

THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF COUNTRY IMAGE: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH^{1,2}**Res. Assist. Onur İZMİR (PhD)*** **Assoc. Prof. Elif EROĞLU HALL (PhD)**** **Assoc. Prof. Nurdan SEVİM (PhD)***** **ABSTRACT**

Although country of origin studies go back to 1960's, there is still no consensus on the conceptualization and measurement of country image. Country image has been studied from a cognitive dominant perspective and most of the scales measuring this construct has failed to capture affective aspects of it. This study intends to provide a more accurate conceptual framework for the country image construct and provide some insights into the measurement of this concept for future studies. In this study, it is identified that country image consists of cognitive and affective elements in which fifteen sub-dimensions of this concept have been reached. It is determined that cognitive oriented development of the literature causes a major threat to the validity of the studies because studies have mostly applied cognitive dominant perspectives/scales and attributed the results to general country image. As a result of this study, new definition of country image is proposed, and it is thought that this concept has been placed on a more concrete and valid theoretical ground. As a result of the content analysis of the qualitative data and literature review, an item pool composed of 85 items were proposed. Future studies with an intention to measure country image with its cognitive and affective aspects can benefit the findings of this study.

Keywords: Country Image, Qualitative Approach, Conceptual Study, Cognitive Elements, Affective Elements.

JEL Codes: M30, M31, M39.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of country of origin has been a subject of interest since the 1960s. Early pioneers in the field, such as Dichter (1962) and Schooler (1965), speculated on the impact of country of origin on product choice and empirically tested its effects on product evaluations. Over the past seven decades, the conceptualization and measurement of this construct have sparked ongoing debates (Roth and Diamantopoulos, 2009; Buhmann and Ingenhoff, 2015a; 2015b; Buhmann, 2016; İzmir, 2021; İzmir et al., 2022).

Initially, country image was not directly addressed in early studies on country of origin. However, it was observed that consumers developed stereotypes towards products from certain countries, leading to differences in product evaluation and choice. These differences were attributed to the so-called "made-in" effect (Nagashima 1970, 1977). Positive perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors towards products from specific countries were associated with the economic, technological, industrial, and cultural development of those countries (İzmir et al., 2023). As "made-in" labels failed to fully explain these well-established attitudes, the concept of country image emerged as a more comprehensive and complex construct. It is worth noting that despite the development of marketing as a science in the 1950s (Weitz and Wensley, 2002; İzmir, 2023), the conceptualization and measurement of country image as a construct to explain foreign product choice in international markets (Öztay and Erol, 2023) have remained relatively immature over the years. Consequently, there is a significant research gap in the country-of-origin literature regarding the accurate definition, conceptualization, and measurement of the country image construct.

In recent years, scholars such as Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009), Buhmann and Ingenhoff (2015a; 2015b), and Buhmann (2016) have made significant contributions to the development of the country image concept. They argue that country image should encompass both cognitive and affective dimensions and criticize the cognitive-oriented approaches prevalent in the literature. However, in some studies, the concept of country image (Chattalas et al., 2008; Roth and Diamantopoulos, 2009; Maher and Carter, 2011) has been treated as three-dimensional construct by adding a behavioral/conative dimension. Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009) discuss, in detail, the measurement errors in the country image concept without providing a clear solution. However, instead of providing a clear solution to these errors, Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009) highlighted the identified errors in the literature by grouping the measurement tools used in previous studies according to the cognitive, affective and behavioral dimensions of country image and concluded that country image has been evaluated from a cognitive dominant perspective. Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009), Buhmann and Ingenhoff (2015a; 2015b), and Buhmann (2016) emphasize the need to develop new measurement tools to rectify the chronic and

widespread errors in measuring country image, place the concept on a more accurate plane, and yield more precise results in country image studies.

Maher and Carter (2011) note that only six studies have evaluated both cognitive and affective dimensions of country image, suggesting that most attempts to include the affective dimension in measurement models have been unsuccessful (Roth and Diamantopoulos, 2009). Considering that emotions are often more influential than cognition in explaining behaviors (Erevelles, 1998), the prevalent use of cognition-weighted tools in measuring country image and the challenges in measuring the affective dimension indicate a significant problem in country image studies. Therefore, the objectives of this study are threefold: (1) to reevaluate the concept of country image, (2) to identify its crucial aspects, and (3) to propose a new conceptual framework that more accurately explains this construct. To achieve these objectives, a qualitative study is conducted using in-depth interviews and a focus group interview. The study results in a novel conceptual framework for country image and identifies the items and dimensions that form this construct.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Method part outlines the methodology used, including details on the method employed. Results part presents the findings of the study, encompassing the first-level and second-level coding processes, and shares results from the qualitative analyses. In the conclusion part, the implications of the study findings are discussed, drawing conclusions on the concept of country image, and offering recommendations for future research.

2. METHOD

Because the purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of the conceptualization and scope of country image, a qualitative focus has been adopted to best serve the objectives of the study. The survey was conducted with participants who provided their consent for recorded interviews, which were later transcribed into text format. The analysis involved content analysis of the transcribed texts to identify and form codes/themes through a process of first and second-level coding.

2.1. Research Design

In this study, the phenomenology research design, one of the most prominent qualitative research designs, was employed. According to İbret et al. (2022), phenomenology is particularly suited for exploring and gaining understanding of phenomena that may not have comprehensive or clear definitions but are somehow known or subjectively experienced. In line with this approach, the study systematically compiled the views, ideas, and comments of the participants to uncover the underlying truth behind the phenomenon of interest. Phenomenology seeks to describe individuals' experiences, perceptions, attitudes, and overall sense-making processes in relation to the subject matter. It aims to reveal how individuals describe, understand, interpret, and explain various aspects of a certain

phenomenon. By utilizing the phenomenology research design, this study aimed to develop a better understanding of the perceptions of social scientists who are experts in different aspects of the concept of country image.

2.2. Participants of the Study

The qualitative data collection involved a sample group of thirteen individuals, including four females and nine males. In-depth interviews were conducted with seven participants, and the focus group interview was conducted with six participants. The in-depth interview participants included three doctors specializing in law, marketing, and communication, two scientific experts in the field of Business Administration, and two security experts with a keen interest in international brands. The focus group interviews were conducted with six undergraduate students from various departments within the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences of a state university in Turkey. To avoid confusion, participants in the in-depth interviews were coded as A, B, C, D, E, F, and G, and participants in the focus group were coded as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6.

2.3. Development of the Data Collection Tool and Collection of Data

In this study, an interview form was developed to gather the views of experts and social scientists on the concept of country image. The development process of the interview form involved multiple stages to ensure its validity and reliability (Creswell, 2012). Initially, the relevant literature was reviewed and analyzed in order to formulate the interview questions. The draft interview form was then created based on this literature analysis.

In line with the suggestions of Creswell (2012) for validity and reliability of a qualitative study, feedback was sought from three experts in the field in order to enhance the quality and effectiveness of the interview form. The insights and suggestions gained from the experts were carefully incorporated into the form, and then the revised version was generated. Subsequently, a pilot study was conducted with five students from the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences. The pilot study aimed to assess the extent of the clarity, relevance, and understandability of the interview questions. Based on the feedback received from the participants for pilot study, further refinements were made to enhance the quality and effectiveness of the interview form.

Before each interview, participants were provided with detailed information about the study and the purpose of the interview. The interviews were conducted with the consent of the participants, and their voices were recorded for transcription purposes. The duration of the interviews ranged from 28 minutes to 121 minutes, allowing for in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives on the country image concept.

2.4. Data Analysis Method

The data obtained from the in-depth interviews and focus group interview were analyzed using content analysis, a widely employed method for identifying themes and categories in qualitative data. The analysis process involved several steps to ensure the rigor and reliability of the findings.

Firstly, the data were transcribed from the recorded interviews into written text. Three coders independently analyzed the transcripts. To ensure the consistency and agreement between the coders, inter-coder reliability checks were conducted at regular intervals. This involved comparing the coding decisions made by different coders and discussing any discrepancies to achieve consensus. The codes derived from the content analysis of the qualitative data were supported by direct quotations from the participants.

Furthermore, efforts were made to ensure data saturation, which means that data collection and analysis continued until no new themes or insights emerged from the interviews. This iterative process allowed for a comprehensive exploration of participants' perspectives and ensured that the analysis captured the rich and diverse range of views on the country image concept. By incorporating these steps, it is meant to maintain methodological rigor and enhance the trustworthiness of the findings.

3. RESULTS

In the interviews, direct and indirect questions were asked to determine the country image criteria of the participants. While the criteria for the cognitive country image dimension were determined mainly in the questions asked directly to the participants, the emotional reactions of the participants were determined with the discussions and indirect questions carried out during the interview process. First of all, the participants were asked what factors they consider when developing their perception of country image for a certain country. The answers are presented in the table 1. Next, the participants were asked to rank the perceived images of the countries as high, low and neutral. When these countries are mentioned, the connotations participants make are discussed. Afterwards, the same question on which criteria they used to evaluate the image of the countries they chose was asked to determine if there is a change in or addition to the first criteria they had already counted.

Table 1. Country Image Criteria of the Participants

Participant A	<i>Communication in political, social and military fields</i>
Participant B	<i>Justice, culture, democracy, education, economy and technology</i>
Participant C	<i>Independence, legitimacy, democracy and development</i>
Participant D	<i>Economic, political and media/communication criteria and general attitudes and behaviors of people in the country</i>
Participant E	<i>Economic, technological and military</i>
Participant F	<i>Media, politics, economy and human factor</i>
Participant G	<i>Humans, culture, media, economy and individual-state relationship (governance)</i>
Focus Group	<i>Language, culture, cuisine, economy, development, political, technological and social elements</i>

It was observed that the participants were prone to make cognitive evaluations about the factors that form their country image perceptions, such as economic, political, legal, military, social, education, justice, administration and media/communication. On the other hand, while evaluating the country image from the aspect of affects, the participants mentioned their feelings toward language, cuisine, culture and people of a given country.

When the participants are asked to choose two countries with high country image, two countries with low country image, and one country with neutral image, different results emerged as a finding that needs to be addressed further. The image levels of the countries attributed by the participants in the in-depth interviews and the focus group interview are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Country Image Perceptions of the Participants

Participant	High	Neutral	Low
A	The USA, Israel	Russia	the UK, Turkey
B	Germany, Belgium	Greece	Middle Eastern Countries- Iraq, Libya
C	Turkey, Canada	China	the USA, Middle Eastern Countries- Saudi Arabia
D	Russia, the USA	Poland	Bangladesh, Cambodia
E	the USA, France	Turkey	Syria, Iraq
F	the USA, the UK	France and Israel *	Afghanistan, Syria
G	the USA and Scandinavian Countries- Denmark	Spain	Turkey, Sudan
Focus Group	Norway, the USA	Turkey	Palestine, African Countries - Nigeria

Note: * After Participant F rejected choosing one of the two countries, the two countries with neutral image chosen by this participant were added to the table as stated by the participant.

75% of the respondents classified the USA as high, 25% of the respondents classified Turkey as neutral and low image and 25% of the respondents classified Iraq and Syria as low image country. When a regional generalization is made from Table 2, it has been determined that the participants tend to attribute high images to Western countries, while they attributed low images to African, Eastern and Middle Eastern countries. Looking at the countries with high image, it is observed that all countries except for Turkey, which is included in the high category by Participant C, are developed countries. In addition, it is thought that the main reason why Afghanistan, Libya, Palestine, Nigeria, Sudan, Iraq and Syria are evaluated under the category of low-image countries is due to the security problems in the country and the civil war. According to the country image classification made by the participants, it is determined that the development and political situations are considered as the determining criteria in the context of country image. Among the countries with low image, countries except the USA, England and Turkey are unindustrialized and underdeveloped countries. This indicates that the development factor has a great importance in making inferences about the country's image. It is possible that the motivations of some participants behind the assignment of these three countries to the low-image category may stem from such variables as xenocentrism in the context of Turkey and hostility and/or ethnocentrism in the

context of the USA and England. According to İzmir et al. (2022), such socio-psychological constructs as xenocentrism, ethnocentrism and hostility have potentials to shape consumer behaviors and lead to certain prejudices. Similarly, the ethnocentric tendencies of some participants or their emotional ties to Turkey may have influenced their assessment of Turkey (Öztürk and Öztay, 2019) as a highly imaged country, similar to highly developed and industrialized countries such as the USA, England, Canada, Norway and Denmark. This finding is pointing to the possible moderator roles that socio-psychological factors can play in the context of country image.

In the continuation of the qualitative design, the participants were asked to list the brands of the countries whose images they evaluated. The most frequently mentioned brands by the participants are Apple 75%, Microsoft 38%, Twitter 25%, Ford 25%, which are the US brands; Mercedes 63%, BMW 38%, Audi 38%, Volkswagen 25%, which are German brands; Vestel 38%, Beko 25%, Ülker 25%, Torcu 25%, Istikbal 25%, LCW 25% which are Turkish brands; Honda 25%, Mitsubishi 25%, Toshiba 25% which are Japanese brands; Samsung 35% and LG 35% which are Korean brands. Among these brands, the most frequently mentioned brands are Apple, the US brand, and Mercedes, German brand. It is observed that the participants mostly have difficulties in finding brands in the context of countries to which they attribute low or neutral image. The participants mostly failed to find brands that originate to the countries with low or neutral image. In addition, the fact that the most frequently mentioned brand (Apple) belongs to the country (the USA) which has been attributed high image by majority of the participants indicates the match between brand and country image. This finding provides insights into the importance of the brands in the context of country image. In the focus group interview, the assertion of participant 4 that the USA is USA thanks to its brands, and the statement of participant 1 that people communicate with the country through its brands support the country image-brand match.

The assertion of Participant 1 that consumers communicate with a certain country through brands is a very logical proposition in today's conditions. When evaluated with a post-modern perspective, the newly developing consumer profile in today's market structure and social structure is building its identity through the consumption culture. Therefore, brands have a very important place in the messages they give to the external environment. Certain consumer groups use the US brands to identify themselves with the popular culture of the USA and build their identity in this direction.

Brand-country image matching is not a generalizable phenomenon in all cases. The discussion in this context, which took place among the participants in the focus group interview, provides a more in-depth insight into this issue. Given the unaltered flow of the discussion, it is determined that the country image-brand matching does not exist in Norway, which is attributed high image by the participants:

Participant 1: “*They all have salient properties in the different areas. America is developed in terms of its brand and technology. Norway does not depend on brand and technology, its impact on us is through education, quality of life. For example, we didn't think of Norway through its brands.*”,

Participant 4: “*Country images are evident through brands.*”,

Participant 1: “*But that doesn't happen in Norway.*”,

Participant 2: “*We didn't say brand in Norway, we said welfare is high.*”,

Participant 4: “*But it must have a brand.*”,

Participant 3: “*We don't know, though.*”,

Participant 5: “*We said America's image is high and we counted a lot of brands. We said high to Norway, but we could only say any brand except for hand cream.*”,

Participant 1: “*They all have differences in their fields, one of them is technology.*”

Despite this, the participants see Norway as a country with a high image due to its high level of development and welfare. Thus, it turns out that brands are not a salient criterion in every case in communicating with a particular country. Participant G supports this view, “(When Denmark is mentioned) *I don't think of a brand. There are Scandinavian brands, ... They are something I associate more with Scandinavian culture, not brand... because I see them as one culture.*”. On the other hand, participant G mentioned the influence of Hollywood in the formation of the country image of America, mentioning that many people know America through its movies and TV series. This also points out that the brand-country image matching is valid for America.

In the context of country image, the matter of information is important. Individuals form their image perceptions of a certain country within the framework of the information they can reach. Participant B said, “*We evaluate a country by what we know, it is impossible to evaluate something we do not know. Since I know its history, I evaluated Greece with its history. Since I know Germany by its brand, I evaluated it with its brand, because I had that image. If I went to Germany, if I saw the hospitality there, if I saw the attitudes and behaviors of the people there, maybe that country's image would be different for me. That's why my assessments are in this direction. You will appreciate that it should be a subject I know so that I can evaluate it.*” Participant B stated that he evaluates the image of Germany through its brands because he has no personal/direct experience with other elements of Germany apart from its brands. Therefore, participant B states that in order to generate ideas about this country and develop attitudes and behaviors in a certain direction, the only contact is the brands belonging to the country. Participant 2 points out the importance of visiting a certain country and experiencing the elements of that country directly in the development of country image and says, “*Maybe we will think differently if we go and see.*”.

3.1. Thematic Study on the Conceptualization of the Country Image

Based on the collected qualitative data, firstly, the basic issues were discussed, and then the codes and themes gathered under the cognitive and affective dimensions were reached in parallel with the findings obtained as a result of the qualitative analyses.

When the concept of country image is mentioned, the participants primarily make cognition-based evaluations, which is a finding that should not be disregarded. The participants were asked the question on which criteria they classified the countries as high and low image. Seven people who participated in the in-depth interviews and six people who participated in the focus group interview (all participants in total) mentioned mostly cognition-oriented factors that can be classified under economic, technological, political, legal, military, social, education, management and media codes. Among these nine codes, economic, technological, political, legal, military and educational codes are gathered under the theme of "development" since they are the factors that determine the development of the country. Social and political codes are gathered under the theme of "socio-political factors" as they reflect the socio-political reality of a particular country. Governance and media codes have been gathered under the theme of "communication", since it fulfills the communication activities of the country with the outside. Apart from these nine (cognition-oriented) codes, two people who participated in the in-depth interview directly mentioned the factors that can be classified under affect. In addition, as they talked in the context of country image and discussed different scenarios in the continuation of the interview, it was observed that the participants developed strong negative emotional reactions towards some countries (USA, France and England) that they initially assigned a positive image (cognitively). The cognition-oriented approaches of the participants in the context of country image provided insights into the reason why this concept has also been mainly evaluated cognitive-oriented in the literature.

At the first glance, country image appears to be a cognitive-oriented concept. Considering the strong and negative emotional reactions of the participants even to the countries whose image they regard as positive, it is determined that country image perception develops in a structure that includes the emotion factor. When the participants were asked to list the factors that make up their country image perceptions, the presence of strong emotional reactions in the interview process indicates that affect plays a very important role in shaping the perception of country image. In this context, although perception is not directly addressed by the participants (except for two participants) within the concept of country image, it emerges as a factor that exists in the country image evaluations of the participants. The elements considered under the affective country image factor are not the elements that the participants directly mentioned when evaluating this concept. However, this concept, by its nature, also includes positive and negative emotional themes that spontaneously develop in the participants towards certain countries. In the interview with the participants, six codes were determined, namely culture, language, food-drinks, country, people and brands, which were extracted from the dialogues about the

affective country image. These six codes cover the feelings developed by the participants towards the language, food-drinks, culture, people and brands of a certain country. While culture, language and food-drinks codes were gathered under the theme of "cultural factors", the codes of country, people and brands were evaluated under the theme of "country associations".

3.1.1. “Socio-political factors” Category

“Political” code

Political issues were mentioned when participants evaluated the image of the countries they selected. Some participants evoked negative feelings toward certain countries due to political conflicts and while others praised certain countries due to their power in the world politics. Participant A made negative connotations about the USA, describing it as a “*brutal and capitalist empire*”. He claims that Israel strives for supremacy and is at the forefront with political issues, “*Judaism, the idea of being a superior race, the effort to exist. Mainly political situations. We haven't seen anything but politics in Israel.*”. It is observed that Participant A has negative connotations about these countries. According to Participant B, “*Today, Germany is an agenda-setting country within the EU. When we say Germany, we mean World War I and our alliance with it.*” Participant B talked about Germany's power in the European Union and political ties in World War I. He classifies Serbia as a low-image country due to the crimes against humanity it inflicts on Bosnian Muslims. This situation can be explained by the interaction of cultural ties and political events between Bosnia and Turkey. Therefore, it has been observed that Participant B developed war animosity against Serbia due its damage to Bosnia, a country that he sees as close to his own culture. According to Participant D, “*Countries with high image have a say over many countries, they have sanctions.*”. Participant D thinks that being strong in the world politics will strengthen the image of the country. Similarly Participant E also points out that being strong in world politics will contribute to the image of the country.

Participant F points out the importance of political leaders in the formation of the country image. Emphasizing President Erdogan's "One minute!" outburst in Davos, Participant F states that Erdogan's upright stance contributes to Turkey's perceived image. “*... the image of the country (Turkey) has changed with the actions of the President. Especially in Davos “One minute!”. With his debut, we also see that we have a tougher, more standing image.*”. Similarly, he emphasizes that the weakness of French President Macron in his bilateral relations with US President Trump weakens the perceived image of France, and matches the leader's character and behaviors with the image of the country. “*For example, the image of France was stronger, but we saw that Macron weakened in the bilateral relations with Trump. ... The leader's actions shape the image of the country in the eyes of the consumer or the citizen.*”.

According to participant F, Saudi Arabia's passive attitude towards America in the world politics and its inability to pursue an independent policy weakens the perceived image of Arabia. Participant 1 explains that political factors shape the image of the country as follows: *“There is a low image of Palestine due to the pressure of Israel.”*. According to Participant 1, Palestine's inactivity in political and military terms in its problems with Israel weakens the image of this country. Participant 2 expressed his dissatisfaction with America's hypocritical policy towards Turkey as follows: *“I don't like their (the US) image because they're running water out of straw. Frankly, it doesn't look nice when it seems friendly to us and helps the countries that are our enemies. We are in a constant conflict that is invisible, so I don't like it.”*

“Social” code

Social issues are another important element of country image. Participant B draws attention to the social problems caused by class differences in Iraq, gangs in Afghanistan and the begging of Syrians. Participant B expresses his positive feelings towards Germany thanks to the social ties as follows: *“The country where 5-5.5 million Turks live in the world is Germany. The fact that they opened their doors to the Turks for various reasons and that they embraced the Turks in their time also creates a different sympathy for the Germans. If a German and a Danish come together today, I would support the German because they opened their door to our citizens and accepted them as citizens”*. It is determined that Participant B has developed strong emotional ties to Germany, and the affective country image (which originates from social relations) is more salient in transforming behaviors. Participant D emphasized the importance of public tolerance, general attitudes of the society and moral structure. Participant G points out elements such as interpersonal relations, obeying the rules that make up the social structure, discipline, power distance and cosmopolitanism. Participant G makes regional generalizations in the context of country image, stating that the problems experienced by countries stem from their geography. According to Participant G, *“(when talking about low-image places) the region is generally troubled, usually places where there has been a civil war for a long time, where people are not safe, where the economy is bad, and where sociability is low.”*. This situation sheds light on the reason why among the countries chosen by the participants, the ones with the high image are mainly from the West, and the ones that are low are predominantly from the Middle East and the East.

Participant 1 mentions that her perception of country image about Poland changed after she had direct experience of Poland through her visit. In this respect, participant 1 states that the negative country image perception she had before going to Poland turned positive after she went to Poland and observed the behaviors of the people there in their social lives. In addition, Participant 1 stated that factors such as class discrimination, high population, unemployment and crime rate are important in the formation of country image perception. Participant 2, on the other hand, emphasizes the issue of gender inequality.

3.1.2. “Development” Category

Because participants have mostly referred the codes of economy, military, technology, law and education interchangeably in one sentence, each code under development category was not separately addressed.

“Economy, military, technology, law, education” codes

It has been determined that participants are prone to state codes related to development of a country interchangeably. However, the code “economy” predominantly emphasized the most, compared to the other codes under development category. Participant B points out that the country's success in education, technology, justice, income level and overall quality of life contributes to the country's image. Participant B stated that *“countries with a high image have high income levels, high living standards/quality. These living standards include income level and justice.”* Participant B accepted that he made cognitive-weighted assessments and inferences about the image of the country *“... due to the fact that I (he) had not seen these countries before and had no knowledge of them. Maybe it will be different if I (he) research, go and see.”* He states that he does not have direct experience with these countries and emphasizes the significance of the direct experience in the formation of especially affective country image. Participant B emphasizes the importance of the economy in shaping the perception of country image as follows: *“When we look at today's conditions, the economic power makes an effect.”*

Participant C points to the significance of the developments in production, democracy and the humanities. Participant C draws conclusions about China's country image in the context of its *“historical and social development, democracy, development in production, and international image.”* Also, participant C emphasizes that he does not *“... evaluate it in a mediatized way.”*, and points out that he bases his criteria on objective, realistic and critical evaluations. Participant C evaluates a particular country in terms of more objective criteria than having a popular culture or being mentioned frequently in the media. According to Participant C, *“In terms of its historical management, China is a country that tries to put itself in a certain balance in economy and production.”* Similarly, Participant D drew attention to the issues of economy and military power by stating *“I chose it according to its economic power and military power.”* Participant D evaluates the images of Bangladesh and Cambodia based on their economy by stating that Bangladesh is *“economically weak and has no say in the world”*, and Cambodia is *“not economically rich”*.

Participant E drew attention to the social, economic, military and technological possibilities of a particular country. According to Participant E, *“As Turkey is a developing country, it has made progress economically and technologically... I see Turkey as a country that has begun to be recognized in the world.”* Participant E mentions that Turkey, which he considers neutral, has begun to be recognized. About the USA, Participant E stated, *“Economic power, colonialism, nothing else. It is a country that*

has developed economically but has become rich by exploiting the opportunities of other countries.”. Participant E evaluated America and Turkey in terms of their economy and also mentioned political factors, basing America's wealth on its colonialism. Although participant E categorizes America's country image as high, he has negative inferences about the USA.

Participant F mentions that the perception of the country image is shaped by such criteria as welfare, good economy, opportunities offered to the people, being safe, and having a low crime rate. Participant G also added the economy to the criteria he counted in the context of country image. In the focus group discussion, Participant 2 said, *“When they ask where you want to live, I prefer Norway. Norway is more attractive in terms of education, per capita income and economy.”* He mentions that he has a desire to live in Norway, to which he attributes a high image in terms of education, national income and economic criteria. In addition, according to Participant 2, *“Palestine is ...very exploited, its people are in need ... Child deaths are so high in this country, they suffer from water scarcity. Despite being such a rich country with natural resources, there is no technology or education. ... So it is not a developed country.”* The fact that Participant 2 regards Palestine as weak in terms of the factors such as health, economy, child mortality, education and technology reduces the perceived image of this country. Participant 3 and participant 5 also mentioned economic factors in the context of Turkey, such as waging and the dependence of the country's economy on hot money.

3.1.3. “Communication” Category

“Media” code

Participant A lists the factors that shape the perception of country image as follows: *“Communication activities include the political stance of the country, its cultural attitude, social responsibility activities and the efforts to announce them to the world (communication activities).* According to Participant A, *“There are two countries that have a say in the means of communication in the world. One of them is America, the other is the Jews, namely Israel. They control the mass media. They also control the advertising industry. Therefore, the strength of these two countries comes from their use of communication tools... America's positive and negative image is very strong, but Israel's negative image is stronger. When you say Israel or Jews all over the world, people can get nervous. It seems to me that they are doing this on purpose. A small country, trying to maintain its power by instilling fear, creating a mystery about themselves. Again, they do this through the means of communication.”*. Participant A emphasizes the importance of using the media effectively and engaging in correct communication activities in creating an image. Participant A states that while Israel creates its image, it instills fear and develops its image accordingly. This indicates the existence of emotional (affective) elements in the formation of country image. According to Participant A, *“The attitudes of America and Israel are very clear, they take a clear position, positive or negative. It goes to war, for*

example, creates a negative image there, its prisons or something, or throws a bomb somewhere, creating a negative image. But you see that it is doing a social responsibility work that is about the world, it is very strong and makes a sound there. How does he achieve this, using communication tools.”. Based on these statements, he divided the country image into positive and negative. It can be inferred that while the positive image mentioned by Participant A is the image perception that emerges as a result of the evaluation of these countries according to the cognitive criteria, the negative image is perceived in the context of affective criteria. This finding supports the idea that cognitive and affective outcomes may not always overlap and country image perception might develop on the axis of cognition and affect dissonance. Participant D mentions that he takes economic and military power as criteria in the context of country image but emphasizes that it is based on the reflections in the media. From this perspective, Participant D points to the power of the media in the formation of his own perception. This indicates that a certain country can affect people's perceptions, attitudes and behaviors towards that country through communication activities carried out on different media channels.

Participant F, referring to the fluctuations in Turkey's economy created by Trump's tweets, states the effect of leaders using social media as follows: “... *the current leader of America (Trump) uses Twitter very effectively. When he tweets negatively about our country, when he takes only one second of action, we can clearly see how the currency rate moves, and we can see that the social media is now a criterion when evaluating the image of the country.*” In addition, participant F mentions the importance of personal (direct) experience through visiting a certain country in the formation of image. He emphasizes that the thing that will create the image in the absence of direct experience is the messages reaching the person. Therefore, the image development for a certain country is shaped through different media channels or with the information and impressions gained from the social environment. According to Participant 5, “*Youtubers and tiktokers on Instagram are doing social experiments with the videos they shoot. These also affect the image of the country. They act on people, people in Turkey may behave differently, a foreign person may behave differently. This allows us to observe the behavior of the people in the country.*” Participant 5 argues that different social media channels are also effective in analyzing the behavior of people in a certain country and having a certain idea about those people. Participant G mentioned the importance of knowledge in the development of the image perception of a particular country as follows: “*If I don't have any information about that country, I have to come to a general conclusion, I look at the way it takes place in the media*”. In addition, participant G emphasized that the media/communication factor is more effective in reaching this information and gaining indirect experience about the country, especially with the introduction of visual art. According to participant G, “*So, for me, the media part, the visual arts part, is the most image-related part. After all, many people know America from movies and TV shows. So it's a very important factor. When mass media such as news is used, it is more informative and aimed at playing with your rational perceptions. But when art*

enters into mass communication, perceived image of that country subconsciously changes with art, without you being aware of it.”. In this context, she mentioned that America is known through TV series and movies and that the image of America is positioned in the minds of individuals in this way. According to Participant G, media/communication activities related to news and general information affect the cognition of individuals. On the other hand, media/communication activities with an artistic content contribute to the formation of the country image by influencing the emotions and subconsciousness of the individuals. Participant G emphasizes that America's country image is predominantly shaped by the film industry created by American production companies. Participant 2 supports these assertions by stating the following: “*America develops its image through the movies it makes, mostly in science-fiction, drama.*”. This situation shows the importance of media channels in the formation of country image.

According to Participant 1, “*The image of the country is formed depending on our environment and what we see on social media ... seems attractive to us ... We do not get an idea about the image of a country by (only) looking at its economy. We are interested in how the country markets itself, how it shows itself to us, how it advertises itself.*”. Participant 1 describes America's successful use of different media channels in building its image. Participant 1 emphasizes that the positive perceptions and associations that a certain country tries to create about itself by using different channels are even more important than the economic situation of the country. In this context, it can be said that the formation of the country image is a kind of marketing activity.

“State administration (Governance)” code

Participant A makes the following observations about Turkey, which he classifies as a country with a low image: “*It is an incompetent and unconfident country. It doesn't do anything right. I say this from the point of view of the state, not from the social and cultural point of view. It makes wrong moves, aims for economic growth but fails to achieve it. It is a country without a system, and that's where its incompetence comes from.*” Participant mentions that although Turkey has a high potential, it has failed to govern itself. According to Participant B, “*I see Libya as a state that did not have a full democracy in its past, there was no democracy, there was social stratification, there was internal turmoil, welfare in the society was completely eliminated, and a state that did not come of age. I mean, I can't see it as a state right now, because there is no order. I think of a state under the exploitation and hegemony and rule of the powerful groups. When Libya is mentioned, when Sudan is mentioned, when the Middle East is mentioned, I think of coups. We are in the 20th century, and we still talk about coups.*” In addition, participant B stated that he never thought of going to Iraq due to the insecurity in the country. Participant B drew attention to the issues of security, state administration, democracy, coups and internal turmoil. Moreover, by mentioning that he does not even see Libya as a state, he points out the importance of the

level of success in the administration of the country for the image of that country. About state administration in the context of country image, Participant C says, “*First of all, what matters is the independence of that country, its legitimacy and its adherence to the rules of democracy. Democracy can mean many different things, but what we emphasize here is the form of government that is legitimate by the choice of the nation.*”. While evaluating the image of China, Participant C emphasizes its former socialist structure and its current orientation towards democracy.

Participant E mentions his inferences on Syria: “*I remember the war, the victims, the people marginalized by their leaders.*”. While making inferences about Iraq, he states, “*It is actually mineral-rich but cannot benefit from its resources very much, it is exploited.*”. Accordingly, participant E talks about the weaknesses in the administration of Iraq and Syria. About the image of America, Participant G says, “*The balance of the relationship between individuals and state is very well established. There is no fully individual-oriented structure, the individual-state relationship is very good, the rules are followed.*”. Participant G focuses on the balance in the individual-state relationship as a criterion while evaluating the country's image. According to Participant 1, “*Israel's pressure on Palestine and the restriction of their freedom reflects negatively on us in terms of the image of the country. Being unable to protect itself, being powerless.*” The fact that Palestine does not have the power and will to protect itself and its rights causes the image of this country to be perceived low in the eyes of Participant 1.

3.1.4. “Country associations” Category

“Country perceptions” code

Participant A states that “*(When England is mentioned) sneakiness comes to mind. They are in every event, but they are never seen.*”. This situation clarifies why participant A could not address England in a negative or positive direction in terms of country image and why he positioned England as a country with a neutral image. Participant B explains his negative attitude towards Armenia as follows: “*... during the First World War, in Erzurum, where I am from ... Armenians have ambitions, our elders used to tell the Armenian atrocities where they killed many of our mothers and elders. As a person from Erzurum ... when I hear the word Armenia, I feel unpleasant. Because of the tragedy that the Armenian atrocities committed in the past by the Armenians in the East and the Southeast, I don't have good feelings for them, even if they promise to bring justice to the world today, whether they become the superpower of the world today...*”. Participant B emphasized that under no circumstances could he develop a positive perception or attitude towards Armenia. It is determined that Participant B has very strong negative feelings towards Armenia based on war animosity. The fact that the image of Armenia will not turn into a positive, even if Armenia could satisfy his criteria (providing the world justice and being a superpower in the world), is a finding pointing to the importance of the affective country image. Therefore, it is observed that the emotional associations developed in the context of country image seems

like more effective than the perception of cognition country image for Participant B. However, although Participant B regards Greece as negative in terms of political factors, which is a component of the cognitive country image, he initially classified it as a country with neutral image due to some emotional factors that create a positive image. Participant B explains: “*The reason why I call Greece neutral is it has some negative aspects. The positive aspects are its greenery, natural beauties, islands, touristic places etc. They have a very rooted and ancient civilization, we are talking about Rome, Byzantium, they have historical beauties to visit. They are neutral when they have positive features and negative features on the other hand.*” In addition, Participant B states that Greece's historical and natural touristic destinations and a deep-rooted civilization make a positive contribution to the country's image. These statements are strictly related to the affective dimensions of the country image construct. In the continuation of the interview, Participant B shares the strong effect of his direct experience and impressions about Spain on the formation of country image as follows: “*I have been to Spain/Barcelona for a week. There was a difference between my perception before I went to Spain and my perception after I left. The most important thing is that the construction there is orderly. When I land on the airport, I remember that the buildings are tidy, the people there obey the traffic rules, and the environment is clean. Of course, this was effective, and I would like to live in Barcelona. The fact that there is an orderly construction, that there is a clean construction, of course, has affected.*”. Participant B states that he started to develop affinity to Spain after his direct experience by visiting Barcelona. In fact, Participant B mentioned his desire to live in Barcelona. It is important to have such a desire to a country because the person sees the country he wants to live in as an ideal country. Therefore, it is an expected outcome that the idealized country has a positive and high image. Participant D expresses his negative feelings about America as follows: “*Exploitation and weapon trade come to my mind. It is a country that has exceeded its limits, especially in terms of its approach to Muslims and its exploitation against countries with rich resources.*”. Participant D's evaluation of America (although he attributes it a high image) as overstepping its boundaries indicates that he also has very strong negative feelings and a certain level of hostility towards this country.

When France is mentioned, Participant E's thoughts are as follows: “*Smugness. It is not a country with very great brands in the world, but a country that only tries to show itself great with mere rhetoric.*”. The fact that this participant regards France as a smug country shows that this participant also has negative emotional reactions. Moreover, Participant E ignores many prestigious brands originated to France. This indicates that he also has ethnocentric tendencies. In the country image evaluation, this participant classified France as a country with high image yet still has negative emotional attitudes toward this country. In parallel with Participant E, Participant F also has salient negative feelings toward France due to possibly conjectural circumstances. Participant F states, “*When I say France, for some reason, a repulsive concept comes to my mind. We also use the phrase to stay French. Out of the events,*

it's a country that is unclear what it does. Seems like it is the enemy of the Turks, a country that makes hostile statements against our country but has very strong brands, it has such an image in my eyes." Participant F's association of France with the concept of "repulsive" and seeing this country as an "enemy of Turks" shows that he has ethnocentric tendencies and a strong and negative emotional attitude towards this country. However, Participant F accepts the power of its brands, which can be a cognitive criterion in the evaluation of country image. In that, cognition-affect dissonance in the formation of the country image is quite salient.

On the other hand, despite Participant F emphasizes that America has a strong (cognitive) image, he still defines America as *"The city thug, the neighborhood bully, he determines everything."* The fact that he sees America as a "bully" indicates that he evaluates this country negatively from emotional aspects. Participant F continues, *"The greatest power in the world order is in its hands. Sometimes you see that it brings rules and human rights to the fore, but you see that it does not comply. Of course, is that a positive image, no!"*. Participant F experiences cognition-affect dissonance while talking about France and America. It is determined that participant F sees the image of these countries as cognitively positive and strong but affectively negative. Participant F says the following about England: *"When I think of England, I think of a sneaky person, sneakiness. Wherever there is an event in the history, there is a hearsay that the United Kingdom is behind it. Of course, whether this reflects the truth or not will never be proven, but there is such a formation and the first thing that comes to my mind is sneakiness and going behind someone's back."*. According to Participant F, England evokes "sneakiness". Participant F appears to have a certain level of antipathy towards this country, although it is not very severe. The fact that he categorized the image of the UK as neutral might come from the perceived sneakiness of this country.

Participant G expresses her feelings towards Turkey as follows: *"Turkey is a place where we cannot look objectively. I'm a little angry."* This participant attributes the reason for her anger to the fact that Turkey has not used its potential sufficiently. Similarly, Participant 1 states that emotions affect the image of the country. According to her, although country image of Turkey (in cognitive terms) is weak, the positive feelings she has for Turkey neutralize the poor image perception. It is observed that there is a cognition-affective dissonance in Participant 1, as in many other participants evaluating Turkey's country image. The participant G expresses her positive feelings towards European, Anglo-Saxon and Mediterranean countries as follows: *"I like European and Anglo-Saxon countries in general. I like Mediterranean countries because I think they are close to me and I will be comfortable there. But if you say which one do you prefer, I prefer Anglo-Saxon. Spain is the exception, which is due to my fondness for architecture. Before, I didn't have the perception that I love Spain, but after I visited, it started."* Although Participant G states that she prefers Anglo-Saxon countries, she explicitly mentions that she developed positive feelings towards this country based on her direct experiences by visiting Spain. In

this example, the importance of direct experience with the country in making positive emotional connotations is once again supported.

Participant 4 stresses the relationship between the image of the country and the number of foreign tourists and says, "*The more tourists come, the higher the image, I think.*". In addition, Participant 1 states that she wants to live in the USA because she thinks she will be happy in this country. She attributes high image to the USA and sees as the most powerful country in the world. On the other hand, Participant 1 says, "*For example, from the perspective of Israel's oppression on Palestine, killing people or other things. Well, doesn't humanitarian issues affect you and the image of the country?*" She points to the country's attitudes toward other countries and states that people should develop certain feelings towards a certain country due to humanitarian reasons. In this respect, Participant 1 says, "*I think that the image of the country includes conscientious feelings, not its economy or anything else. What we feel towards that country, emotions come into play.*" By expressing this, she clearly reveals that the concept of country image includes feelings towards the country.

"People" code

Participant A expresses his negative feelings towards the Greeks as follows: "*Even though we try to establish a peaceful environment with them in every matter, even though we approach them as our border neighbors, today a Greek citizen cannot welcome Turkish citizens. Therefore, when I think of Greece, I think of Rome and Byzantium. That's why I'd be cautious if I were to speak to a Greek.*" For Participant B, the Greek people have a negative connotation, as well. Due to the negative events in history and today, it is determined that Participant B has strikingly negative attitudes towards the Greek people, which make an impact on the formation of the country image.

Participant G mentions the importance of having knowledge and experience about the human elements in the perception of a particular country's image as follows: "*If it is a country I go to, I look at the behavior of the people, the order (traffic) there ... Since I don't evaluate from the aspects of politics, I look at the human factor, the human behavior is important to me. It could also be people's behavior in traffic, walking, in a restaurant, or towards you. In general, I pay more attention to the structure of interpersonal and social relations, so political situations remain in the background.*". Participants B and G are prone to observe the behaviors of people in the past or present. In this way, they gain experience and use it as an element in the formation of the country's image.

It is determined from the following statements that the participants in the focus group have negative feelings about US citizens:

Participant 1: "*From a human perspective, I think they are very tough.*"

Participant 2: *“They has no family feelings at all. We have strong family feelings because of our traditions.”*

Participant 5: *“They have very low emotional intelligence.”*

Participant 6: *“They seem to be more prejudiced than citizens of other countries. Cold and prejudiced”.*

In the focus group, it was agreed that Nigeria's country image was low. Participant 5 explains one of the reasons why Nigeria's country image is low as follows: *“Many countries are depleting their (Nigeria's) natural resources. In my eyes, besides the economic situation of a country, the fact that the people in the country stand up against oppression and be moral affects this situation.”* Participant 5 emphasizes that the Nigerian people's not taking a stand against the oppression and remaining passive weakens the perceived image of the country. Similar to Participant 5, Participant F explains why human behavior is important for country image as follows: *“While evaluating the country, the behavior of the citizens of the country is important ... The actions of people representing that country in the news, in the media or in other messages we receive are of great importance.”* Participant 1 expresses the contribution of the attitudes and behaviors of people in shaping the image of that country as follows: *“I think that Turkey's conscience is really high. Tolerant, helpful and hospitable, with sentimentality. In Turkey, even if there is no bread to eat at home, when a guest comes, they will spend all their resources for that guest. Even if their economy is bad, even if their salary is not enough for the household, when a guest comes, they welcome, anyways. They have such feelings, even if their economy is bad, they neutralize each other.”* Participant 1 states that the image of Turkey, which she sees as low in cognitive terms, is neutralized by the human factor, which is effective in the development of affective country image.

“Brands” code

Participant B explains the importance of information in the perception of country image and that he experiences this information through the brands belonging to the country as follows: *“We evaluate a country by what we know about it, it is impossible to evaluate something we do not know. Since I know its history, I evaluated Greece with its history. Since I know Germany with its brand, I evaluated it with its brand because I had that image.”* Participant B explains that since he could not experience Germany directly, he indirectly experienced it through using or being exposed to the brands of the country as follows: *“To be realistic, when we say Germany, we think of technology and brands, not in any other way. It comes to our minds with its brand. In another way, these are the brands we use, addressing us in the visual and literary media. So, how can I evaluate Germany without a brand?”* Participant B states that he cannot have an idea about Germany's image without relying on its brands. This statement is an important finding in terms of country image. The perceived image of brands/products has been evaluated

under the product/country image (micro image) rather than the general country image (macro image) in the literature (Roth and Romeo, 1992; Martin and Eroglu, 1993). Therefore, the importance of brands has been ignored in the measurement of the concept of country image. In the current era of consumption, researchers encounter another limitation in measuring the concept of country image by neglecting the influence of the brand phenomenon. It is determined that the participants emphasize the need for information and direct or indirect experiences about a country in order to develop an image perception. Therefore, the subject of accessing information and experiencing the country occurs directly through “visits, business relations, family relations or friends” or indirectly through “conventional/social media, (product/service) brands, movies, TV series”. In this respect, individuals need to come into contact with the elements of the country in order to develop an image perception of that particular country. Participant B points out the importance of brands in the realization of this contact. The reflections of the capitalist order in the human life and the post-modern paradigm's assumptions that we construct our selves through consumption are the factors that support the role of brands in the development of country image. In this respect, the following statements of participant B pointing to the importance of brands in measuring country image are very important: *“From the beginning of my speech, if you notice, I have always based the image of countries on brands. The brand is very important for me in getting to know the countries and their impressions in my eyes.”*

According to Participant E, *“Brands affect the image of countries. Those products are spreading from one country to the world.”* Participant E points out that brands are the country's gateway to the world. Participant B says, *“There are a lot of cheap goods from China, their names are not even taken into account. Maybe they are not advertised, at all.”* This statement explains why China's country image is perceived as neutral or negative in the world. The poor quality of Chinese goods and the long exposure of the whole world to these poor-quality Chinese goods negatively affect not only China's micro (product) image, but also the overall perceived country image.

Following the reflections of France in the media, Participant F states that he sees this country as an *“enemy of the Turks”* but admits that it has very strong brands. Therefore, for Participant F, France connotes as enemy as well a country with very strong brands. Participant F matches the image of Germany with its brands and mentions that Germany itself connotes durability: *“For example, when Germany is mentioned, there is always a durability phenomenon coming from their brands.”*

Participant F points out the role of knowledge in the development of country image. In addition, participant F explains the country image-brand matching as follows: *“The sneakiness of England is also reflected in the brands, I can't think of the brand right now, British Airways. It's the same in Israel. For example, there is Henkel in Israel. Even at Henkel there is a slyness. Country images are also reflected in the brands. Ask Henkel, nobody knows. But ask about Omo, everyone knows, that is the roof brand.”*

Sabancı puts "sa" at the end of everything to make its name known, but Henkel never puts its name there. It says Omo, it says Persil, it says Rejoice, but it's all Henkel's. Each brand has its own value, but Henkel is its umbrella brand. We can see how the image of the country stands out in the brand. In the same way in America, we can give the example of Apple there. Although Apple has lost many lawsuits against Huawei and Samsung, we see that America's power and sassiness is there as well. We see that Apple, which has almost collapsed after Steve Jobs, took the power of America behind it, and used violence against other brands in many ways, including unfair competition. This shows us the reflection of that power.". Participant F mentions that the slyness of both England and Israel is also embedded in their brands. Similarly, the reflections of America's power and violence in the world are also in their brands. This example indicates the country image and brand perception match. Participant F tends to attribute the characteristics of the country of origin to the brands as well. In this context, participant F argues that the images of the countries are reflected in the brands.

The discussions of the participants in the focus group on the relationship between brand and country image developed as follows:

Participant 1: *"They have brands, this is how we communicate with the country. We live in the age of technology, because America markets technology, we put it in a high position in terms of image without addressing human factors."*

Participant 4: *"How could America have the same image if they don't have brands, zero ... Would America be America without its brands?"*

Participant 5: *"Brands are advertising the country."*

Findings that people communicate with a certain country through brands and the brands advertise the country show the effect of brands on shaping the perception of country image. Moreover, the statement by the Participant 4 that the image of America would become neutral (zero) without its brands constitutes the best example of country image-brand matching. Therefore, the opinion of the participants that the brands originate to a certain country reflect the image of that country predominates. In this context, brands should be considered within the concept of general country image. In fact, the findings indicate that brands can even be taken as a proxy variable in the measurement of country image. This situation is limited to the countries with strong brands because respondents had difficulties in finding the brands originating to many other countries with weak image. On the other hand, some countries with a strong image, such as Scandinavian countries, come to the fore not with their brands, but with the factors such as living standards, income justice and education quality.

3.1.5. “Cultural factors” Category

Participants emphasized codes related to culture in their statements. Because participants have mostly referred the codes of language, foods, and drinks in one sentence, each code under culture category was not separately addressed.

“Culture, language, and foods/drinks” codes

It has been determined that participants are prone to state the codes related to culture of a country interchangeably. Participant A stated that ethnic/cultural ties are effective in the context of developing behaviors because these ties create a positive image perception. Participant B says, *“For example, although there is no justice in Azerbaijan, our ethnic ties with Azerbaijan positively affect my view of them. This is in everyone. For example, in the Eurovision contest, you see that when an Azerbaijani competitor comes out, you are loaded on SMS, or when a Turkish person comes out, they are loaded on SMS. Even if we don't like it, it happens because we come from the same ethnic background.”*

Participant G says, *“The reason why I call Mediterranean countries neutral is emotion, I sympathize because I see them close to my own culture. For example, I couldn't call them bad image because I felt sympathy. Since I love Mediterranean culture, I have a Mediterranean sympathy. The culture I idealize is not the Mediterranean culture. Since the discipline of the culture I idealize is Anglo-Saxon and European culture, they (Mediterranean countries) do not have a higher image. But I have a sympathy, so I don't see too much negative. I'm not very objective, so emotions come into play. I find it sympathetic to be close to my own view of life.”* She emphasized that the positive feelings she felt for countries that she regarded as very weak on the basis of cognitive criteria neutralized this negative perception. It is seen that cognition-affect dissonance is also valid for Participant G. In addition, Participant G states that her feelings toward a certain country are effective in shaping the perception of the country image. According to Participant G, having a cultural similarity with a certain country causes sympathy for that country.

In the focus group discussions, the issues touched upon under the theme of culture are hosting different civilizations, food culture, sympathy for language (Participant 2); cultural affinity, food culture (Participant 3); customs and traditions (Participant 4); and sympathy for language (Participant 5).

3.2. Cognition and Affect in the Perception of Country Image

In the evaluation of the country image, participant D said, *“I chose it according to its economic power and military power, we see it that way from the media.”* In addition, when Participant D mentions countries with high image, he says, *“They are strong mostly because of their economic power and media. Countries with high image have a say over many countries, they have sanctions.”* Participant E mentions about his cognition-oriented criteria, *“First of all, a country is better in terms of its image if it*

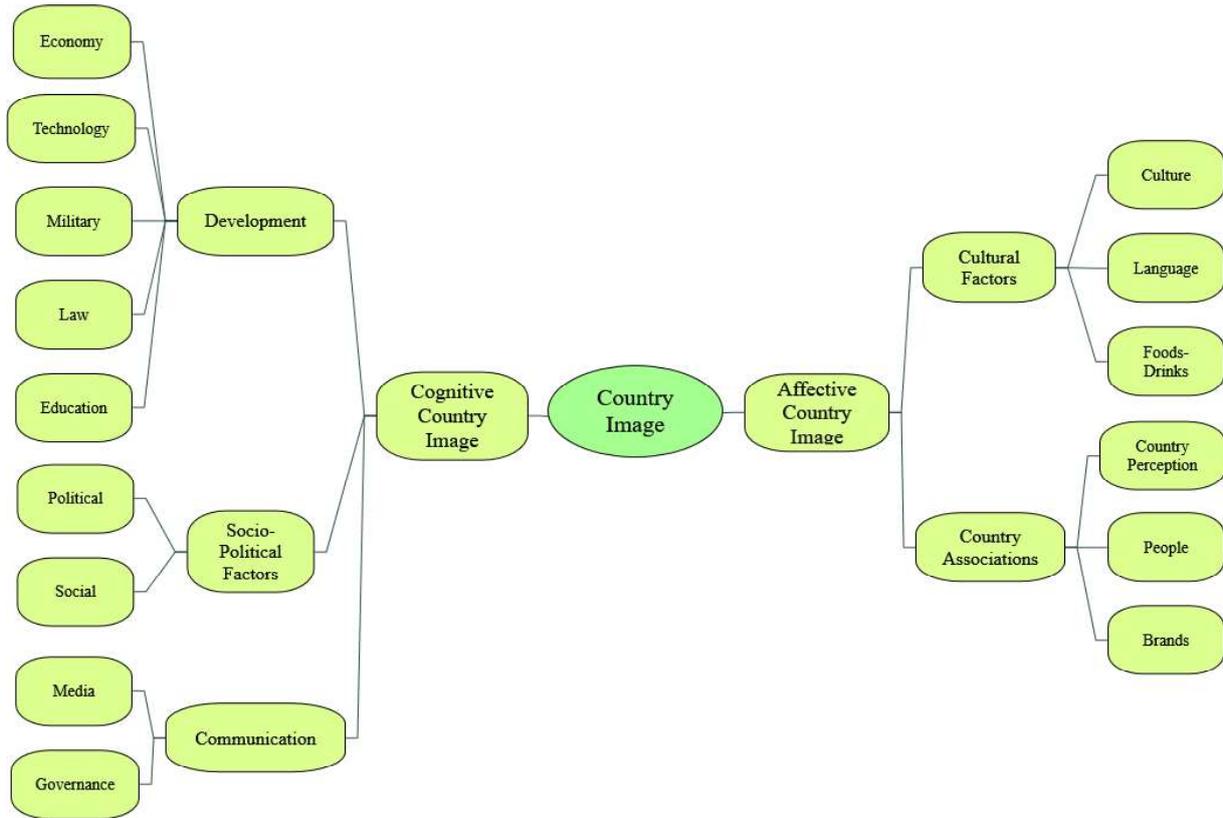
is in a place that is mentioned in the world, well-known, and whose name is mentioned on television. The military, economic and technological possibilities of the country.”. Therefore, this shows that participants D and E think that country image conceptually consists mainly of cognition-oriented criteria. These participants evaluate country image from the perspective of only cognition and do not consider their negative/positive emotional attitudes as a criterion in the country image evaluation. Although Participant D classifies the USA as a country with a high image, when the USA is mentioned, he states, “*Exploitation and weapon trade come to my mind. It is a country that has exceeded its limits, especially in terms of its approach to Muslims and its exploitation against countries with rich resources.*”. He clearly shows his negative feelings toward this country. Similarly, although Participant E places France in the category of countries with a high image, when this country is mentioned, he makes the following emotionally negative connotations: “*Smugness. It is not a country with very great brands in the world, but a country that only tries to show itself great with mere rhetoric.*”. These two participants developed strong negative emotional attitudes towards the countries they place in the high-image country category.

In the focus group discussion, Participant 2 emphasized that although he included America in the category of high-image countries, he explicitly stated that he does not like the country image of America because he does not feel good about it: “*I don't like their (the US) image because they're running water out of straw. Frankly, it doesn't look nice when it seems friendly to us and helps the countries that are our enemies.*”. After the arguments of Participant 2, Participant 1 said, “*I think that the image of the country includes the conscientious feelings, not the economy or anything else. What we feel towards that country, emotions come into play.*” She mentioned that affect is the strong side in cognition-affect conflict. Afterwards, Participant 4 said, “*I think a country's image is determined by its economy. For example, Israel, let's explain one by one, is very good in terms of its defense and economy.*” Participant 1 asks a question that reveals the vitality of the affect in country image: “*Well, let me ask you something. For example, from the perspective of Israel's oppression on Palestine, killing people or other things. Well, doesn't humanitarian issues affect you and the image of the country?*” Upon this question, Participant 4 stated that the importance of the cognitive dimension, which he advocated at first, becomes actually insignificant when considered from this perspective. This indicates that the cognition-oriented factors that seem dominant at the first sight in the evaluation of country image become insignificant after the emotions come into play.

The statements of the participants show that the affect dimension can be more effective in taking a clear position and transforming a set of behaviors towards a certain country. However, it is clear that the participants of this study have a cognitive orientation in the evaluations of the concept of country image. The fact that participants mostly base their evaluations of the image of a given country on cognitive criteria does not reduce the significance of the affect dimension in shaping the perception of

country image. On the very contrary, this situation simply reveals that at the first glance, participants are inclined to think that country image as a construct is closely linked to a set of cognitive criteria such as social and political factors, development level of the country and how the country perceived in the international arena in terms of media and state governance. This could be the sole reason why the affect dimension of country image has been long neglected and studies have failed to identify the vitality of the affect dimension. Based on the findings derived from the qualitative data and the literature review, the conceptual map of country image has been formed and illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The Conceptual Map of Country Image



Izmir et al. (2023) provided strong insights on how cognitive and affective dimensions of the country image develop by the following explanations: "... 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.”. This detailed explanation given by İzmir et al. (2023) implies that sometimes affects might be a stronger agent that shapes behaviors and this conclusion is obviously a salient result supported by the finding of this study.

The concept of country image and its measurement is a subject that has been discussed by many scholars (Jaffe and Nebenzahl, 1984; Papadopoulos et al., 1990; Martin and Eroğlu, 1993; Parameswaran and Pisharodi, 1994; Knight and Calantone, 2000; Knight et al., 2003; Pereira et al., 2005; Chattalas et al., 2008; Lala et al., 2008; Maher and Carter, 2011; Buhmann and Ingenhoff, 2015a; Buhmann, 2016). Among these studies, there are only very few that have considered feelings towards a particular country as a dimension within the scope of the measurement of this concept. (Eg. Chattalas et al., 2008; Maher and Carter, 2011; Wang et al. (2012); Buhmann and Ingenhoff, 2015a; 2015b; Buhmann, 2016). Wang et al. (2012) measured affective country image by collecting certain items from the literature; however, the reliability and validity issues of the measurement tool compiled by Wang et al. (2012) were not discussed in depth. Chattalas et al. (2008) and Maher and Carter (2011) tried to measure the affective country image based on Fiske et al.'s (2007) and Cuddy et al.'s (2007; 2008) studies on the concepts of warmth and competence within the framework of Social Cognition Theory, Stereotype Content Model and the Behavior from Intergroup Affect and Stereotypes (BIAS) Map. Chattalas et al. (2008) and Maher and Carter (2011) brought a new approach to the measurement of country image but caused a certain deviation from the essence of this concept. Although the studies of Buhmann and Ingenhoff (2015) and Buhmann (2016) are conceptually and psychometrically one of the most successful studies in the literature in measuring country image, they are far from a marketing perspective due to their international relations/public relations orientation. In addition, since the scale developed by Buhman and his colleagues contains too many items, it seems difficult to use it practically in the academic studies. Therefore, applying an interdisciplinary perspective due to the nature of this concept, this gap in the literature needs to be filled by a conceptually and psychometrically more robust measurement tool.

In this study, a new definition of country image is made on the basis of both the literature reviewed and qualitative study conducted. The concept of country image is “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.”³

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the content analysis and literature review, including studies by Chattalas et al. (2008), Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009), Maher and Carter (2011), and Buhmann (2016), it is concluded that the concept of country image encompasses two main dimensions: cognition and affect. However, it is evident that participants tend to focus more on the cognitive aspect when evaluating country image. This conclusion seems generalizable considering the perspectives of the majority of the country of origin/country image studies published in the mainstream academic journals, as documented in the study of Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009).

In this study, a comprehensive item pool representing the key elements of the country image construct was developed based on content analysis of qualitative data and literature reviews. The analysis revealed a greater emphasis on cognition-oriented evaluations by participants. Out of the 85 collected items, 56 were associated with the cognitive dimension, while 29 pertained to the emotional dimension. The significant asymmetry in item distribution, with almost a 2:1 ratio between cognition and affect, suggests that country image perception is predominantly influenced by cognitive processes. However, this observation stems from participants' misconceptions regarding the fundamentals of the country image concept, indicating a widespread error in their understanding. The items comprising the country image construct can be found in Appendix 2.

The cognitive dimension of country image occurs as a result of the inferences that the participants reach by objectively evaluating the cognitive criteria important to them, such as economy, technology, education, military, politics, media so on so forth. On the other hand, the affective dimension develops as a result of the biased and subjective evaluations of individuals. The affective dimension, in short, consists of the sum of people's feelings towards a certain country and the basic elements that make up that country such as culture, language, food/drinks, people etc. Therefore, inferences in the affective dimension are not rational, they are formed within the framework of the emotional reasons developed by individuals. Since emotions are inherently subjective, participants in country image studies may tend to rely on more tangible aspects when evaluating the image of a given country, leading to a cognitive-dominant perspectives in such studies.

³ This definition is developed in the PhD dissertation of the first author in the light of literature review and qualitative research. To cite this study: İzmir, O. (2021). *The role of the xenocentrism, cosmopolitanism and price in the effect of country image on health service quality and behavioral intentions* (Doctorate Thesis). Anadolu University, Eskisehir.

4.1. Implications in the Context of Marketing Theory and Practice

In both focus group interviews and in-depth interviews, participants were asked to choose countries with high, neutral and low country image. Afterwards, they were asked about their criteria when choosing these countries. It was observed that the participants tended to base their criteria mostly on cognition-oriented phenomena. As they started to go into details about the factors that shape the perception of country image, it is seen that their initial perceptions began to change. This indicates the effect of some socio-psychological variables on the development of the country image perception. The attitudes and behaviors of the individuals toward their own country or other countries point to the concepts of affinity or animosity shaped within the framework of historical and cultural ties or conflicts. In addition, the strong ties of the people in a closed and conservative culture toward their own country is related to the concepts of ethnocentrism and patriotism, while the distant approach to other countries emphasizes the concepts of psychic distance. The embracing attitudes of people in a country with an open and free culture to other countries brings the concepts of cosmopolitanism and internationalism to the fore. It is seen that these socio-psychological variables and country image develop in a strong interaction and are related concepts. Therefore, it is thought that these socio-psychological variables have an important role in shaping the perception of country image. When the literature is examined, the absence of a study investigating the relative effects or interactions of these variables on country image points to another gap in the country image studies. This gap was meant to be fulfilled by a recent study (Izmir et al., 2022) in which significant relationships between country image and four socio-psychological constructs (psychic distance, ethnocentrism, xenocentrism and cosmopolitanism) were found.

The cognitive orientation in the country image literature seems to pose serious problems for the validity and generalizability of studies conducted in this context. Within the scope of this study, it was determined that some of the countries which were evaluated positively from the perspective of cognitive criteria were regarded equally negative from the affective aspects. For example, a researcher who uses one of the widely used country image scales in the study conducted in Turkey may find results that do not exist in reality or are much more exaggerated (positive) than they actually are for America, Israel and some Western countries. Similarly, the opposite results can be achieved in the context of the countries that do not have a strong cognitive image but have a positive affective image (eg Azerbaijan). This situation threatens the validity of (general) country image studies conducted only with cognitive-oriented scales. Within the scope of this study, it has been determined that the country image consists of cognition and affect, yet the studies in the literature are mostly cognitive-oriented. For the solution of this problem, it is recommended to use CIscale (Izmir 2021, Izmir et al., 2023) or similar measurement tools consisting of both cognition and affect to reach more valid results.

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Appendix 1

Interview Questions
1- What factors do you take into account when evaluating the image of a particular country and what are the factors that shape your general perception of that country?
2- Can you name 2 countries with a low country image, 2 countries with a high country image and 1 country with a neutral country image? What is the reason for the difference between the perceived images of these countries?
3- What comes to your mind when you think of country X? How would you define/describe/evaluate country X as a country?
4- What comes to your mind when you think of country X? How would you define/describe/evaluate country X as a country?
5- What comes to your mind when you think of country X? How would you define/describe/evaluate country X as a country?
6- What comes to your mind when you think of country X? How would you define/describe/evaluate country X as a country?
7- What comes to your mind when you think of country X? How would you define/ describe/ evaluate country X as a country?
8- Which elements did you take as criteria when evaluating the images of these countries? Do these criteria differ according to the countries? If so, in which ways?
9- Which are the most famous brands of the countries you selected?
10- Does the image of the countries you selected affect the image of these brands, or does the image of these brands affect the image of the countries you selected?
11- Assuming that these famous brands are not present in the countries you have selected, could you briefly re-evaluate the image of the countries you have selected? Do you think the perceived image of your selected countries has changed after the brands were removed? If so, why do you think the reason for this change?
12- Can you name some of the most prestigious brands of some of the countries with high country images?
13- Assuming that these brands are purchased by X, a country with a low country image, do you think there will be any change in the image of country X after the purchase of these prestigious brands by country X? Also, after these prestigious brands leave countries with a high country image, do you think the image of these countries will change? If a change occurs, in what ways? Do you think there is a difference in the perceived image of these prestigious brands after they are sold to businesses in countries with low country image?
14- The Swedish Volvo car brand was acquired by the Chinese brand Geely in 2010. The American brand Motorola was acquired by the Chinese brand Lenovo in 2014. The American General Electric (GE) household appliances brand was acquired by the Chinese brand Haier in 2016. These and many other prestigious brands in the international market have been acquired by Chinese companies. Does this contribute to China's country image, or does it harm the image of the countries from which these prestigious brands were acquired?
15- Does your perception of the image of a particular country influence your purchasing decision? In which cases?

Appendix 2

Cognitive Country Image
1- This country is a safe country to visit. *
2-I think we have a positive historical background with this country. *
3-We share similar cultures with this country. *
4-This country has a strong economy. *
5-This country shapes world politics*
6-This country is home to strong brands. *
7-This country has prestigious brands. *
8-The brands of this country provide prestige to its consumers. *
9-The educational opportunities in this country are good. *
10-This country has positive connotations in the world media. *
11-This country is able to create a positive impression about itself in the world through mass media. *
12-This country is a democratic country. *
13-People live in safety in this country. *
14-This country has a high level of prosperity. *
15-This country is a developed country. *
16-People in this country are disciplined. *
17-This country has a clean historical past. *
18-This country is a country that is changing the world order in a positive way. *
19-This country can protect its own rights and interests. *
20-This country produces innovative ideas that shape the world. *
21-This country has mechanisms/institutions that work systematically. *
22-This country is a militarily strong/deterrent country. *
23 - People living in this country have a high level of opportunities (education, health, work, etc.). *
24-This country is a country with a superior culture. *
25-This country has a popular culture in the world. *
26-There is a developed sense of justice in this country. *
27-This country is a country with high social welfare. *
28-This country has a strong state leader. *
29-This country has a leader who sets the agenda of the world. *
30- This country is a rich country.
31- This country provides rights and freedoms to its people.
32- This country is technologically advanced.
33- This country produces/markets goods/services for the upper class.
34- This country produces/markets quality goods/services.
35- This country produces/markets durable (robust) products.
36- This country is friendly towards my country in international relations.
37- The labor force in this country has high technical skills.
38- People in this country are hardworking.
39- The products of this country are cheaply produced consumer goods.
40- The products/services of this country are distributed all over the world.
41- This country produces highly technical products.
42- People living in this country enjoy a high standard of living.
43- This country is a peaceful country.
44- This country has a stable political system.
45- This country has strong political and economic ties with us.
46- People in this country have a work ethic.
47- This country is an ideal country.
48- This country respects the values of other nations.
49- This country respects civil rights.
50- The goods/services of this country give me a high status.
51- This country has a global presence.
52- This country is culturally close to my country.
54- This country has a strong position in the global economy.

55- This country has a globally influential culture.
56- This country is sensitive to sustainability issues.
Affective Country Image
57-I love this country. *
58-I like using the brands of this country. *
59-I like the language of this country. *
60-I love the food of this country. *
61-I love the culture of this country. *
62-I love the people in this country. *
63-The touristic/natural environment of this country interests me. *
64-The state leader of this country is a person who has been favored by people around the world. *
65-This is a country that seems sympathetic to me. *
66-People in this country have high emotional intelligence. *
67- I think I will be happy if I live in this country. *
68-I love watching movies/series from this country. *
69-The people in this country are warm-blooded. *
70-This country has athletes who are loved all over the world. *
71-This country is an attractive destination for many tourists. *
72- I would like to live in this country. *
73- I would like to visit this country. *
74- The idea of living in this country excites me. *
75- Goods/services of this country have emotional appeal.
76- This country excites me.
77- Owning the goods/services of this country makes me proud.
78- This country produces/markets goods/services that I would be proud to show my friends.
79- This country is a popular country.
80- This country is a reliable country.
81- The people of this country are friendly and lovely.
82- This country reminds me of pleasant things.
83- This country is an interesting (attractive) country.
84- This country and its people excite me.
85- This country has natural beauties.

Notes: * symbolizes the items obtained from the analysis of qualitative data. Other items were collected from different sources in the literature presented below:

Wang and Lamb (1980; 1983); Bilkey and Nes (1982); Parameswaran and Yaprak (1987); Papadopoulos et al. (1990); Roth and Romeo (1992); Parameswaran and Pisharodi (1994); Martin and Eroglu (1993); Häubl (1996); Nebenzahl and Jaffe (1996); Verlegh (2001); Knight et al. (2003); Heslop et al. (2004); Laroche et al. (2005); Brijs (2007); Meng et al. (2008); Buhmann (2016).

KATKI ORANI / CONTRIBUTION RATE	AÇIKLAMA / EXPLANATION	KATKIDA BULUNANLAR / CONTRIBUTORS
Fikir veya Kavram / <i>Idea or Notion</i>	Araştırma hipotezini veya fikrini oluşturmak / <i>Form the research hypothesis or idea</i>	Res. Assist. Onur İZMİR (PhD) Assoc. Prof. Elif EROĞLU HALL Assoc. Prof. Nurdan SEVİM (PhD)
Tasarım / <i>Design</i>	Yöntemi, ölçeği ve deseni tasarlamak / <i>Designing method, scale and pattern</i>	Res. Assist. Onur İZMİR (PhD) Assoc. Prof. Elif EROĞLU HALL Assoc. Prof. Nurdan SEVİM (PhD)
Veri Toplama ve İşleme / <i>Data Collecting and Processing</i>	Verileri toplamak, düzenlenmek ve raporlamak / <i>Collecting, organizing and reporting data</i>	Res. Assist. Onur İZMİR (PhD) Assoc. Prof. Elif EROĞLU HALL Assoc. Prof. Nurdan SEVİM (PhD)
Tartışma ve Yorum / <i>Discussion and Interpretation</i>	Bulguların değerlendirilmesinde ve sonuçlandırılmasında sorumluluk almak / <i>Taking responsibility in evaluating and finalizing the findings</i>	Res. Assist. Onur İZMİR (PhD) Assoc. Prof. Elif EROĞLU HALL Assoc. Prof. Nurdan SEVİM (PhD)
Literatür Taraması / <i>Literature Review</i>	Çalışma için gerekli literatürü taramak / <i>Review the literature required for the study</i>	Res. Assist. Onur İZMİR (PhD) Assoc. Prof. Elif EROĞLU HALL Assoc. Prof. Nurdan SEVİM (PhD)

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