THE INFLUENCE OF COUNTRY OF ORIGIN ON BRAND IMAGE AND BRAND ATTITUDES: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON TURKEY

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ABSTRACT

Aim: This study aims to investigate country of origin effect on the brand image perceptions of Turkish consumers for three groups of products produced in the USA, Germany, France, UK, Italy, Japan, Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Southern Korea, India and Turkey.

Method: A survey was conducted on a sample selected from Turkey. The t-test and Chi-square test were used among the sample groups in order to determine differences in brand image, trust and prestige according to the countries

Findings: Findings based on 393 interviews show that there are significant differences in consumers' brand image perceptions.

Results: The study has implications not only for exporters exporting products to Turkey but also for Turkish importers and retailers.

Keywords: Brand Imagine, Country of Origin, Brand Perception.

MARKA İMAJI VE MARKAYA YÖNELİK TUTUMLAR ÜZERİNDE KÖKEN ÜLKE ETKİSİ: TÜRKİYE'DE AMPİRİK BİR UYGULAMA

ÖZ

Amaç: Bu çalışmanın amacı, ABD, Almanya, Fransa, İngiltere, İtalya, Japonya, Bangladeş, Çin, Endonezya, Güney Kore, Hindistan ve Türkiye'de üretilen üç ürün grubu için Türk tüketicilerinin marka imajı algılamalarında menşei ülke etkisini belirlemektir.

The Influence of Country of Origin on Brand Image and Brand Attitudes: An Empirical Study on Turkey

90

Yöntem: Türkiye'den seçilen bir örnek üzerinde anket uygulaması gerçekleştirilmiştir. Örneklem gurubu arasında ülkelere göre marka imajı, güven ve prestij konularındaki farklılıkları belirlemek amacıyla t-testi ve Ki-Kare testi yapılmıştır.

Bulgular: 393 katılımcıdan elde edilen bulgular, tüketicilerin marka imajı algılamalarında belirgin farklılıklar bulunduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

Sonuç: Bu çalışmadan elde edilen sonuçlar, sadece Türkiye'ye ihraç eden firmalar için değil aynı zamanda Türk ithalatçılar ve perakendeciler içinde önemlidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Marka İmajı, Köken Ülke, Marka Algısı

I. INTRODUCTION AND THE RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Over the last two decades, global trade has changed significantly. This rapid transformation has produced huge market opportunities for countries and business worldwide. Thanks to globalization firms have been capable of creating global brands engendering commodity chains that bring out competitive advantage over local firms. Otherwise, the impact of country of origin Country (COO) on the consumer's perception of products has been one of the most widely studied areas of international marketing (Peterson and Jolibert, 1995; Leonidou et al, 1999; Shain et al., 2013). Increasing globalization of today's business environment has also renewed the interest in the effect of a product's country of origin on consumer decision making (Papadopoulos and Heslop, 1993; Kucukemiroglu, 1999; Diamantopoulos et al., 2011).

Turkey**,** one of the largest consumer markets in this global trade (consumer spending reached $ 138 billion in 2015 – represent 1.26 percent of the world consumer market)**,** offers many opportunities for exporters and international brands (International Business Degree Guide, 2015). By fast growth rate of the Turkish economy (third in the Europe in 2015 with 4 % growth rate) (World Bank, 2015**,** Turkey increasingly appears to become an attractive market for many international brands.

Turkey is one of the largest markets for a wide variety of international brands including Coca Cola, Nokia, Nike, L'Oréal, Tommy Hilfiger, etc. Additionally, as well as the fact that Turkey is the 18th largest economy in the world with $721 billion gross domestic product, Turkey is a significant importer. With its total imports of $ 242 billion is the 21th largest importer in the world (World Bank, 2015). Due to issues mentioned above, this study aims to explore the perceptions of Turkish consumers of clothing, cosmetics and consumer electronics products associated with the

USA, Germany, France, UK, Italy, Japan, Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Southern Korea, India and Turkey. The study particularly examines whether consumers are positively or negatively influenced if they see that their favorite products are produced in these countries.

II. Country of Origin Effect

Consumers tend to evaluate products based on their intrinsic (i.e. physical product attributes such as taste, design and performance) and extrinsic (i.e. non-physical product attributes such as price, brand name, country of origin and warranties) attributes. Studies show that The number of consumer depend on extrinsic attributes, including country of origin (Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999; Borzooei and Asgari, 2015). Lawrence et al. (1992) defined country of origin effect as a significant extrinsic factor affecting consumers' purchasing decisions as "the country of manufacture or assembly". Country image is "the overall perception that consumers form of products from a particular country, depending on their prior perceptions of the country's production and marketing strengths and weaknesses" (Schlomo and Jaffe, 1998). The factors forming this image are generally representative products, national characteristics, economic and political background, history and traditions (Nagashima, 1977). According to Kotler et al. (1993), country image is "the sum of beliefs and impressions people hold about places. The brand image of a country results from its history, geography, art, music, celebrities, proclamations, and other aspects. The media and entertainment industry are pretty important elements shaping people's perceptions of a specific place (Kotler and Gertner, 2002).

Image represents a simplification of a large number of associations and pieces of information connected with a place." Shortly, country image that has a significant effect on consumers' (Hsieh et al., 2004) purchase intentions is likely to affect country of origin, its companies, product brand images, and consumers' purchase intentions (Ham, 2008).Thakor and Kohli (1996) argue that the cues relating to a country constitute a significant aspect of a brand which may influence purchase decisions of consumers. Global brands sourced in different countries are evaluated by consumers in terms of their country of origin attributions along with various dimensions (Nebenzahl and Jaffe, 1997). There may be a strong link between country image of a brand and the performance of that particular brand internationally (Cervino et. al., 2005). Hence brand image may change the production outsourced. Consumers' knowledge of manufacturing and assembly activities performed outside the country origin rises to different reactions on their perceptions of the quality (Tse and Gorn, 1993). Chao's

The Influence of Country of Origin on Brand Image and Brand Attitudes: An Empirical Study on Turkey

92

(1993) research showed that American consumers preferred products designed/assembled produced in Japan to products designed/assembled produced in Thailand. Additionally, American consumers preferred US brands produced in the US to US brands produced outside. While consumers associate developed countries such as Japan, Germany and the USA with high quality products they tend to associate newly developing nations such China and the Philippines with poorer quality products" (Lim et al., 2010). Countries about which consumers have very little knowledge, e.g. the Eastern European countries, consumers tend to have the lowest level of reputation. The reputation of an unknown country may be lower than even a developing country (Lim et al., 2010), due to the level of uncertainty and risk calculations of consumers.

Tkahor and Lavack (2003) claimed that brand-origin is an informational element which plays potentially an important role in determining a brand's image. Johansson et al.'s (1985) study indicated that the country of origin is quite often used as a surrogate variable to evaluate a product especially when respondents have limited knowledge about that product. Interpretively, the reason of why consumers use brand or country of origin image as a halo or a stereotype to directly infer product beliefs may be their limited ability to infer quality before purchase. Consumers generally use COO stereotypes to evaluate products. For example**,** for many consumers**,** Japanese electronics are reliable, German cars are excellent, French cosmetics products have high quality, Italian pizzas are delicious. The use of country of origin also resembles to summary construct effect. "I know, from experience that the Japanese make poor quality wine, this is a wine from Japan, therefore I would expect it to be of poor quality" This evaluation can be considered as an example for summary construct effect (Hong and Wyer, 1989; Papadopoulos, 1993; Maheswaran,1994). Country image is "the overall perception that consumers form of products from a particular country, depending on their prior perceptions of the country's production and marketing strengths and weaknesses" (Schlomo and Jaffe, 1998).

A brand's country image (positive, negative or neutral) perception of consumer is an attitude and it influences her/his behavior towards product**s**. Positive brand image or attitude relates to the feeling of trust. The relationship between satisfaction and trust is positively affected by favorable country of origin perception (Nijssen and Herk, 2009). The origin of a product influences consumers' opinion of a product, as country of origin may be a good proxy to evaluate and eventually trust new brands and products (Bilkey and Nes, 1982; Haubl, 1996; Michaelis et al., 2008;

Vida and Reardon, 2008). According to several studies trust is a very important element in any relationship as it helps to build successful relational exchanges, and decreases consumer uncertainty and risk (Crosby, et al. 1990; Moorman, et al., 1993; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Harris and Goode, 2004).

The country of origin information can be used independently along with other cues for product/brand evaluation (Hong and Wyer, 1989; Li and Monroe, 1994). In fact, consumers use country of origin not only when they are unfamiliar with it (Hong and Wyer, 1989; Li and Wyer, 1994), but also when the consumers would like simplify the product/brand evaluation process when they have too much information. Many consumers turn to product origin and brand name as a means of simplifying information processing by using them as indicators of quality and acceptability. The country of origin of a product is identified through "made in" or "manufactured in" labels (Bilkey and Nes 1982; Cattin et al., 1982; Han and Terpstra 1988; Papadopoulos 1993). Although traditionally many global company brands have been positioned according to their national origin over the past decades, today for many consumers, it may be difficult to recognize the country of origin of brand due to the emergence of multinational companies, increasing number of company takeovers and emergence of hybrid products with components sourced from many countries. For instance, the traditional British car brand , Jaguar, now belongs to Tata Group of India and Godiva a traditional Belgian Choclate brand, now belongs to Ulker group of Turkey. As consumers increasingly may find it difficult to locate the country of a brand, they may have to resort cues relating to countries where it is designed/made/assembled in.

III. Method

International firms spend huge sums of money, time and effort to develop strong brand images. However, these strong images may deteriorate due to the information cues related to where these strong brands are designed/assembled/produced. This study explores the perceptions of Turkish consumers, which tend to a significant consumer markets on clothing, cosmetics and consumer electronics products associated with the USA, Germany, France, UK, Italy, Japan, Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Southern Korea, India and Turkey. The study particularly examines whether the consumers are influenced positively or negatively when they see that their favorite products are associated with these countries.

The Influence of Country of Origin on Brand Image and Brand Attitudes: An Empirical Study on Turkey

The study was implemented through interviews with randomly chosen people in shopping centers in Istanbul, Turkey. In the field of research, survey application was carried out and the subsequent analysis was conducted on the responses of 393 respondents who were above 15 years of age. The age interval of the sample was 15-60, while the oldest group in terms of the average age of respondents was represented by the age interval 26-40 (190 people, 48.3%). Male and female respondents represented 40.7% (160 people) and 52.4% (206 people) of the sample, respectively. The interviews were based on a questionnaire which included 17 sections. While the questions in the first two sections were related to demographic background of remaining fifteen sections included statements regarding respondents' attitudes. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure the attitudes of respondents when they saw a particular country name on a product. As a first step, the study examined the minimum and maximum values, frequency distributions and averages pertaining to the demographic attributes of respondents. In order to analyze the correlation between the country names a Chi-Square was used. The Chi-Square test was also used to investigate the correlations of respondents' demographic variables and their attitudes towards brands associated with different countries. The t-test was used to examine the differences between genders in terms of the influence of the country names specified on the consumer products on brand liking, trusts and prestige, and the same differences among age groups were measured through the one-way analysis of variance, when the intergroup comparisons were performed by using the LDS (Least Significant Difference) test.

IV. Findings

4.1 Overall Findings

When presenting the findings on tables I definitely agree" and "I agree responses" and "I definitely do not agree" and "I do not agree" responses have been combined to show the overall picture of respondents'/consumers'.

The findings show (See Table 4.1) that Turkish people hold strong positive attitudes towards clothing products associated with Turkey (286; 73%), Italy (250; 64%) and the USA (215; 55%) respectively. A strong positive attitude towards Turkish clothing products shows a major shift of attitudes over the past few decades. In the past Turkish people held a very low level of respect for Turkish products overall, including clothing products. This strong positive attitude may be attributable to the major

growth of Turkish exports of textile products and the confidence emanating from a relatively stronger economy while western counterparts are facing economic decline.

An analysis of the responses also show**s** that for countries consumer in USA, Germany, France, UK, Italy, Japan and Turkey who agreed with the statement, i.e. who believed that clothing brands' associations with USA, Germany, France, UK, Italy, Japan and Turkey increased their liking, trust and prestige they held for the brands, were significantly higher (p<0.05) than those who did not. It is interesting to see that Turkish people have a high opinion of Japanese clothing brands, although Turkey's textile imports from Japan is almost non-existing. This may be related to overall image of Japan as a developed country. The finding shows that there are opportunities or Japanese clothing exporters in Turkey or brands with and Japanese associations.

Turkish consumers had the most negative attitudes towards clothing brands associated with China (303; 77%), Indonesia (228; 58%) and Bangladesh (227; 58%) respectively. Consumers who did not agree with the statement for China, Indonesia, Bangladesh and South Korea were significantly high (p<0,05). It is again interesting to see that Turks held a relatively high positive attitude towards clothing brands associated with Japan while they had a relatively high negative attitude towards clothing brands associated with South Korea, though both countries are mainly known as consumer electronics products/brands in Turkey. The production/design/outsourcing of clothing brands associated with Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Southern Korea and India can be recommended to be avoided by Turkish importers and retailers.

Table 1.
Distribution of the effect of country names specified on CLOTHING Products on brand affinity, reliability and prestige

COUNTRY	I agree	%	No idea	%	I don't	%	Total
USA	**215**	55%	50	13%	128	33%	393
GERMANY	207	53%	66	17%	120	31%	393
BANGLADESH	45	11%	121	31%	**227**	58%	393
CHINA	31	8%	59	15%	**303**	77%	393
INDONESIA	72	18%	93	24%	**228**	58%	393
FRANCE	200	51%	89	23%	104	26%	393
S. KOREA	77	20%	106	27%	210	53%	393

If the following country names appear on my clothing, my brand affinity, brand reliability and perceived brand prestige will increase.

The Influence of Country of Origin on Brand Image and Brand Attitudes: An Empirical Study on Turkey

Table 1. Contuned

If the following country names appear on my clothing, my brand affinity, brand reliability and perceived brand prestige will increase.

COUNTRY	I agree	%	No idea	%	I don't	%	Total
INDIA	78	20%	104	26%	211	54%	393
UK	209	53%	81	21%	103	26%	393
ITALY	**250**	64%	61	16%	82	21%	393
JAPAN	171	44%	92	23%	130	33%	393
TURKEY	**286**	73%	37	9%	70	18%	393

When Turkish consumers' responses regarding cosmetics brands were analyzed and it was seen that the strongest positive attitude they had towards French (250; 64%), Italian (229; 58%) and American (215; 55%) cosmetics brands. Consumers agreed with the statement, i.e. who believed that cosmetics brands' associations with France, Italy and the USA increased their liking, trust and prestige they held for the brand, were significantly higher ($p<0.05$) than those who did not. It is not surprising to see the positive attitude towards French cosmetics as France is famous for its cosmetics products/brands. However, there are very few Italian cosmetics brands marketed in Turkey. This high figure is believed to do with the overall impression of Italy in the minds of Turkish consumers. Additionally, it was noted that Turkish consumers did not evaluate Turkish cosmetics brands as positively as they did for Turkish clothing products. That is probably why, as in many countries, in Turkey many Turkish cosmetics producers use French brand names for their products. Chinese cosmetics brands held the lowest opinion (289; 74%) in the minds of the consumers.

Table 2.
Distribution of the effect of country names specified on Cosmetics on brand affinity, reliability and prestige

If the following country names appear on my cosmetic products I use, my brand affinity, brand reliability and perceived brand prestige will increase.

COUNTRY	I agree	%	No idea	%	I don't	%	Total
USA	**215**	55%	74	19%	104	26%	393
GERMANY	212	54%	90	23%	91	23%	393
BANGLADESH	47	12%	132	34%	214	54%	393
CHINA	30	8%	74	19%	**289**	74%	393
INDONESIA	42	11%	109	28%	242	62%	393
FRANCE	**250**	64%	68	17%	75	19%	393

Table 2.Contuned

COUNTRY	I agree	%	No idea	%	I don't	%	Total
S. KOREA	60	15%	114	29%	219	56%	393
INDIA	54	14%	104	26%	235	60%	393
UK	206	52%	89	23%	98	25%	393
ITALY	229	58%	79	20%	85	22%	393
JAPAN	125	32%	122	31%	146	37%	393
TURKEY	212	54%	77	20%	104	26%	393

If the following country names appear on my cosmetic products I use, my brand affinity, brand reliability and perceived brand prestige will increase.

When Turkish consumers' responses were analyzed in terms of their attitudes towards consumer electronics brands a number of differences with the first two categories of brands were observed. It was seen that positive brand associations in Germany (295; 75%), Japan (284; 72%) and the USA (271; 69%) were found to be significantly high ($p<0.05$). Therefore consumers' liking, trust and prestige they held for electronics brands associated with these countries were found to be the highest. Consumers who did not agree with the statement for China (297; 76%), Indonesia (240; 61%) and Bangladesh (220; 56%) were significantly high ($p<0.05$). It is interesting to see that South Korea is not evaluated so positively by Turkish consumers although a number of South Korean brands such as Samsung and LG are quite popular in Turkey. This may be due to the fact that consumers are unaware about South Korean brands.

It was also noted that a total of the positive attitudes towards consumer electronics brands associated with Bangladesh, China and Indonesia seem to be higher than the positive towards consumer electronics brands associated with France. This may be interpreted as many consumers do not attach much importance to country associations for consumer electronics brands. This may be due to the fact that consumer electronics products carry less social risk than clothing and cosmetics products. Turkish consumers' positive attitude towards consumer electronics associated with Turkey (235; 60%) is no surprise as there are Turkish companies like Vestel, Beko and Arcelik. For instance in 2011 exports Vestel's exports constituted 77% of its total sales.

JOBS

Table 3.

Distribution of the effect of country names specified on CONSUMER ELECTRONICS on trademark affinity, reliability and prestige

If the following country names appear on the electronics, my trademark affinity, trademark reliability and perceived trademark prestige will increase.

COUNTRY	I	%	No idea	%	I don't	%	Total
USA	271	69%	42	11%	80	20%	393
GERMANY	**295**	75%	46	12%	52	13%	393
BANGLADESH	44	11%	129	33%	220	56%	393
CHINA	49	12%	47	12%	**297**	76%	393
INDONESIA	46	12%	107	27%	240	61%	393
FRANCE	175	45%	120	31%	98	25%	393
S. KOREA	144	37%	91	23%	158	40%	393
INDIA	70	18%	103	26%	220	56%	393
UK	196	50%	105	27%	92	23%	393
ITALY	158	40%	118	30%	117	30%	393
JAPAN	**284**	72%	51	13%	58	15%	393
TURKEY	235	60%	78	20%	80	20%	393

4.2 Findings Relating Age Groups and Gender

In this section analysis of the findings in terms of the attitudes of consumers according to their age groups and genders are presented. For simplicity the tables have excluded, as there would be too many tables. Only the findings which are believed to be noteworthy are presented in this section.

One-Way Anova and LSD tests were used to examine the consumers' attitudes according their age groups. Test results show that attitudes of consumers may vary across age groups (.e.g. for Bangladesh $F_{(3.348)}=4.52$) for clothing brands. For Bangladesh there is a significant difference only between the 15-25 (A) age group (3.28±1,08) and 26-40 (B) age group (3.75±0.93. On the other hand the average of the 26-40 age group is significantly higher than the average of the 15-25 age group ($p<0.05$) and there are no significant differences among other groups. In the case of clothing brands and associations with China significant differences among the age groups ($F_{(3.351)}=6.976$). Especially the 26-40 (B) age group seems to be mostly influenced by brand associations with China. For the age group 15-25 (A) the influence was minimal.

In terms of cosmetics brands associations with Bangladesh, China and Indonesia appear to demonstrate significant differences among age

groups. The cosmetics brands' associations with these countries produce rather negative attitudes within the 26-40 age group. On the other hand cosmetics brands associated with Bangladesh showed a lower level of significance for consumers aged 60 and over. This finding could indicate that age group is significant when cosmetics brands are associated with Bangladesh.

Also test results show that associations of consumer electronics brands with Indonesia appear to have significant differences among age groups ($F_{(3,346)}$=2.862). The analysis reveals that there is a significant difference only between the 26-40 (B) age group (3.86±0.98) and the age group above 60 years of age (D) (2.95) (3.21±1.23) and that there is no significant difference among other age groups. Especially for consumer electronics brands significant differences for associations with Bangladesh and China appear to exist. This may mean that brand image and country image are taken more seriously mostly by the 26-40 age group (D) (3.86±0.98). For the age group 60 and over associations with various countries do not make much of a difference. This finding may be explained with the formation of self-concept over the years. . Studies show that in general young people use brands to complete and/or enhance their self-image and self-concept, while old people tend to use brands for their functionality and practical reasons (Koc, 2012; Koc, 2016; Wang and Yang, 2008).

Interestingly research reveals that males, rather than the females were more knowledgeable about the country of origin for the clothing brands they used/purchased, 79.6% compared with 62.6%. This may be interpreted as the fact that males are relatively more careful in purchasing clothing brands. When cosmetics brands and country of origin awareness was asked compared with males (43.2%) more females (70.4%) seemed to be aware of the country of origin for the cosmetics brands they used. It was also seen that females attached.

Considering the comparison between sexes in terms of the importance attached to the brands of cosmetic products, 89.2% of female respondents and 62.1% of male respondents are observed to attach importance to the brands of cosmetic products they use and there is a significant difference between female and male respondents' knowledge of the country of brand. The comparison among age groups, on the other hand, reveals that the importance attached to the brands of cosmetic products is represented by 69.2% in the 15-25 age group; 86% in the 26-40 age group; 68.5% in the 41-60 age group; and 63.2% in the group above the

The Influence of Country of Origin on Brand Image and Brand Attitudes: An Empirical Study on Turkey

100

age of 60 and that there are significant differences among age groups in this sense.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study has implications not only for Turkish importers and retailers but also producers and brand managers in various countries across these three sectors analyzed in the study. This means that designing/assembling/outsourcing products in various countries may have detrimental effects in certain countries. Countries like Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Southern Korea and India seemed to have negative attributes across three groups of brands. While the western countries (USA, Germany, France, UK and Italy) and Japan had positive attributes there were major differences across different groups of brands. For instance for a consumer electronics firm an association with Italy is expected not to bring about positive outcomes.

It is clear that marketing efforts of these countries (Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Southern Korea and India) should make improvement in some specialties. The products made in these countries are appreciated affordable price. But quality, performance, durability, diversity and other attributes were seen insufficient for these countries' product. For example, as it was seen that while Turkish consumers used/purchased consumer electronics from South Korea, Turkish people did not have strong positive feelings towards South Korea. South Korean consumer electronics firms such as Samsung and LG are advised to engage in marketing communications activities to increase country of origin awareness. This study showed that it is significant to notice that if a country's output image is generally negative, specific product characteristics are necessarily assessed properly. New marketing strategies are needed for the survival of these products in the world market. On the other hand, Japanese, German, French, English and Italian products are perceived to be of as high in quality and technology wise. If these countries will balance between quality and price, they would have been successful in Turkish market.

This study informs an independent, consumer appreciation of competitive strengths and weaknesses of the image of products produce in different countries with the point of different product features. Consequences of this investigation can be used by firms to sustain and to get strong current outputs. When an organization located in a country wants to improve its marketing strategies, it would be suitable to integrate their strategic plans with consequences gaining in this and other

investigations. This analysis exemplifies a simple and efficient evaluation for lighting the effect of behavior modifications toward products made in specific countries. On the other hand, this survey was applied just in a country and only a consumer market. So that, the generalizability of the survey should be limited **only** Turkey sample. Replication in other Turkish cities would be better to encourage the consequences. Increasing sample size is efficient to boost the statistical power of a test.

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The Influence of Country of Origin on Brand Image and Brand Attitudes: An Empirical Study on Turkey

102

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