The Mediating Role of Country Brand Equity in the Effect of Country of Origin Image on Word of Mouth Marketing: A Study on Turkish TV Series in Morocco

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Abstract

Turkish TV series have recently become more widespread and popular in the international arena, especially in the Balkan and Middle Eastern countries. Turkish TV series, which have a wide audience in the Arab geography, are met with great interest especially in the Kingdom of Morocco. Within the scope of this study, the reasons and tendencies of Moroccan people, who are among the audience of Turkish TV series, to watch Turkish TV series were investigated. In addition, the effect of country of origin image (COI) on country brand equity (CBE) and word-of-mouth marketing (WOM) was analyzed and the mediating role of country brand equity in this effect was examined. In the context of literature, the historical development of the Turkish TV series sector is discussed by touching on the historical relationship between Türkiye and Morocco, and the similarities in terms of culture and belief. The study was carried out in the cities of Casablanca, Fez, Marrakesh and Meknes, which are among the most populous cities of the Kingdom of Morocco. Quantitative methods were used in the research and data was collected with a survey form obtained from 250 people using the easy sample method. Among the data obtained in the study, demographic characteristics, perspectives on Turkish TV series, reasons for watching TV series, criticisms about TV series, desire to buy products in TV series and perspectives on Türkiye were analyzed using frequency analysis using SPSS program. The effect of COI on WOM and the mediating role of country brand equity in this effect were analyzed by measurement and structural model with the help of SmartPLS 4.0 program. As a result of the study, it was seen that the COI had a statistically significant effect on brand equity and WOM. In addition, a mediating role of country brand equity was found in this effect.

Keywords: *Country of Origin, Country Brand Equity, Word of Mouth Marketing, Morocco, Turkish TV Series, Intercultural Communication.*

1. INTRODUCTION

An important factor in people's product evaluations is national origin. The country of origin of a product signals the quality of that product and influences perceived risk and purchasing behavior (Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2003). Country image is defined as the sum of the ideas, impressions and beliefs that people living in a particular place have about a country (Kotler et al., 1993). Therefore, it shapes people's behavior (Kim & Yim, 2022; Magnusson et al., 2022). For comprehending the value of brands, brand equity structure has been presented in the literature (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). Country brand equity, which is considered a conceptual extension of brand equity, refers to the value of country brands (Zeugner-Roth et al., 2008). Therefore, a country's country brand represents a "relational", in other words, intangible asset (Veloutsou et al., 2013). The country of origin of the brand is a driving force in determining the brand image, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and brand awareness (Magnusson et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2020). In this context, Turkish TV series take their place in literature as an important factor in the image of a country (Özarslan, 2020; Kaptan & Algan, 2023; Hancığaz & Hülür, 2024).

TV series and movies can affect the thoughts and behaviors of the audience in the country where they are broadcast and encourage the audience to live and live standards in the TV series. In addition, Turkish TV series are effective communication tool in promoting Turkish culture, customs, traditions and tourism (Cengiz & Çakın, 2022). Word of mouth marketing (WOM) is a communication effort that takes place between two people without commercial concerns or any self-interest (Taylor et al., 2012). There are studies in the literature on the connection between brand equity and word of mouth marketing (WOM) marketing (Latif et al., 2019; Mukerjee, 2018; Sofiane, 2019; Yazgan et al., 2014). In a study conducted to determine the effect of the brand equity on the WOM communication variable; research indicates that brand equity positively influences and significantly contributes to positive WOM communication (Odabaşoğlu et al., 2022). Another study stated that brand image has a moderate and positive effect on WOM communication carried out online (Urmak & Dayanç Kıyat, 2021). There are also studies on the effect of the country-of-origin on brand equity. In these studies, it was concluded that country of origin effects have a positive effect on consumer brand equity. (Aaker, 1991; Kim & Chung, 1997; Yoo & Donthu, 2001; Lin & Kao, 2004; Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2006; Pappu et al. 2006; Mohd Yasin et al. 2007; Ngan et al., 2020).

The aim of the article is to examine the effect of country of origin image on country brand equity and WOM and to analyze the mediating role of country brand equity in this effect. In addition, to examine the tendencies of Moroccan people towards Turkish TV series and products, to reveal the reasons for their preference of Turkish TV series and products and the aspects they criticize in the series. There are studies in the literature that measure the effect of country of origin image on country brand equity. It has been noticed that the studies that examine the effect of country of origin and brand equity on word of mouth marketing are limited. Considering the limited number of studies on the interaction

between the country of origin and WOM, it is expected that the study conducted will have a significant effect in terms of providing insight when it is simultaneously included in the marketing strategies related to the country, product, company or brand that will be in the market. In addition, no study has been found that examines the mediating role of the country brand equity in the effect of the country of origin image on word of mouth marketing. In this context, the study is considered original. Another original area of the study is that the application area of this model designed for Turkish origin products and brand equity is Morocco. Research on country brand equity continues to be added to the marketing literature (Zeugner-Roth et al., 2008; Pappu & Quester, 2010; Bose et al., 2020).

Overall, this study aims to contribute to the existing literature on country brand equity and addresses the fact that consumer perceptions in the global market can be manipulated through TV series. As a result of this situation, the study is considered important in terms of providing clues and guidance to companies operating in international trade in determining strategies. TV series export, which has an important place in foreign trade, is an effective international marketing area in the promotion of countries and products. Therefore, this study aims to raise awareness by emphasizing the importance of TV series and film exports. In addition to all these, it is thought that it will also guide researchers who want to work in this field. In this context, the first part of the article consists of a conceptual framework and covers the perception of country brand equity, COI, Turkish TV series exports and WOM. The second part provides the purpose, scope and method of the study, data analysis, findings and comments.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Country Brand Equity and Country of Origin Effect

The concept of brand equity is considered a concept used not only on companies or individuals, but also on countries. A country's branding depends on its success in these areas. In a global context, a country's perception of its image and reputation has an important place in country branding. In his study, Anholt (2003) emphasized that the implementation of brand strategies, approaches and methods for countries gives strength to global economic prosperity and country development. According to Anholt, the concept of country brand equity is evaluated as a set of perceptions of people about a country in terms of its political, commercial, cultural, tourist attraction, investment potential and workforce infrastructure features. Mariutti and Giraldi (2020) argue that country brand equity has expanded both in theory and practice, but there is little work on conceptualization. On top of that, they propose a multidimensional framework by including the "reputation" dimension in the concept of country brand equity.

Compared to products from other countries, the feeling of trust that Japanese brands give to the person and the perception of longevity in terms of functionality are seen as the reasons for preference. The perception of low quality and use of cheap materials towards Chinese products creates a discouraging effect that causes a lack of trust in this country's products and makes people worry about

choosing them. Therefore, the perception of a country's brand, which has a strong influence that makes a difference in certain commercial areas, not only affects the purchasing decision process of consumers, but also reflects on the country's performance in the field of exports for its interests (Yıldız, 2017). Countries, in people's perception; They can be divided into multiple groups in terms of brand equity, technological superiority, product design and quality. People may associate the perceptions they attribute to a brand or product with different product groups in the same country. Attitudes attributed to a particular country can also be shaped by people's backgrounds, such as the degree of similarity with that country, cultural, psychological and demographic characteristics. Country of origin; It is expressed as a reputation, an animated picture, formed in the minds of consumers based on a country's image, political and economic history, and national characteristics (Nagashima, 1970).

From a marketing perspective, the country name can have the same power and influence as the brand name and can also contribute to the perceived value of the product. As a result of the reputational perspective, products of a country with a positive image in people's minds are more popular and preferred than products of a country with a negative image (Petra & Diamantopoulos, 2008). Brand equity may be defined as the perception formed in consumers' minds and affects their purchasing decisions (Ural & Perk, 2012). A study by Mohd Yasin et al. (2007) found that the concept of country of origin impacts brand equity, according to the analysis of survey results obtained via e-mail from companies operating in Malaysia. In the studies of Parkvithee and Miranda (2012), it was observed that a brand image with a strong value can replace a country image with a weak value. A meta-analysis study concluded that country of origin image is effective in brand evaluations by consumers (Oduro et al., 2024). Another study conducted on Algerian consumers regarding mobile phones concluded that the perception of country of origin has a direct impact on brand equity dimensions (Djafer & Adjila, 2024).

2.2 Turkish TV Series Industry and Product Placement in the Perspective of Popular Culture

Understanding of popular culture; It consists of products and systems known, recognized and shared by people and is produced and consumed for commercial purposes. The most distinctive feature of this understanding is that it is produced to be sold in the market. Culture industries, which produce the concept of popular culture, create demand for products by creating meaning, images and a consumable pleasure based on these on the capitalist system through a commercial good. In the understanding of popular culture conveyed through mass media, television series and movies are mass media that quickly penetrate people's worlds, influence their thoughts, enable them to take stances on certain issues, manage their perceptions, and have the effect of creating images related to people, places, etc. (Yılmaz & Yılmaz, 2010). Turkish TV series attract all audiences from seven to seventy; In some cases, it can create effects such as different image, personality, style, lifestyle, and arouse different emotions, causing emulation behavior and, as a result, increasing devotion to popular culture. Popular culture, which has become widespread as a result of increased devotion, can also cause a cultural

transformation and a change in consumption patterns (Sucu, 2011). Local TV series broadcast in foreign countries help to spread the understanding of popular culture and to recognize that region in different geographies as a result of visually influencing the audience with the location and location features (Sakallı, 2014).

Many global and national factors have contributed to the rise of Turkish television as a transnational media industry in the last thirty years. The trans nationalization of the Turkish television industry, which began in the late 1990s, continues to be successful with Turkish television series exported to more than 150 countries. Turkish television is a tremendous area of cultural production in its historical past (Kaptan & Algan, 2023). Turkish TV series gained momentum especially after 2006 and were exported to many countries, especially the Balkans and the Middle East. After 2010, Türkiye became the largest exporting country in the TV series industry after the USA (United States of America) (Öztürk & Atik, 2016; Uğurlu, 2018). Turkish TV series viewers in Middle Eastern countries approach Turkish TV series with great interest in order to find traces of their own cultural history. The success of Turkish TV series in various aspects such as location, setting and actors is among the main reasons for this intense interest. Another reason is the presence of an Islamic culture with similar lifestyles and beliefs as the audience. Thanks to the TV series, the culture of the Turks has increased its popularity in the Middle Eastern countries and stimulated tourist visits to the country (Ökmen & Göksu, 2019). The concept of product placement, advanced as an alternative to traditional advertisements, is a marketing communication tool. According to DeLorme and Reid (1999), the purpose of this communication tool is to influence the subconscious of the audience and allow the message to be easily received by the receiver (Yıldırım, 2018). Since the actors on the screens have a great influence on the general audience, companies have chosen to appeal to people by taking advantage of this influence for years. Many trendy products have become widespread by being reflected on people's screens. Companies that are aware of this situation have started to take advantage of this marketing communication and use the "product placement" strategy. It is known that this marketing communication increases awareness of brands and provides benefits in image formation (Bozkurt, 2008).

Cultural proximity theory put forward by Straubhaar (1991); This is because viewers are more interested in television productions that they find close to their own lifestyle and culture. This concept was revealed in a study on why Turkish TV series are admired in the Middle East and North African countries, known as the MENA region with the use of English (Berg, 2017). Within the scope of the study, the fact that the actors in the series are more similar to Arabs than European, American or Far Eastern actors, the fact that the plot takes place in a modern Muslim society, the overlap in terms of social relations, similar beliefs and lifestyles cause Turkish TV series to be met with admiration and interest in this region. has happened. Another striking result of the study is the cultural blending situation. As a result of the adoption of the modern understanding of Islam in society, there are differences in the role of women in society compared to the countries of the Mena region. Adopting

modern Islam, a blended image of eastern and western lifestyles, increases the interest in Turkish TV series. The roles of female actors, who take on different roles, especially compared to the countries in the Mena region, are met with interest by female audiences. Therefore, Turkish TV series that reflect modern Muslim culture blended with cultural closeness and east-west synthesis attract more attention than other countries. Another reason why Turkish TV series attract attention in the study is that people who are popular with the audience take part in the TV series. In addition, the fact that the series take place in attractive and luxurious places and lead to a luxurious lifestyle and consumption is another important result of the series attracting attention (Şentürk et al., 2017).

Doğanay and Aktaş (2021) examined television series, which are seen as the biggest entertainment and communication tool, within the scope of production. In their study, Armağan and Gürsoy (2011) aimed to contribute to the development of international scale by examining the concepts of country of origin and consumer ethnocentrism and finding common factors between them. In their study, Başgöze and Kazancı (2014) investigated the factors that affect people's attitudes, brand image and purchasing tendency towards product placement and advertising strategies. As a result, it has been found that people have positive attitudes towards the product placements they encounter in TV series, people have a positive brand image, and people's tendency to purchase the product increases. In their study, in another study, the attitudes of young consumers towards product placements in movies and TV series were examined and divided into categories (Kırcova & Köse, 2017). In a study examining consumers' perceptions of product placement strategies in Turkish TV series watched in Azerbaijan; Six dimensions were revealed: perceived benefit dimension, purchasing effect dimension, cultural promotion dimension, tourism effect dimension, general promotion effect dimension and viewing reason dimension. Participants stated that in the Turkish TV series they watched, they remembered actor clothes, venue furniture and mobile devices in terms of products, and Istanbul in terms of city (Gümüş, 2018). In the study conducted in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Jordan and Kyrgyzstan, the perception levels of Turkish people and Türkiye created by Turkish TV series on individuals were measured. As a result, it was found that the perceptions of Turkish TV series viewers about the personality traits of Turkish people, life in Türkiye, Türkiye's power and Türkiye's active role were effective on their desire to establish close relations with Türkiye (Hancığaz & Hülür, 2024).

2.3. Country Image and WOM

It is stated that the image created by a country's historical facts and events, traditions and cultures, economic maturity, products and services, technology and industrialization are effective in consumers' brand preference and purchasing decision process (Bannister & Saunders, 2001). The image of the country; It states that consumers' comments formed as a result of their experiences are shaped by the opinions of opinion leaders in society and the guiding influence of mass media (Shimp, 1984). In individuals' purchasing behavior, the people around them, such as their spouses, friends, relatives, and people they take as role models and trust, influence the decision-making process. While individuals

share their positive or negative opinions with other individuals, they inevitably spread their thoughts through WOM (Karaca, 2010). Positive WOM; It takes place in the form of transferring the advisory status of the companies to another person. This allows the company to reduce costs in promotional activities and increase company profits due to attracting a new customer portfolio (Derbaix & Vanhamme, 2003). This marketing activity directly relates to people's value, judgment and quality perceptions. It is indicated that the positive nature of WOM is directly related to perceptions (Hartline & Jones, 1996). A study conducted in America examined how consumers perceived Chinese-made automobiles and its reflections on their purchasing behavior. Within the scope of the study, the effects of product quality, country's image, ethnicity and ethnocentrism on product evaluation and purchase intention were measured. It has been concluded that product quality affects purchasing, while other variables do not affect purchasing (Chinen & Sun, 2011). The concept of country of origin, which is thought to play an active role in shaping consumer perception, plays an active role in shaping the consumer's perception of the country where the product is produced. There are perceptions formed due to some generalizations, such as the deliciousness of Italian pizza, the perfectionism of German cars, and the technological superiority of Japanese electrical products (Mohd Yasin et al., 2007). In a study conducted on a motorcycle brand in Bandung, it was revealed that country of origin, e-wom, and brand trust variables affect people's purchase intention (Hasanawi et al., 2024). Koçan and Yıldız (2020) found correlation between consumption emotions such as gladness and arousal, WOM communication, loyalty and satisfaction in the TV series industry. It has been determined that a positive correlation exists between arousal, WOM communication, loyalty and satisfaction. In a study based on the automotive industry, where the effects of brand, price and COI on product evaluation and purchasing were revealed, it was found that Japan country image is more than France (İzmir, 2016). Doan et al., (2024) concluded in their study that altruism, perceived value and brand equity significantly affect e-wom.

2.4. Model and Hypotheses of the Research

A positive brand image generally results in positive brand equity (Yoo & Donthu, 2001; Lin & Kao, 2004; Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2006; Pappu et al., 2007). When the studies are examined, country image has a positive and significant effect on perceived quality, brand awareness, brand loyalty and brand associations (Ngan et al., 2020). Country of origin image has a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty variable (Kim & Chung, 1997; Paswan et al., 2003; Pappu et al., 2007; Shahin et al., 2012; Saydan, 2013; Panda & Misra, 2014; Septyanti & Hananto, 2017). Country of origin image is effective in creating associations in people's minds (Aaker, 1991). As a result of this call, product quality perception can be affected (Klein et al., 1998; Haubl & Elrod, 1999; Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999; Norouzi & Hosienabadi, 2011, Murtiasih et al., 2014; Kim & Chao, 2018). Similarly, there is a positive relationship between the country of origin image and brand awareness (Nath Sanyal & Datta, 2011; Murtiasih et al., 2014; Chiu & Ho, 2015; Kim & Chao, 2018). Generally speaking, when people do not

have information about the product, they refer to the country of origin (Lusk et al., 2006). Considering all these studies, the following assumptions were made in this research:

H_1: COI affects the country brand loyalty dimension of country brand equity in a positive and significant way.

H_2: COI positively and significantly affects the country brand quality dimension of country brand equity.

H_3: COI positively and significantly affects the country brand awareness dimension of country brand equity.

When the studies are examined, it can be said that there is a positive relationship between the country of origin image and word of mouth marketing. It is assumed that the country of origin affects celebrity endorsement and e-wom purchase intention (Halim & Keni, 2021). Li and Li (2024) assume in their studies that there is a substitutive relationship between the country of origin and WOM. If the brands have a positive and strong brand equity, the likelihood of expressing positive opinions about that brand and recommending it to others will increase to this extent (Seo & Park, 2018; Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018; Ahmad & Guzmán, 2021). Therefore, examining the relationship between word of mouth marketing and brand equity will benefit stakeholders in creating a marketing strategy for the target audience in the short term. In this way, it will allow for a permanent perception in the consumer's mind and more efficient future strategy plans (Keller, 1993). Based on all these assumptions, the mediating role of brand equity in the effect of country of origin on word of mouth marketing has been wondered and it has been noticed that there is no study on this subject in the literature. The hypotheses prepared by taking into account the assumptions in the studies are as follows:

H_4: COI affects WOM positively and significantly.

H_5: The country brand loyalty dimension of country brand equity affects WOM positively and significantly.

H_6: The coutry brand quality dimension of country brand equity affects WOM positively and significantly.

H_7: The country brand awareness dimension of country brand equity affects WOM positively and significantly.

H_8: The country brand loyalty dimension of country brand equity has a mediating role between COI and WOM.

H_9: The country brand quality dimension of country brand equity has a mediating role between COI and WOM

H$_{10}$: The country brand awareness dimension of country brand equity has a mediating role between COI and WOM.

The research model was created based on the variables used in the studies examined as a result of the literature review. The model established in accordance with the purpose of the research is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Research Model
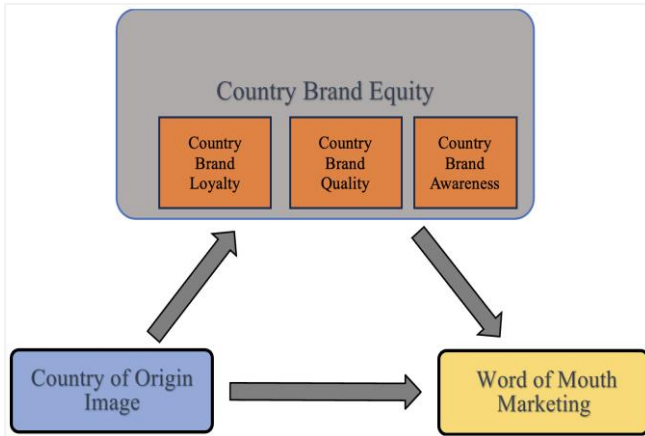
3. METHOD

Purpose of the research; to determine the perceptions of the Moroccan people towards Turkish and Turkish origin products by revealing their perspectives and tendencies regarding Turkish TV series, to analyze the effect of the COI on the country equity and WOM in the eyes of the Moroccan people, and to analyze the mediating role of the country brand equity in this effect. For this purpose, the study has been carried out in the cities of Casablanca, Fes, Marrakesh and Meknes, which are the most populous cities of the Kingdom of Morocco. Data was collected with a face-to-face survey form from 250 people determined by easy sampling method. In determining the sample size for the study, the rule that there should be 5 times or more participants than the statements in the survey form was taken as basis (Hair et al., 2019). At the same time, as another method to determine the sample size, the number of participants was determined based on the fact that the ratio of the number of items to the number of participants was considered to be between 3-6 people for each item (Cattell, 1978).

The survey form was first prepared in Turkish and then translated into Arabic under the supervision of an expert. In the first part of the survey form, statements regarding demographic information are included. In the second part; people were presented with statements such as which Turkish TV series they watch, the reasons for watching Turkish TV series, and the aspects they criticize. In the third section, statements about country brand equity, country of origin and positive WOM prepared using a 5-point Likert scale are included. Expressions created using the Likert scale were adapted from scales that have been used in many studies so far and whose validity and reliability have been tested. Country brand equity scale was measured by the scale used in Zeugner-Roth et al. (2008) study. The

COI scale, which consists of seven single dimensions, was adapted from the scale used in the study of Mohd Yasin et al. (2007). The positive WOM scale, which consists of six statements and one sub-dimension, was adapted from the scale used in the study of Goyette et al. (2010). Data were collected between 20 - 30 December 2023. The analysis of the data obtained was subjected to frequency analysis with the SPSS program. In addition, with the help of SmartPLS 4.0, the reliability, validity and discriminant validity analyzes of the measurement model were conducted. Variable explanation rate (R^2) and effect size (f^2) values were calculated using the PLS algorithm. Linearity analysis and path analysis were applied to the structural model. In order to determine the significance level of the path diagram that gives the path coefficients, 5000 subsamples were taken from the sampling using bootstrap (resampling) and t values were found. PLSPredict analysis was applied to calculate the Q^2 value for model predictive power. Structural equation modeling comes in two forms: variance and covariance (Garson, 2016). Variance-based PLS-SEM works successfully in cases where the normality assumption is not met without specifying an assumption regarding the data distribution (Hair et al., 2017). Considering these situations and the fact that the data do not have a normal distribution, PLS-SEM was preferred in the structural equation modeling established in the research.

3.1. Data Analysis and Findings

Descriptive statistics of the demographic information about the participants and the Turkish TV series trend are given in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Distribution

		n	**%**
Gender	Female	146	58.4
	Male	104	41.6
Age	18-25	136	54.4
	26-35	38	15.2
	36-45	25	10.0
	46-55	28	11.2
	56-65	23	9.2
Civil Status	Married	70	28.0
	Single	180	72.0
Education level	Secondary School Graduate	3	1.2
	High School Graduate	93	37.2
	Associate Degree Graduate	11	4.4
	Bachelor's Degree	120	48.0
	Master's Degree	22	8.8
	PhD	1	0.4
Job	Civil Servant	17	6.8
	Employee	39	15.6
	Tradesman	14	5.6
	Self-Employment	6	2.4
	Private Sector	15	6.0
	Housewife	4	1.6
	Student	151	60.4
	Other	4	1.6
	Total	250	100.0

As can be seen from Table 1, most of the participants in the study are women. In addition to this, the age range of the study participants is mostly young and middle age. It is known that there is a high concentration of single people as a result of the greater participation of the young audience. Based on this situation, the education level is mostly at the undergraduate level and students are excluded from Table 1 as a professional group.

Table 2. Trends of Moroccan People Towards Türkiye and Turkish TV Series

		n	%
Have you ever visited Türkiye?	Yes	17	6.8
	No	233	93.2
How many Turkish TV series do you follow?	1-2 TV Series	124	49.6
	3-4 TV Series	59	23.6
	5 and more TV Series	65	26.0
	None	2	0.8
After watching Turkish TV series, have you ever wanted to buy the products in the series?	Yes	174	69.6
	No	76	30.4
Have you ever bought a product you saw in the TV series after watching Turkish TV series?	Yes	68	27.2
	No	182	72.8
Have you ever wanted to go to Türkiye after watching Turkish TV series?	Yes	216	86.4
	No	34	13.6
Did you want to live in Türkiye after watching Turkish TV series?	Yes	151	60.4
	No	99	39.6
Total		250	100.0

When the expressions created to reveal the tendencies towards Turkish TV series were examined, it was seen that the majority followed at least one Turkish TV series even though they did not visit Türkiye. In line with the response given regarding the formation of purchasing desires for the products in Turkish TV series, it is stated that this desire is formed in the majority. At the point of turning the purchasing desire into action, some of them realized it, but the majority could not. It has been concluded that after watching Turkish TV series, most participants have a desire to go to Türkiye and even a desire to live in Türkiye.

As can be seen from Table 3, the most watched TV series is "Diriliş Ertuğrul". It was followed by the TV series "Kurtlar Vadisi" and "Aşk-ı Memnu", respectively. As a result of the answers given to the statements asked to learn the reasons for watching these series, it is seen that the most marked statement is "because I find it close to my own culture". Then comes the phrase "Because I love Türkiye and the Turks." In the previous section, it is concluded that the answers given to the desire to go to Türkiye and live in Türkiye are parallel to the participation in this statement. In terms of criticism of Turkish TV series, the phrase "Normalizing and encouraging extramarital relationships" was the most marked, and it is highly possible to comment that the formation of such an impression from the eyes of a country close to Turkish culture could be an indication that extramarital relationships have become very common in Turkish TV series. It seems that the most memorable products in Turkish TV series are

clothes and furniture. As a result of this situation, although Moroccan people are close to Turkish beliefs and culture, different lifestyle of Türkiye compared to Morocco can be remarkable, and it can be interpreted that clothes and furniture can be memorable, perhaps due to emulation or attraction.

Table 3. The Most Watched TV Series in the Kingdom of Morocco, Reasons for Watching, Criticisms and Memorable Product Groups

		n	%
Please mark which of the Turkish TV series below you watch. (You can mark more than one)	Ihlamurlar Altında	4	0.5
	Kaybolan Yıllar	98	11.9
	Muhteşem Yüzyıl	14	1.7
	Gümüş	2	0.2
	Aşk-ı Memnu	132	16.0
	Beni Affet	10	1.2
	Kara Sevda	118	14.3
	Siyah Beyaz Aşk	69	8.4
	Kurtlar Vadisi	149	18.1
	Fatmagül'ün Suçu Ne	8	1.0
	Oğlum İçin	19	2.3
	Diriliş Ertuğrul	171	20.7
	Yaprak Dökümü	31	3.8
	Total	825	100.0
What is your reason for watching Turkish TV series? (You can mark more than one)	Because I find it close to my own culture	106	27.7
	Because I love Turks and Türkiye	104	27.2
	Because I find it to be of high-quality production.	87	22.8
	Because I found the actors successful	85	22.3
	Total	382	100.0
What aspects of Turkish TV series do you criticize? (You can mark more than one)	Too many violent incidents	49	11.5
	Encouraging young people to have bad friendships	90	21.2
	Normalizing and encouraging extramarital affairs	155	36.5
	Encouraging people to commit crimes	58	13.6
	There is nothing I criticize	73	17.2
	Total	425	100.0
Which products do you remember most from the Turkish TV series you watched? (You can mark more than one)	Mobile Phones	52	6.5
	Furniture	166	20.9
	White Goods	69	8.7
	Electronic Small Appliances	18	2.3
	Automobiles	98	12.3
	Clothes	189	23.7
	Shoes	96	12.1
	Bags And Accessories	108	13.6
	Total	796	100.0

Note: It exceeds the sample number n because it contains multiple answer questions

3.2. Structural Equation Modeling with Partial Least Squares - Measurement Model Testing (PLS-SEM)

Before starting the structural model analysis, conditions such as reliability and validity of the structures within the scope of the study must be met. In the study to examine the reliability and validity conditions; Internal consistency reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity were evaluated. Internal consistency reliability, cronbach's alpha value and composite reliability (CR) coefficient value were examined. In convergent validity, the values assigned to the factors and the AVE, that is, explained variance values, were examined. Factor loading ≥0.70; cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) coefficients ≥0.70; average variance explained (AVE) values are expected to be ≥0.50 (Hair et al., 2022). The measurement model table created for reliability and validity is given in Table 4.

Table 4. Measurement Model Results

Variable		Expression	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alfa	CR	AVE
Country of Origin Image		COI1	0.752	0.892	0.918	0.651
		COI2	0.763			
		COI3	0.761			
		COI4	0.643			
Country Brand Equity	Country Brand Loyalty	CBVP1	0.807	0.715	0.821	0.535
		CBVP2	0.892			
	Country Brand Quality	CBVP3	0.715	0.647	0.850	0.739
		CBVP4	0.647			
	Country Brand Awareness	CBVP5	0.593	0.593	0.821	0.699
		CBVP6	0.807			
		CBVP7	0.892			
		CBVP8	0.715			
Positive Word of Mouth Marketing		WMM1	0.708	0.807	0.872	0.632
		WMM2	0.769			
		WMM3	0.831			
		WMM4	0.790			
		WMM5	0.870			
		WMM6	0.862			

Hair et al. (2022) state that any statements with a factor loading below 0.40 in the measurement model need to be eliminated from the model. They recommend that expressions with factor loads between 0.40 and 0.70 be removed from the measurement model by checking the AVE or CR coefficient values and if they are below the threshold value. After examining the AVE and CR values of 3 variables belonging to the COI scale with factor loadings below 0.40, it was decided to remove them from the measurement model. Although the factor load of the COI4 expression is 0.643, it was decided to keep the expressions in the measurement model because the AVE (0.651) value is over 0.50 and the CR (0.918) value is over 0.70 again, although the factor load of the CBVP4 statement regarding country brand quality, which is the sub-dimension of brand equity, is 0.647, the expressions are not included in the measurement model because the AVE (0.739) value is over 0.50 and the CR (0.850) value is over 0.70. It was decided to stay. Likewise, although the factor loads of the CBVP5 expression regarding

country brand awareness, which is the sub-dimension of country brand equity, is 0.593, the expressions are not valid because the AVE (0.699) value is over 0.50 and the CR (0.821) value is over 0.70. It was decided to remain in the measurement model.

When the values in Table 4 are examined, it can be said that reliability regarding internal consistency is ensured. CR coefficients; It is seen that the values are between 0.918 and 0.821. As for Cronbach's Alpha values, values between 0.60 and 0.70 are considered acceptable, values between 0.70 and 0.80 are considered good, and values above 0.90 are considered excellent reliability. In addition, values in the range of 0.60 and 0.80 are considered medium reliability, and values in the range 0.80 and 1.00 are considered high reliability (Gallais et al., 2017; Kılıç, 2016). When the values in Table 4 are examined, factor loadings are between 0.593 and 0.892; Since the AVE coefficients are between 0.535 and 0.739, it can be seen that the convergent validity assumption is met.

For the determination of discriminant validity; cross loads, the criterion recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981) and HTMT values given were used as criteria by Henseler et al. (2016). When the cross-loading table was examined, it was seen that there was no overlapping expression between the expressions measuring the research variables. Fornell and Larcker (1981) discriminant validity results are presented in Table 5, and discriminant validity results of HTMT coefficients are presented in Table 6.

Table 5. Discriminant Validity (Fornell and Larcker Values)

	Word of Mouth Marketing	COI	Country Brand Loyalty	Country Brand Quality	Country Brand Awareness
Word of Mouth Marketing	**0.807**				
Country of Origin Image	0.607	**0.732**			
Country Brand Loyalty	0.586	0.507	**0.860**		
Country Brand Quality	0.333	0.410	0.412	**0.836**	
Country Brand Awareness	0.536	0.484	0.421	0.248	**0.795**

According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), the square root of the average explained variance values (AVE) of the structures included in the research should be higher than the correlation coefficients between the structures included in the research. In other words, the square root values of the AVE coefficient must be greater than the other structures in its columns and rows. The values expressed in bold color in Table 5 are given as the square root values of the AVE coefficient, and the other coefficients are given as the correlation values between the variables. When the values in Table 5 are examined, it is seen that the square root of the AVE value of each structure is greater than the correlation coefficients with other structures.

Table 6. Discriminant Validity (HTMT Values)

	Word of Mouth Marketing	Country of Origin Image	Country Brand Loyalty	Country Brand Quality	Country Brand Awareness
Word of Mouth Marketing					
Country of Origin Image	0.720				
Country Brand Loyalty	0.770	0.719			
Country Brand Quality	0.438	0.599	0.626		
Country Brand Awareness	0.612	0.583	0.570	0.319	

Henseler et al. (2016), HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait) is stated as the ratio of the average of the correlations of the expressions of all variables in the research to the geometric averages of the correlations of the expressions of the same variable. When the HTMT coefficients in Table 6 are examined, it is seen that each value is below the threshold value. Thus, discriminant validity conditions are met.

3.2.1. Testing the Structural Model and Results

The structural equation model established for hypothesis testing is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Structural Equation Model
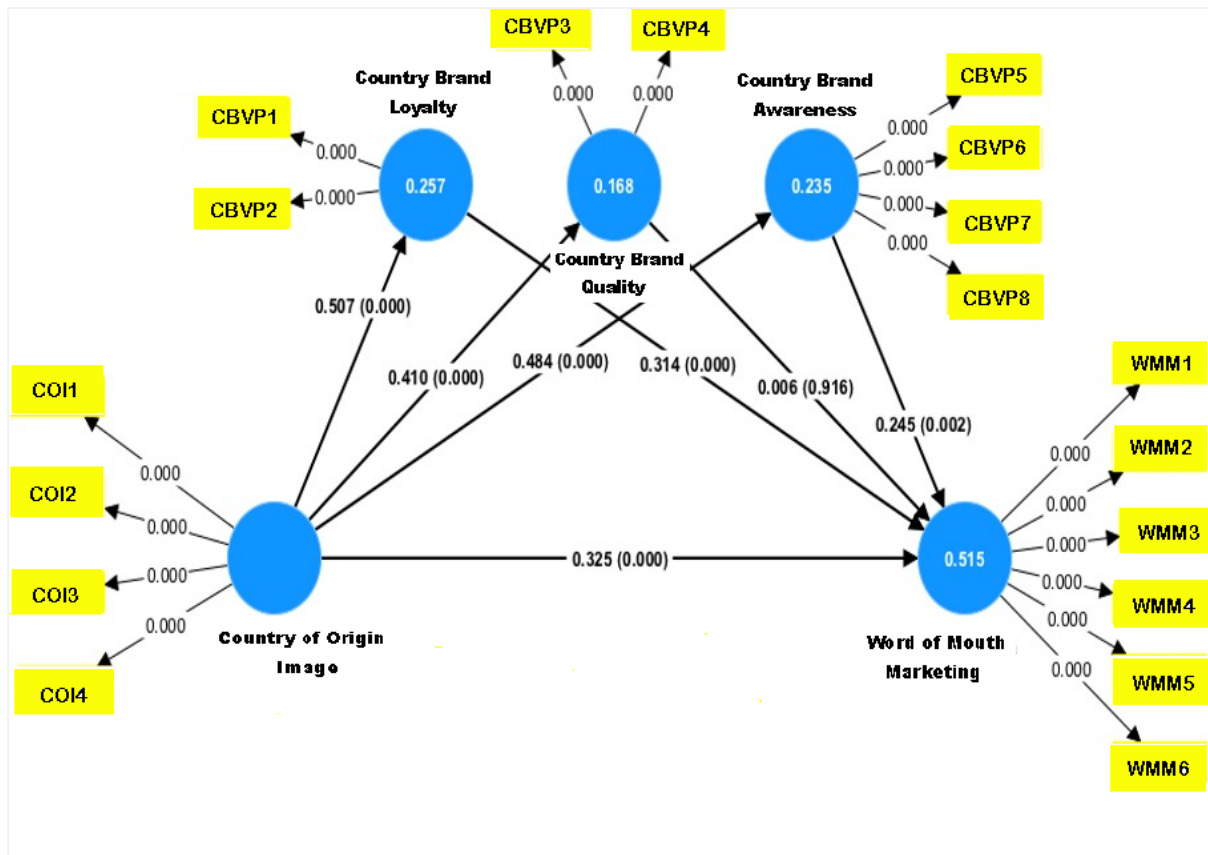
Partial least squares path analysis was used in the research model test. The data was analyzed with the SmartPLS 4 statistical program (Yıldız, 2021). Regarding the research model; PLS algorithm

to calculate linearity values, path coefficients, R^2 values giving the explanation ratio and f^2 values giving the effect size; PLSpredict analysis was also used to calculate the Q^2 value for predictive power. In order to measure the significance levels of PLS path coefficients, t values were found by taking 5000 subsamples from the sample with the resampling method. Regarding the research results; VIF, R^2, f^2 and Q^2 values are given in Table 7, and research model impact coefficients are given in Tables 8 and 9.

Table 7. Research Model Coefficients

Variables		VIF	R^2	f^2	Q^2
Country of Origin Image	Country Brand Loyalty	1.000	0.257	0.345	0.251
Country of Origin Image Country Brand Loyalty	Country Brand Quality	1.000	0.168	0.202	0.156
Country of Origin Image Country Brand Loyalty Country Brand Quality	Country Brand Awareness	1.000	0.234	0.306	0.223
Country of Origin Image Country Brand Loyalty Country Brand Quality Country Brand Awareness	Word of Mouth Marketing	1.623 1.520 1.289 1.381	0.516	0.135 0.135 0.000 0.089	0.360

When we look at the VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) values, which measure the linearity between variables, there are results below 5, which is considered a threshold value. As a result, it appears that there is no linearity problem between the variables (Hair et al., 2022). When we look at the R^2 values of the model, it is calculated that the brand loyalty dimension of the country's brand equity is explained by 25%, the brand quality dimension by 16%, and the brand awareness dimension by 23%. Additionally, the explanation rate for the WOM variable was found to be 51%. The f^2 value calculated as the effect size coefficient; Values of 0.02 and above are low; medium with a value of 0.15 and above; values of 0.35 and above are considered high (Cohen, 1988). When the f^2 coefficients are examined as the effect size on the WOM variable; It has been determined that the country brand quality and country brand awareness dimensions have a low effect, while the COI and country brand loyalty dimensions have a medium level effect. On country brand equity dimensions; It was found that the COI had a medium or even high effect. In cases where the Q^2 predictive power value coefficients calculated for endogenous variables are greater than zero, the research model is said to have predictive power (Hair et al., 2022). When the Q^2 coefficient values in Table 7 are examined, it can be interpreted that they are greater than zero and therefore the model has predictive power. Direct effect coefficients are given in Table 8, and indirect effect coefficients are given in Table 9.

Table 8. Research Model Direct Effect Coefficients

		Standardized β	Standard Deviation	t value	p value
H$_1$	Country of Origin Image → Country Brand Loyalty	0.507	0.046	11.028	0.000
H$_2$	Country of Origin Image → Country Brand Quality	0.410	0.076	5.403	0.000
H$_3$	Country of Origin Image → Country Brand Awareness	0.484	0.054	8.895	0.000
H$_4$	Country of Origin Image → Word of Mouth Marketing	0.325	0.064	5.093	0.000
H$_5$	Country Brand Loyalty → Word of Mouth Marketing	0.314	0.062	5.038	0.000
H$_6$	Country Brand Quality → Word of Mouth Marketing	0.006	0.062	0.105	0.916
H$_7$	Country Brand Awareness → Word of Mouth Marketing	0.245	0.078	3.147	0.002

• The effects of the COI variable (β=0.507; p<0.05) on the country brand loyalty dimension are statistically positive and significant, and the effects of the COI variable (β=0.410; p<0.05) on the country brand quality variable. It was concluded that the effects of the COI variable (β=0.484; p<0.05) on the country brand awareness dimension were statistically positive and significant.

• On the WOM variable; The effects of the COI variable (β=0.325; p<0.05), country brand loyalty dimension (β=0.314; p<0.05) and country brand awareness dimension (β=0.245; p<0.05) were statistically significant. It was concluded that it was positive and significant, while the country brand quality dimension was not statistically significant (p>0.05).

In line with the findings, it was seen that hypotheses numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7 were supported, while hypothesis number 6 was not supported.

Table 9. Research Model Indirect Effect Coefficients

		Standardized β	Standard Deviation	t value	p value
H$_8$	Country of Origin Image → Country Brand Loyalty → Word of Mouth Marketing	0.159	0.033	4.771	0.000
H$_9$	Country of Origin Image → Country Brand Quality → Word of Mouth Marketing	0.003	0.026	0.102	0.919
H$_{10}$	Country of Origin Image → Country Brand Awareness→ Word of Mouth Marketing	0.119	0.041	2.917	0.004

It can be seen that the indirect effects of country brand awareness (β=0.119; p<0.05) and country brand loyalty (β=0.159; p<0.05) dimensions on the WOM variable through the COI variable. It is seen that the effect of the country brand quality dimension is statistically significant (p>0.05). Regarding the results, it was seen that hypotheses 8 and 10 were supported, while hypothesis 9 was not supported.

Zhao et al. (2010), the existence of a mediating effect is considered as the existence of a mediating effect if the independent variables have significant (indirect effects) effects on the mediator

variables and the mediator variables have significant effects on the dependent variables. Based on this situation, a mediation effect can be mentioned if the effect of the COI on the country brand awareness and country brand loyalty dimensions is significant, and the effect of the country brand awareness and country brand loyalty dimensions on the WOM variable is significant.

The types of mediation effects detected were also decided in line with the decision tree (Zhao et al., 2010; Yıldız, 2021).

• Since it has a significant indirect effect on the COI → Country brand awareness → WOM path, it has a significant direct effect on the COI → WOM path, and the path coefficients are positive, the country brand awareness dimension is the COI variable. It has an integral partial mediating role between the WOM variable.

• Since it has an important indirect effect on the COI → Country brand loyalty → WOM path, It has a significant direct effect on the COI → WOM path, and the path coefficients are positive, the country brand loyalty dimension is the COI variable. It has an integral partial mediating role between the WOM variable.

4. CONCLUSION

Within the scope of the study, the attitudes and tendencies of the Moroccan people towards Turkish TV series, which are met with great interest in the Kingdom of Morocco, were investigated. The reasons for watching Turkish TV series and the issues they criticized while watching them were examined. Their desire to go to Türkiye or live in Türkiye after watching the series was mentioned. It was also examined whether the products in the series were memorable and whether they created a purchasing desire and behavior in people. In addition to all these, the effects of COI and country brand equity on WOM and the mediating role of country brand equity in this effect were examined and statistically analyzed. Although the majority of the participants had never been to Türkiye before, they stated that they wanted to come to Türkiye and live here due to the effect of the series. Morocco's similarity to Turkish culture in terms of its cultural characteristics and the sympathy of the people living there towards Türkiye and the Turkish people play a major role in the preference of Turkish TV series. The participants stated that the products in the series stimulated a purchasing desire in them. It was observed that the most watched series were love and action, drama and political themed series, and that the furniture and clothes in these series were remembered more than other products. Although participants find Turkish TV series to be of good quality, they criticize them for encouraging young people to have bad friendships and normalizing extramarital affairs.

The intensity of positive and negative emotions that occur in people after watching a series can lead them to certain behaviors. Some of these behaviors may be related to people's demand for products. A person may be interested in the products used in a series by a celebrity whom they consider a role model, like, find close to their own culture, and admire, and this may arouse certain feelings in the

person and cause them to want to buy it. Or, by sending messages to people's subconscious through product placements in series, certain emotions can be triggered and awareness of that product or brand can be created. As a result of the recent increase in demand for Turkish series abroad, Turkish series are among the top in the world in series exports. This situation contributes greatly to the country's economy and is also an important element in terms of promoting the country and attracting tourists. The Moroccan people, who find Turkish culture and beliefs close to their own culture and beliefs, express this situation with their sympathy for Turkish series.

It has been observed that Turkish TV series create an attractive effect and sense of identity in the countries where they are broadcast, which creates a soft power effect for Türkiye. Although they touch on different stories, TV series, which act as cultural ambassadors, convey Turkish culture. TV series are a media product that has an impact on people's thoughts. TV series, which are an important tool of popular culture, are also an important factor in terms of tourism. People get ideas about the places they will go thanks to the TV series they watch. For this reason, TV series are of great importance in creating a positive image (Hancığaz & Hülür, 2024). In the study, it was found that the image of the country of origin has a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty, brand quality and brand awareness, which are expressed as country brand equity dimensions. The results found support the literature (Kim & Chung, 1997; Klein et al., 1998; Yoo & Donthu, 2001; Paswan et al., 2003; Pappu et al., 2007; Mohd Yasin et al., 2007; Norouzi & Hosienabadi, 2011; Murtiasih, et al., 2014; Shahin et al., 2012; Saydan, 2013; Panda & Misra, 2014; Septyanti & Hananto, 2017; Ngan et al., 2020; Djafer & Adjila, 2024). In the study prepared based on the relationship between country of origin and word of mouth marketing and purchase intention (Halim & Keni, 2021), it was found that country of origin is effective on word of mouth marketing. In addition, brand awareness and brand loyalty were found to have a positive and significant effect on word of mouth marketing. This finding supports the literature (Seo & Park, 2018; Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018; Ahmad & Guzmán, 2021). Perceived quality was found to have no significant effect on word-of-mouth marketing. This may be related to the country of application, time, sample variety and size. When indirect effects were examined; the indirect effects of country brand awareness and country brand loyalty dimensions on word-of-mouth marketing variable through the country of origin image variable were found to be significant. As a result of the significant indirect effect, complementary partial mediation type was encountered. It was found that the mediating effect of country brand quality between country of origin and word-of-mouth marketing was insignificant.

When the study is evaluated in general, it is concluded that Turkish TV series have a significant impact on the country's image, and the studies in the literature support this (Özarslan, 2020, Kaptan & Algan, 2023; Hancığaz & Hülür, 2024). It can be interpreted that the Moroccan people approach Türkiye and Turkish TV series with sympathy in line with their own culture and beliefs, and this situation is reflected in the brand equity of the country. The fact that clothing and furniture attract attention

especially among the product groups in the TV series may be a clue for companies that will open up to the international market in this field. As a result of the Moroccan people who love Turks and Türkiye wanting to go to Türkiye after watching Turkish TV series, it can be interpreted that this type of TV series export sector can also have a significant impact on the promotion of the country and the revitalization of tourism in the country in terms of attracting people to the country. It can be said that the TV series export sector is an important marketing strategy in terms of product marketing and recall as a result of the desire to buy the products in the series after watching the TV series. While the criticism of Turkish TV series by the Moroccan people and their encouragement of extramarital affairs are normalized, the fact that such a comment is made by people close to Turkish culture and beliefs can also be considered as an issue that needs to be emphasized. The study was conducted in a single country (Morocco), at a specific time, and with a specific number of samples related to the series. Therefore, the results are limited to a single country. Future studies can be conducted in different countries and the results can be compared. The research can be applied to developed, developing, and underdeveloped countries and discussed across regions. The model can be expanded by adding dimensions that include nationalism and patriotism, such as ethnocentrism, to the research model. In addition, country reputation can be included in the model. In addition to all these, studies can be conducted on certain categorized product groups and the results of easy product, popular product, and luxury product groups can be discussed among themselves. The scope and interpretation of the study can also be expanded with qualitative analyses such as surveys or interviews with the help of an interpreter. According to the results obtained here, strategic information can be provided to companies that will enter international markets. It can shed light on the foreign policies to be followed regarding Türkiye.

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