviors through product/brand evaluations and quality perceptions. Moreover, behaviors and/or behavioral intentions toward a product/brand are formed by more antecedents than only product evaluations and quality perceptions. Many other vital extrinsic and intrinsic cues arouse purchase behavior (Ahmed et al., 2004; Ahmed and d'Astous, 2008; Garrett et at., 2017). Another issue in the COI literature is the fact that studies mostly focused on the consumer goods market rather than the service market (Javalgi et al., 2001; Dedeoglu, 2019). Izmir (2021a) states that the line between goods and services is becoming more blurred and what consumers seek in their exchange behaviors is not the core benefits of the goods or services but the value attached to them. Convergence of the goods and services markets requires a new perspective to increase the value of the market offering (Gummeson, 2007). Studies in the COI literature have mostly focused on either services or goods. A holistic approach is required, especially in industries where services and goods

are inseparable elements of the market offering. Furthermore, the measurement of COI stands as another important issue to be carefully addressed in the design of every study. Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009) emphasized that COI should have been conceptualized as a two-dimensional construct composed of cognitive and affective dimensions.

This study intends to understand COI's effects on quality perceptions and a set of behavioral intentions through a holistic perspective in the automobile industry in which goods (physical) and service quality are of utmost importance. Considering that a market offering cannot only consist of either pure goods or pure services, which can be only a degree, not an absolute state (Gummeson, 2007), the effect of COI on quality perception should be measured based on the balance between pure goods and pure services. Hence, this study considers after-sales service quality with physical quality to set the goods and services balance. Moreover, as a secondary purpose, this study intents to test the construct validity of the two-dimensional COI composed of cognition and affect to make a theoretical contribution to the literature. Four leading countries in the automobile industry, Germany, Japan, France, and the USA, were selected to examine the consistency of the results.

The study continues with the literature review part, in which the hypotheses of the research model are developed. Then, the method of the study is mentioned. The results and discussion part presents the study's major findings discussed with the relevant literature. Afterward, the study's conclusion is drawn, and the whole study is summarized based on the contributions made to theory and practice.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1 The Effect of COI on Quality Perception and A Set of Behavioral Intentions

The first studies in the COI literature go as far back as the 1960s when the COO effect was determined as an element of success in the international market (Dichter, 1962; Schooler, 1965; Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999). In this study, the concept of country image is defined as "an attitude that has cognitive and affective characteristics and is shaped by the positive, neutral, or negative experiences of a person with a certain country gained either directly (visits, business relations, family relations, friends etc.) or indirectly (conventional and social media, brands, movies, TV series, etc.). Country image based on indirect experiences is more symbolic and perceptual, while country image perception based on direct experiences is more concrete and solid." The first COO studies have identified consumer stereotypes, a set of attitudes and behaviors toward certain countries and their products. This phenomenon was initially explained by "made-in" labels (Nagashima 1970, 1977), and positive perceptions toward the products of certain countries were associated with their development in economy, technology, industry, and culture (Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999; Izmir, 2017). Later, made-

in effects which drive consumer behaviors in the international market have been explained by a more complex concept, the COI. Early COO studies tended to identify the differences in consumer behaviors toward certain countries, but with the COI concept's development, the reason behind the differences became clearer (Roth and Diamantopoulos, 2009). Consumer perceptions of made-in labels were not as comprehensive and generic as well-established attitudes (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen, 1991) like COI, which consists of complex cognitive and affective processes. COI construct successfully explains the differences in attitudes and behaviors better than the overall beliefs, perceptions, and stereotypes toward certain countries.

When the country-of-origin literature is examined, it can be identified that there are studies examining the effects of the country image on quality perception and purchase intention through either multi-cue or single-cue approaches. In the multiple cue approach, a set of variables that are effective in consumers' purchasing decisions are added into the model (Johanson et al., 1985; Ahmed et al., 2004), and then COI and their relative effects on attitudes and behaviors are examined. On the other hand, the single cue approach only considers the effect of the COO/ COI (Nagashima, 1970; Izmir, 2016b). The relative effect of COI on attitudes and behaviors is smaller in the multi-cue studies than in the single-cue studies. Country image as a single independent variable has a greater effect on attitudes (Han, 1990; Paswan and Sharma, 2004). However, it has been observed that the relative effects of the country image decrease when different variables such as price, brand perception, store image, and product characteristics are included in the model (Dodds et al., 1991; Ahmed et al., 2004).

COO/COI has been mainly studied in the goods market (Bilkey and Nes, 1982; Han, 1989, 1990; Ahmed and d'Astous, 2008; Chattalas et al., 2008; Costa et al., 2016). The role and impact of COI in the service market remains a much less studied area than in the goods market. In the literature review of Javalgi et al. (2001) covering the last twenty years on the country image, only nineteen studies using service market themes were found. While only six of them were within the scope of basic services (ski vacation, export consultancy (B2B), legal services for foreigners, retailer services, eye care services, and airline services), the majority of the studies were conducted on the complementary services (guarantee, loan terms, customer support). Javalgi et al. (2001) concluded that the effect of country of origin on consumer attitudes and behaviors is valid in the services market as well as in the goods market. Cheng et al. (2014) support the view of Javalgi et al. (2001) in that COI literature has kept giving more weight to the research on the goods market rather than services. Cheng et al. (2014) found a positive effect of COI on the evaluations of intangible services in the airline sector. Zang et al. (2016) emphasized the vitality of the inclusion of the service element in COI studies, especially in the tourism industry. Dedeoglu (2019) mentioned that COI studies have not paid sufficient attention to the services industry and supported the

view that COI does not only have physical and service quality effects.

Fakhrai Rad and Izmir (2013) found that Swedish consumers perceive the COI of Germany more strongly than the COI of America and Japan due to perceived psychic distance. Hence, Swedish consumers evaluate the physical quality and service quality of German cars better than the others and develop a set of positive behaviors toward German cars. It can be said that country image shapes the quality perception of goods (Elliot and Cameron, 1994; Nebenzahl et al., 1997; Ahmed et al., 2004) and services (Javalgi et al., 2001; McCleary et al., 2006; Thelen et al., 2010), and has a significant impact on the process of purchasing decisions (Izmir et al., 2022). Considering all these studies, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H₁: *Country image positively affects product (physical) quality perception in the automobile industry.*

H₂: *Country image positively affects (after sales) service quality perception in the automobile industry.*

H₃: *Country image positively affects a set of behavioral intentions in the automobile industry.*

Country image affects the cognitive processes of the consumers and enables them to make inferences about the quality of the product (Bilkey and Nes, 1982; Izmir, 2016b). Consumers tend to believe that developed countries are technologically and technically more advanced, producing better quality products. Therefore, consumers who make cognitive evaluations believe that certain countries, especially in certain industries, can produce superior products than their counterparts (Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999). While evaluating the theoretical foundations of the concept of country image, Buhmann and Ingenhoff (2015a; 2015b) determined that there are gaps in this construct's definition, scope, and conceptualization. According to Buhmann (2016), the theoretical foundations of the dimensionality of the country image and the results of the empirical tests are still not satisfactory. Just as some other authors in the country image literature (Chattalas et al., 2008; Roth and Diamantopoulos, 2009; Maher and Carter, 2011, Izmir et al., 2022), Buhmann also mentioned in his studies that the affective dimension is waiting to be completed as a missing part in the measurement and conceptualization of country image, and he and his colleagues argued that country image had only been considered as a cognitive concept in many research models (Buhmann and Ingenhoff 2015a; 2015b; Buhmann, 2016).

Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009), Maher and Carter (2011), and Izmir et al. (2022) state that the concept of the country image consists of two dimensions, which are cognitive and affective, and this two-dimensional country image construct is an antecedent of behavior. Maher and Carter (2011) argue that the cognitive dimension measures consumers' beliefs toward other countries, while the affective dimension measures consumers' emotional reactions and feelings

toward other countries. Maher and Carter (2011) explain how the cognitive and affective dimensions work with the following example: Although the French do not regard the Portuguese as very competent (cognition), they can develop a feeling of love (affect) towards them due to the Portuguese being polite (cognitive attitude). This indicates that the concept of country image includes not only cognition but also affect. Furthermore, it can be said that studies ignoring the effect in the measurement and conceptualization of COI fall into a serious study artifact.

2.2. The Effect of Goods and Service Quality on Behavioral Intentions

According to the quality approach in Japanese philosophy, quality is zero defect; that is, doing the right thing at the first time (Crosby, 1979). Perceived quality is the general perception of consumers about the excellence or superiority of the offerings of a particular business. (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Most of the studies on the definition and measurement of the concept of quality have been carried out in the context of the goods market (Parasuraman et al., 1985). According to Parasuraman et al. (1988), perceived quality and actual (objective) quality are two different concepts. Perceived quality is a type of attitude that emerges from comparing perceived performance with expectations.

According to Parasuraman et al. (1988), quality is generally accepted judgment about the superiority of a particular good or service. Perceived service quality emerges by comparing the expectations of consumers from the service offering of a particular business with their perceived performance (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Therefore, perceived service quality is shaped by the degree and direction of the gap between consumers' perceptions and expectations regarding the service provided. If the perceived service exceeds the consumers' expectations, the service quality is perceived positively; otherwise, it is perceived as negative (Izmir and Oypan, 2022).

Zeithaml et al. (1996) mention that when the service quality is positive, consumers can engage in positive behaviors such as positive word of mouth, loyalty, recommending the business, spending/shopping more from the business, and bearing high prices. Avcı and Yıldız (2021) state that perceived quality, price, and product properties are three essential elements that strongly impact consumers' purchase decisions. On the other hand, when the service quality is negative, consumers may engage in negative behaviors such as negative word of mouth, tending to purchase from other brands, making complaints, and stopping the purchase behavior.

The Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) are two important and complementary theories used to explain the attitudes and behaviors of individuals. According to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), behavioral and normative beliefs form attitudes towards

behavior and subjective norms of individuals. Thus, through subjective norms and attitudes towards behavior, beliefs shape behavioral intentions and then final behaviors. Consumers' behavioral intentions are important for businesses because they indicate the consumer's tendency to purchase (Zeithaml et al., 1996). Quality is also an attitude and, therefore, closely related to behavior (Parasuraman et al., 1985; 1988). Ozer et al. (2018) regard purchase intention as a planning phase before purchasing a product/service, and intentions are different from attitudes in being a conscious effort to act in a certain way.

In the COI studies conducted in the goods market, it has been argued that country image affects quality perception, and quality perception leads to purchase intention (Nebenzahl et al., 1997; Ahmed et al., 2004; Javalgi et al., 2001). Moreover, it has been discussed in many studies that perceived service quality affects a set of behavioral intentions (Boulding et al., 1993; Cronin et al., 2000; Dagger and Sweeney, 2006; Aliman and Mohamad, 2016). Based on the literature above on goods and service quality, the following hypotheses are developed, and the research model is illustrated in Figure 1:

H₄: *Perceived product (physical) quality affects behavioral intentions in the automobile industry.*

H₅: *Perceived service quality affects behavioral intentions in the automobile industry.*
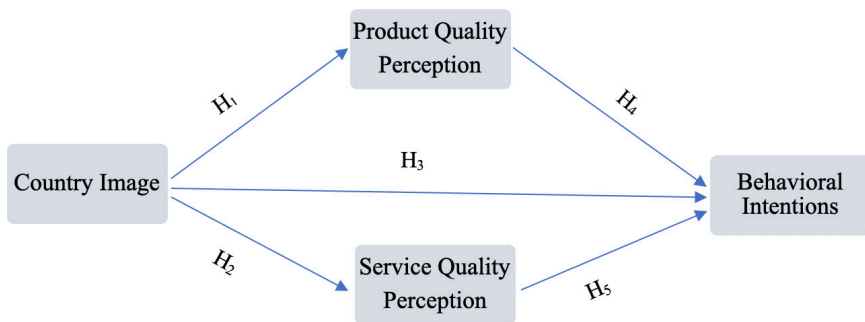

Figure 1: Research Model of the Study

Parasurman et al. (1988) emphasize that the retailers, at first sight, seem as if they provide pure goods, but almost all of them also market services. Most retailers provide facilitating services such as sales assistance or delivery when selling their products. On the other hand, companies in sectors such as consultancy, airline, and communication only market services. In this respect, Parasurman et al. (1988) emphasize that the service element exists in almost every sector, and therefore the issue of service quality is very important.

According to Izmir (2021a), from the perspective of exchange in marketing, a consumer either decides to purchase a market offering, which is expected to

satisfy a need, want, and desire, by paying a certain price or not. The content of this market offer may consist of goods and/or services. However, the consumer actually buys the added value to this market offering. Kotler and Armstrong (2010) consider the product at three levels: core, actual and augmented product. The core product is the most basic version of a particular product and offers basic benefits such as the camera taking pictures. When the core product becomes available to the market, its brand, package, price, etc., turn into an actual or expected product. The product's perceived value increases, and it gets augmented with added benefits such as warranty, delivery, and consultancy services to differentiate it from the competitors. Therefore, Izmir (2021a) emphasizes that it is quite difficult to distinguish between goods and services since a certain product consists of a combination of goods and services as content.

3. Method of The Study

3.1. Context of The Research

This study investigates the roles of product quality and (after-sales) service quality in the impact of country image on consumers' behavioral intentions towards specific brands in the automobile industry. The effects of the country image on quality perception and purchase intention have been studied in the literature for a long time (Wang and Lamb, 1980; Bilkey and Nes, 1982; Han, 1990; Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999; Ahmed et al., 2004; Yunus and Rashid, 2016; Vijaranakorn and Shannon, 2017). This study differs from its counterparts because, in this study, (1) country image is conceptualized as a two-dimensional construct composed of cognition and affect, (2) product quality and service quality are evaluated together in the research model to provide a holistic perspective, (3) the research model is tested across four countries/brands to check the consistency of the results and compare the findings.

In this context, country images of Germany, Japan, France, and the USA are determined, and the effect of COI on quality and behavioral intentions toward Volkswagen-Jetta (Germany), Toyota-Corolla (Japan), Renault-Megane (France), and Ford-Focus (the USA), which are four leading brands in the automobile industry, are discussed. The research model illustrated in Figure 1 is tested across four countries and brands considering the country-brand matches. For instance, the effect of Germany's COI on quality perception and behavioral intentions toward Volkswagen are investigated. In this way, the research model was tested four times.

3.2. Sample and Data Collection

Data were collected from 228 participants selected by convenience sampling. After excluding four observations out of the sample that disturbs the normal distribution assumption, analyses were run with 224 observations. As a result of the statistical power analysis using the Gpower program, it was determined that the sample size

was sufficient enough for the analysis. For 224 observations, the calculated power was more than 95% across four country-brand pairs. Robust results in evaluating the (measurement) model fit, presented in Appendix 2, support this conclusion.

Due to pandemic conditions, an online survey method was utilized. The online survey method is deemed appropriate because the contact with the participants might have made them uncomfortable due to the risk of coronavirus transmission. Initially, the link to the questionnaire was delivered face-to-face to the participants through a QR code. When the participants scanned the QR code, it directly linked them to the online questionnaire. While conducting the survey face-to-face, participants were told to fill it out at their convenient time and also asked to share the link with their social surroundings if possible. Face-to-face delivery of the link failed to produce the anticipated outcome. To increase the number of participants and ensure a sufficient level of representativeness in the sample, the link of the questionnaire was also delivered on various social media platforms. In general, linking the questionnaire available to the participants at their convenient time is expected to increase the results' reliability because participants did not make haste to fill out the questionnaire. Moreover, the online survey method also eliminated the missing data problem because participants cannot send their answers without fully completing the questionnaire when a constraint is added to settings.

Since this study was carried out with a quantitative approach that requires data collection from the participants through a questionnaire, it is among the studies that require ethics committee approval. Accordingly, at the beginning of the research, it was approved by Anadolu University Ethics Committee with the decision document dated 03.11.2020 and numbered 54674 Protocol.

3.3. Analysis

Firstly, the improvement of the data has been achieved through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 21.0. Having completed the improvement of the data, confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) of the latent variables were run. The assessment of the construct validity in which discriminant validity and convergent validity of the scales were evaluated was made using the Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) 20.0. Afterward, the extent of the validity of the hypotheses was tested through the Process macro of Hayes (2017) using SPSS 21.0.

Before starting to check the validity of the hypotheses, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed for the scales used in this study. The scales in the model were tested for four countries/brands separately. EFA of the scales was made considering Hair et al.'s (2006) suggestions. EFA procedures were applied to the scales because especially COI scale is quite new. Therefore, factorial distributions and the reliability issues of this scale should be handled before starting the hypotheses tests. The details on EFA and reliability analyses were not mentioned here in detail because of the space limitations6. The

lowest KMO value is found to be greater than .50, and Bartlett's test is significant at the .001 level. The lowest factorial loading is greater than .40. In the rotation procedure, the Varimax method is used. Cronbach's Alpha level for the lowest scale is found to be greater than .70. The item-to-total correlations exceed .50, and inter-item correlations are greater than .30.

For the CFA process, the literature fails to agree on a golden rule to evaluate the model fit (Marsh et al., 2004; Markland, 2007). According to Kline (2016), and Hair et al. (2014), the most widely used indices in the evaluation of the model fit are x2/df<3; CFI>.90; SRMR<.08; RMSEA<.07. These fit measures evaluate the model fit of the measurement model. The Process is used to analyze the hypothesized model's validity because most of the popular covariance-based SEM programs like AMOS cannot calculate the significance level of the parallel mediation effect for each mediator. However, the significance level of each mediator could have been determined by the normal theory approach by using Sobel test, but this test is very sensitive to normal distribution assumption and might result in type II error if the distributions of the indirect effects are non-normal (Hayes, 2017).

The construct validity of the measurement model is ensured by convergent validity and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2014). Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is determined as .50 and above, and Composite Reliability (CR) is .70 and higher for each construct in the model. Therefore, the convergent validity criterion is met for each construct in the model. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), if AVE is greater than the squared correlations between each construct in the measurement model, the discriminant validity criterion is also met. Measurement models for each country/brand satisfied the requirements of discriminant validity. The measurement models separately applied the same procedures for the first-order and second-order constructs. Details on the validity of the measurement model are illustrated in Appendix 2. Having completed the procedures for construct validity, paths in the proposed model were tested by the Process macro of SPSS 21.0.

3.4. Measures

Country image is measured by CIscale (Izmir, 2021b). CIscale is a specific and robust scale developed for measuring the cognitive and affective dimensions of the concept of country image. The Product quality scale for automobiles is based on the studies of Chao (1993; 1988) and Pappu and Quester (2006), while (after-sales) service quality is measured by Gonzales (2015). Studies of Jang and Namkung (2009) and Cakici and Shukla (2017) are used in the measurement of a set of behavioral intentions in which willingness to purchase for oneself and others, word of mouth, and the suggestion was evaluated. Five-point Likert scale is used in the measurement of the scales. Items of the scales are illustrated in Appendix 1.

4. Results and Discussion

Significant direct and indirect effects of the country image on attitudes and behavioral intentions are identified in the automobile industry across four different countries and brands. The results of the hypotheses tests are shown in Table 1. Country image significantly affects product quality perceptions of the consumers, and hence H_1 is supported. The strongest link between country image and product quality is observed for Japan-Toyota and the lowest for France-Renault pairs. The association between country image and consumer perceptions of products has been emphasized in the literature and goes as far back as the first studies on the country of origin (Nagashima 1970; 1977; Han, 1989; Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999; Izmir, 2016b). However, in the literature, it is criticized that the country image, and quality perception link has been mostly studied in the goods industry than services (Javalgi et al., 2001). This study not only focuses on the country image-product quality link but also considers the effect of country image on service quality perception.

Strong effects on the country image are also identified on perceived service quality. Therefore, H_2 is supported. Country image and service quality association are the strongest for the Germany-Volkswagen pair and the lowest for France-Renault. Although the magnitude of the effects of the country image on product quality and service quality seems very similar, it can be said that this effect is relatively stronger on product quality than on service quality. The effect of country image on the development of a set of attitudes toward brands has been supported in the literature (Bilkey and Nes, 1982; Laroche et al., 2005; Costa et al., 2016; Izmir, 2016b; 2017). According to Parasuraman (1985; 1988, 1994), perceived service quality is something very similar to attitudes, and hence country image-service quality association is a natural outcome. Furthermore, Javalgi et al. (2001) state that the relationship between country image and product quality perception is also a widespread phenomenon in the service industry, and this study presented supporting results to the assertions of Javalgi et al. (2001). Thelen et al. (2010) claim that country of (service) origin and service quality are strongly associated especially in the pure service domain, and consumers depend on communication, security, and reliability aspects of service quality when buying an off-shored service.

Country image is not directly associated with behavioral intentions in any given country and brand pair. Therefore, H_3 cannot be supported. Non-significant country image and behavioral intentions link has been detected in the literature in the past (Wang et al., 2012; Izmir, 2017), and there are also other studies emphasizing the weakness of this link (Peterson and Jolibert, 1995; Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999). According to Balabanis and Diamantopoulos (2011) and Izmir et al. (2022), country image and behaviors link is usually mediated by consumer perceptions of products. The non-significant direct effect of country image on behavioral intentions suggests that there might be indirect effects of country

image through product quality and service quality elements. There are studies in the literature supporting the mediator effect of quality on the link between country image and behavioral intentions (Izmir, 2016b; Rahimnia and Sarvari, 2019; Dedeoglu, 2019; Hien et al., 2020). Han (1989; 1990) explains the effect of quality (beliefs) as a mediator in his halo effect model. Based on these, indirect effects of the country image on behavioral intentions are tested through a parallel mediation effect model by two mediators, and results are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 1. Hypotheses Testing

Relationships			Unstandardized Effects				Hypotheses
			Germany	Japan	France	The USA	
Country Image	→	Product Quality	. 509***	.564***	.228**	.462***	H_1- Supported
Country Image	→	Service Quality	.519***	.520***	.308***	.447***	H_2- Supported
Country Image	→	Behavioral Intentions	-.039	.055	.104	-.020	H_3- *Not Supported*
Product Quality	→	Behavioral Intentions	.693***	.654***	.762***	.696***	H_4- Supported
Service Quality	→	Behavioral Intentions	.285***	.281***	.230**	.338***	H_5- Supported

** p<.01

*** p<.001

Product quality positively affects a set of behavioral intentions in the automobile industry across four countries. Based on this, H_4 is supported. It is determined that the product quality of the Renault brand has the strongest effect on the formation of a set of behavioral intentions. The magnitude of the product quality and behavioral intentions association seems quite similar for other brands. Past studies also support the product quality and behavioral intentions relationship (Han, 1990; JinKyo et al., 2019). When the quality of a product is favored, consumers become more prone to develop positive behaviors toward it. Especially product quality gains more importance in such high-involvement products as cars (Ahmed et al., 2004; Izmir, 2016).

The Service quality also showed significant effects on behavioral intentions for each brand in the research model, and hence H_5 is supported. The service quality of Ford has the strongest effect on behavioral intentions, and the magnitude of the effect of service quality is quite similar for other brands. However, the relative effects of service quality on behavioral intentions across four country-brand pairs are determined as much lower than those of product quality. This finding implies that product quality is rendered more important than service quality in the development of behavioral intentions in the automobile industry. Nonetheless, service quality perception succeeded in arousing behavioral intentions toward

brands, even in the automobile industry, in which the market offer can be categorized as a purely physical product. Gummeson (2007) and Izmir (2021a) support this view by emphasizing that the line between goods and services has become blurred in today's market structure. Even products categorized as pure goods have a service element embedded in and the service quality in the automobile industry can only be considered as an element attached to the offer to enrich the final product. In accordance with Kotler and Armstrong's (2010) framework on the levels of a product, it makes sense that consumers are prone to attach more relevance to product quality than service quality in the automobile industry.

Table 2. Mediation Effects

Relationships	Unstandardized Indirect Effects			
	Germany	**Japan**	**France**	**The USA**
Country Image→Product Quality→Behavioral Intentions	.360 (.192; .559)	.369 (.221; .545)	.173 (.037; .325)	.322 (.208; .466)
Country Image→Service Quality→ Behavioral Intentions	.145 (.049; .317)	.146 (.042; .301)	.071 (.021; .151)	.151 (.065; .269)

Note: The Significance level of the indirect effects is calculated by lower and upper limit bootstrap confidence intervals (LLCI; ULCI).

Using the bootstrap method with 5000 samples, mediation effects of product quality and service quality in the relationship between country image and behavioral intentions are investigated across four country-brand pairs, and significant indirect effects of country image are identified. Significance levels of the mediation effects of product quality and service quality are determined by lower limit bootstrap confidence interval (BootLLCI) and upper limit bootstrap confidence interval (BootULCI). According to Hayes (2017), if LLCI and ULCI do not include zero, the indirect effect calculated by Process macro is signed by a 95% BC bootstrap confidence interval.

Mediation effects of product quality are found to be significantly different from zero for each country-brand pair. The product quality of Renault has the lowest mediation effect, and the mediation effects for other brands are determined as very similar compared to one another. The mediation effects of service quality are also found as significantly different from zero for each country-brand pair. Although the mediation effect of service quality in France is so small, it is yet significant on a 95% confidence interval. In general, service quality has shown much smaller mediation effects compared to those of product quality because physical elements might outweigh service characteristics in automobiles. Other studies support the mediation effect of the perceived quality, but these studies have mostly focused on the goods industry (Liefeld, 1993; Wang et al., 2012; JinKyo et al., 2019). Bautista et al. (2020) claim that country image affects purchase intention through

the mediation of perceived product quality and has no direct effect on purchase intention. In addition to the mediation effect of product quality, this study has also reached supporting evidence on the mediation of service quality in the automobile industry through a holistic quality perspective.

As a result of the parallel mediation effect model, although the total indirect effects of country image on behavioral intentions seem similar in the automobile industry across three countries, it is identified that country image of France has the lowest indirect effects through both product and service quality.

Non-significant (Wang et al., 2012; Izmir, 2017) or relatively lower effects of country image (Peterson and Jolibert, 1995; Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999; Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2011) on behavioral intentions point out the possibility that indirect effects of other variables decisive in the consumer decision-making process such as product and service quality develop this link.

5. Conclusion

This study aims to understand the effect of country image, composed of cognitive and affective dimensions, on a set of attitudes and behavioral intentions in the automobile industry. Country image has significant effects on perceived product quality and service quality. Positive perceptions of the quality of physical products and services shape a set of behavioral intentions in the automobile industry. These behavioral intentions include being willing to purchase for oneself and others, word of mouth, and suggestions. No direct effect of country image has been identified on behavioral intentions for any of the four country-brand pairs. Although the effects of country image on the perceived quality of both product and service are very identical, the strongest indirect effects of country image on behavioral intentions have been reached through the mediation of product quality. Mediation effects of service quality, as well as its direct effects on behavioral intentions, are found to be much lower than those of product quality. Although product quality and service quality perceptions work in harmony with relation to country image, product quality seems to be the dominant factor in this study because an automobile, in its nature, is more of a physical product than a service. This conclusion supports the findings of the overwhelming majority of the country image studies (Liefeld, 1993; Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999; Wang et al., 2012; Izmir, 2016b) and also compliments the need for studies in the service industry (Javalgi et al., 2001; Izmir et al., 2022).

Strong associations of service quality with country image in the goods market imply that country image studies need to consider service-dominant logic. The fact that the direct and mediation effects of service quality on behavioral intentions are weaker than those of product quality is thought to be context-dependent, and much stronger effects are expected for the studies to be conducted in the service industry. Future studies utilizing the extensions of the Halo Effect Model of Han

(1989; 1990) can benefit from a Parallel Mediation Effect Model in this study in which product quality and service quality are used as mediators in the model with a holistic perspective.

Because the cognitive country image is strongly associated with quality perceptions, it may not mean these positive perceptions and attitudes will transform into actual behavior. Country image perception can be described as a two-faced coin. On the one side is cognition, and on the other is affect. The general perception of a country is developed in harmony or conflict with the multitude of both cognition and affect. For instance, the cognitive country image of the USA might be perceived as high in Iraq because the USA has a good education, good standard of living, strong army, developed economy, high product quality, high technology, a workforce with high technical skills so on so forth, which are the items by which country image is measured (Papadopoulos et al., 1990; Martin and Eroglu, 1993; Parameswaran and Pisharodi, 1994; Knight et al., 2003). These are a set of facts about a country and do not produce extreme differences among people. On the contrary, Iraqi people might perceive the affective country image of the USA unfavorably because of the destructions and sufferings caused in Iraq. In that, Iraqi people might acknowledge the superiority of the USA, and this superiority may also be attributed to the products that originated there, yet they might simply decline to buy the USA-based product and boycott them. Although both the USA and its products can be perceived positively in terms of cognition, they might be perceived unfavorably in terms of affect. Therefore, country image perceptions of the consumers are formed by the summation of the cognitive and the affective dimensions. In addition to the cognitive dimension, the affective dimension of country image implies that consumers use the country image as not only heuristics to predict the quality of the products but also a symbol of the self by which they affiliate themselves with certain groups and differentiate from others.

5.1. Theoretical Contribution

Literature review (Roth and Diamantopoulos, 2009; Maher and Carter, 2011; Wang et al., 2012; Izmir et al., 2022) and construct validity procedures of this study support the view that country image is composed of both cognitive and affective dimensions. There is an immense need for future studies that focus on the conceptualization and measurement of country image so that this concept can be grounded on a more accurate theoretical framework. Therefore, this study intends to place a strong emphasis on the vitality of the affects in the conceptualization and measurement of country image because the literature explicitly reveals that country image studies are developed around a cognitive-dominant view. This chronic and overlooked cognitive dominance in the country image literature creates a huge study artifact and threatens the validity of the findings. Country image concept measured through cognitive perspective can only provide implications on the effects of cognitive country image. The results derived from cognitive dominant country image scales would not comprise of affective dimension and hence cannot

be generalized as if they belong to (general) country image concept, which should consist of cognitive and affective dimensions.

Gummesson (2007) and Vargo and Lush (2014) assert that goods and services are intertwined in today's market structure. In line with the assertions of Gummesson (2007) and Vargo and Lush (2014), this study did not only focus on product quality but also took service quality into consideration. When a market offer is evaluated on an axis between pure goods on the one continuum and pure services on the other continuum, it can be said that the market offer in the automobile industry approximates much closer to pure goods than services. The results of this study support service-dominant logic because product quality and service quality showed both strong direct and mediation effects on the development of a set of behavioral intentions, even in a product category that can be classified under pure goods on the goods-services dichotomy. Therefore, country image studies should cast their perspective from product-dominant approaches to service-dominant view because some studies in the literature have criticized the evaluation of the concept of country image around goods market (Javalgi et al., 2001; Thelen et al., 2010, Izmir et al., 2022).

5.2. Marketing Implications

Country image shapes consumer perceptions of (product and service) quality and behavioral intentions. Therefore, marketing managers should emphasize the country-of-origin information to develop positive quality perceptions and behaviors toward brands if the country is perceived positively in that market. Due care should be given if there is any cognition and affect conflict for that country. In order to reduce the uncertainties in the service industry resulting from the intangible nature of the services, brands can utilize cognitive and affective elements of country image so that the foundations of a strong bond between service brand and consumer can be established. In that, country image can help brands make their services relatively more tangible. However, marketing managers should be cautious in the use of country-of-origin information. At first sight, a country might seem to be perceived positively from cognitive aspects, which could be sufficient enough for the development of positive quality perceptions and a set of attitudes, but this seemingly positive country image might not turn into actual behaviors due to the strong negative affect. Marketing managers should ensure that there is no cognition and affect conflict in the market the company intends to serve. Moreover, due care should be given to country-of-origin misclassifications of the consumers and the information related to the country of manufacture, country of assembly, country of design, and brand origin.

5.3. Limitations and Directions for Future Studies

The findings of this study cannot be generalized and are only limited to the sample used. The limitation with the representability of the sample is mostly rooted in

the obstacles experienced in the data collection under pandemic conditions. The study's results might be context dependent and show differences in other industries and brands. Future studies should focus more on the service elements and utilize a holistic quality approach. Although country image is an old concept dating back to the 1960s, there is still potential for the improvement of this concept and its measurement. Therefore, conceptual studies with a quantitative perspective can provide stronger insights into the nature of this concept and help the development of the theory of COI. More valid and robust measurement tools for COI could be generated by understanding the vital elements that form the COI construct.

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Appendix 1

Behavioral Intentions (Jang and Namkung, 2009; Cakici and Shukla, 2017**)**

1. I would like to purchase this brand for myself.
2. I would tell people positive things about this brand.
3- I would like to purchase this brand for my family members, as well.
4. I would recommend this brand to the people around me.

(After-Sales) Service Quality (Gonzales, 2015**)**

1- The technical personnel in the service center of this brand are reliable.

2- The service provided in the service center of this brand is of high quality.

3- The service consultants at the service center reception of this brand are experienced and knowledgeable.

4- The behaviors of the service center employees of this brand are friendly.

5- The waiting area in the service center of this brand is comfortable.

Product Quality (Chao, 1993; 1988; Pappu and Quester, 2006**)**

1- The cars of this brand have very good workmanship.
2- The cars of this brand are very durable.
3- The cars of this brand are very reliable.
4- The cars of this brand are of excellent quality.
5- The cars of this brand have high-end features.

Country of origin image (CIscale) (Izmir, 2021b**)**

Cognitive COI

1- (Country X) is a technologically advanced country.
2- (Country X) has strong brands.
3- (Country X) is a developed country.
4- (Country X) has a strong position in the global economy.
5- (Country X) can protect its own rights and interests.
6- (Country X) can produce/market quality goods/services.

Affective COI

7- (Country X) reminds me of the pleasant things.
8- I love (Country X).
9- I like the culture of (Country X).
10- I think I would be happy in (Country X).
11- (Country X) makes me feel excited.

Appendix 2

GERMANY	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	Service Quality	Country Image	Product Quality	Behavioral Intentions
Service Quality	.914	.683	.457	.932	**.827**			
Country Image	.947	.621	.314	.954	.560	**.788**		
Product Quality	0,927	0,718	0,642	.940	.676	0,552	**.848**	
Behavioral Intentions	.962	.862	.642	.966	.653	.456	.801	**.929**

x2/df=1,750; CFI=.959; SRMR=.0505; RMSEA=.058

JAPAN	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	Service Quality	Country Image	Product Quality	Behavioral Intentions
Service Quality	.919	.697	.476	.952	**.835**			
Country Image	.943	.602	.314	.945	.517	**.776**		
Product Quality	.926	.715	.624	.938	.690	.560	**.846**	
Behavioral Intentions	.959	.855	.624	.966	.688	.461	.790	**.925**

x2/df=1,797; CFI=.956; SRMR=.0854; RMSEA=.060

FRANCE	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	Service Quality	Country Image	Product Quality	Behavioral Intentions
Service Quality	.892	.631	.332	.950	**.794**			
Country Image	.938	.580	.172	.942	.415	**.762**		
Product Quality	.925	.711	.651	.931	.545	.290	**.843**	
Behavioral Intentions	.946	.815	.651	.958	.576	.379	.807	**.903**

x2/df=1,761; CFI=.952; SRMR=.0635; RMSEA=.058

The USA	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	Service Quality	Country Image	Product Quality	Behavioral Intentions
Service Quality	.895	.635	.542	0,934	**.797**			
Country Image	.948	.622	.376	0,950	.613	**.789**		
Product Quality	.918	.693	.687	0,930	.736	.517	**.832**	
Behavioral Intentions	.953	.835	.687	0,959	.718	.433	.829	**.914**

x2/df=1,880; CFI=.951; SRMR=.0635; RMSEA=.063