Gestão & Regionalidade

Knowledge versus Stereotype: an analysis of the "Country of Origin Effect" relevance

Conhecimento *versus* Estereótipo: uma análise sobre a relevância do "Efeito País de Origem"

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Abstract

The economies of countries depend, in large part, on their international trade. Studies of the so-called 'country of origin effect' help to explain the influence of a country's image on the evaluation of its products by international consumers. But to what extent does a country's stereotype surpass rational knowledge-based assessment. This study aimed to identify the relevance of these influences. The survey has been conducted through a questionnaire applied personally to a sample of 1,120 inhabitants of the ABC Paulista region. The estimated margin of error is 4.0%, with 95.5% reliability. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation tests. The results showed the difficulty in reversing the influence of a country's negative image. The research covers a gap in addressing the influence of prior knowledge about a given product against the stereotype of its country of origin.
Key-words - country of origin; country of origin image; stereotypes; knowledge level.

Resumo

A economia dos países depende, em grande parte, de seu comércio internacional. Estudos do chamado "efeito país de origem" ajudam a explicar a influência da imagem de um país na avaliação de seus produtos pelos consumidores internacionais. Mas até que ponto o estereótipo de um país supera a avaliação racional baseada no conhecimento. Este estudo teve como objetivo identificar a relevância dessas influências. A pesquisa foi realizada por meio de questionário aplicado pessoalmente a uma amostra de 1.120 habitantes da região do ABC Paulista. A margem de erro estimada é de 4,0%, com confiabilidade de 95,5%. Os dados foram analisados por meio de estatística descritiva e testes de correlação. Os resultados mostraram a dificuldade em reverter a influência da imagem negativa de um país. A pesquisa cobre uma lacuna ao abordar a influência do conhecimento prévio sobre um determinado produto frente ao estereótipo de seu país de origem.
Palavras-chave: país de origem; imagem do país de origem; estereótipos; nível de conhecimento.

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Introduction

According to the Brazilian Ministry of Industry, Foreign Trade, and Services, MDIC, (http://www.mdic.gov.br/comercio-exterior/estatisticas-de-comercio-exterior/comex-vis/frame-brasil) official data, in 2017 the Brazilian trade balance has registered the best result in the past 29 years, with a positive balance worth US$ 67 billion.

While exports have increased by 18.5% achieving US$ 217.74 billion, imports have grown 10.5% arriving at US$ 150.74 billion.

These figures indicate the foreign trade relevance and associated with the higher volatility of international markets, raise the need for a bigger knowledge about aspects impacting the exchange relationships among different countries.

It is true that the image of a country is relevant for any nation interested in participating as a prominent player within the world economic scenario. However, for Brazil, this topic is particularly important nowadays, when an impeached president, the exacerbated corruption, the economy stalled, a former president and many other important political and economic personalities in jail, as well as the emergence of a right-wing extremism, make world observers be in a state of alert in the face of the reigning undefinition.

As Kotler and Gertner (2002) say, many and complex factors help to give life to a country's image. Among them, media is of key importance as it has a strong influence on the formation of the image people have about a nation, as far as ideologies in newsrooms, whatever they are, end up establishing stereotypes from the news and opinions released. As the authors say, the image of a product, personality or a given country is the simplification of a reality that is not always consistent with truth. Therefore, a nation's image, or more accurately, a country's brand, must be looked after similar to a manufacturer of any product available to the mass consumer market.

Although it has not been covered herein, it is notorious that in those articles published in the media, the current international image of Brazil is not a good one. Without considering the validity of such strategy, the fact is that it has been intentionally spread the idea that we are an insecure country, whose democracy is at stake, freedoms are being curtailed, with corruption on the loose, in spite of the effort that has been done for containing it, although it has been attempted to place *sub judice* the legal procedures adopted for such purpose. Finally, seen from abroad, we do not present ourselves as reliable for producing goods and services, with the notable exception of agroindustry and some commodities.

According to Prado and Giraldi (2015), similar to what happens in companies, countries also compete to expand their exports, attract investments, and create a positive image internationally. The authors have pointed out that among the aspects influencing such international trade, there is the consumers' quality perception regarding certain countries and their manufactured products.

Works in the Marketing area, such as those written by Sutter, Polo and Maclennan (2014), Meirelles *et al*. (2016), and Borges *et al.* (2017) have sought studying the impact the country of origin of products have in the consumers' purchase decision-making process.

As Giraldi (2006) says, this impact is called "The Country of Origin Effect" and refers, in general terms, to stereotypes developed by people regarding countries and, consequently, to the products coming from them. Even according to the author, such an effect could significantly influence the consumers' purchasing decision.

While the low-quality stereotype assigned to certain countries negatively affects the consumers' willingness to purchase the products manufactured there,

the opposite also happens, with customers more likely to buy products whose countries of origin have a high-quality stereotype.

Despite the advances on studies regarding the Country of Origin Effect and its impacts, a greater understanding is still required about the variation of such impacts, and it is worth questioning if they occur similarly, regardless the categories of products, effective levels of knowledge about such products and their manufacturing processes, consumers' demographic variables, among others.

In the face of such demand lies the central objective of this work, which attempts identifying whether the effective consumer's knowledge about a product from a given country is capable of influencing the image such consumer has about other products, he does not have any knowledge about, coming from that same country.

It has been questioned the hypothesis that the consumer's experience with a single product, whether positive or negative, is capable of influencing the image the customer will have about other products, which he does not have a significant level of knowledge.

As a cutout for this study, we have chosen two countries from which are the highest Brazilian import volumes: the United States and China. Some products have also been chosen due to the high import volume. Among the manufactured products intended to end-users, MDIC data indicates that the items with higher imported value were passenger cars, with 2.3% of Brazilian imports in 2017, tires with 0.73%, mobile phones with 0.43%, perfumery products with 0.41%, and toys with 0.38%.

To validate the questionnaire, a pre-test was conducted before the field survey, interviewing college students from two universities in the Greater São Paulo Area. In addition to adjustments to the questionnaire, the pre-test result analysis has shown some aspects that were later deepened, such as the low relevance of demographic criteria in the assessment of analyzed products.

The country of origin effect and the stereotypes

Upon analyzing the steps forming the consumer's purchase decision-making process, seven different steps have been identified, according to the model proposed by Blackwell, Miniard and Engel (2005), which go from the acknowledgment of the need, the search for information, the alternative assessment in the pre-purchase stage, the purchase itself, the consumption, the post-consumption assessment, until the last step: disposal.

Among such steps, the search for information and the alternative assessment have major relevance when considering the marketing efforts for conquering new clients, especially in the case of products and services acquired in high consumer engagement situations.

Back in 1972, Olson and Jacoby said that when confronted with a given brand, consumers were exposed to several "information hints" upon which they would build their opinions and assessments. For these authors, such variables could be classified as intrinsic or extrinsic ones. Intrinsic variables referred to more tangible aspects, such as appearance, flavor or smell, while extrinsic ones considered more subjective aspects, like brand or price.

In line with this classification, Garcia *et al.* (2018) have defined as intrinsic product characteristics, its physical and functional components, such as flavor, design, and color. Regarding extrinsic characteristics, these authors have said that they are product-related aspects, but they are not part of the physical product composition, such as price, brand, and packaging.

By analyzing these two groups of variables, Bredahl (2004), and Magnusson, Westjohn and Zdravkovic (2011) have indicated that if intrinsic hints are not within

the consumer's reach, either by not having made any previous purchase or by not having effective experiences with a given product, such customer will tend to be more strongly influenced by extrinsic characteristics. Therefore, the authors defend that extrinsic variables influence consumers' assessment more intensively when intrinsic variables are not available or are hard to find.

Among several extrinsic variables that can influence the consumer's decision making, there is the product's country of origin.

From such findings, studies were done attempting to assess the influence the country of origin exercises on the consumer's decision making, and in which circumstances such phenomenon occurs.

In a study conducted in 1989, Han has named the Halo Effect to the phenomenon occurring when a consumer generalizes an assessment based on only one characteristic. Therefore, the knowledge about the country of origin would create a halo effect in the assessment of those products that the customer is not very familiar with using stereotypes about that country.

In the same line, Giraldi (2006) has defended that the country of origin effect precisely consists of stereotypes that people develop regarding certain countries and that influence their purchasing intent, as well as the assessment they make about the products coming from them.

In 2007, Mohd, Nasser and Mohamad have inquired up to which extent the country of origin would be capable of influencing the consumers' value perception, and they have concluded that in those cases where there was not a big familiarization with the products, the image of the country of origin appeared as an important assessment criterion. Authors have stated that products would be more easily accepted in those cases where the country of origin's image was positive.

In the same year, Yu, Park and Cho have confirmed such arguments by defending the idea that consumers build a stereotyped image of countries and, consequently, of the products therein manufactured.

It is worth mentioning that the stereotype concept has been studied for many years. Back in 1995, Greenwald and Banaji have defined stereotypes as a socially shared array of beliefs. Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999) have adapted such view for the study of nations, advocating that countries' stereotypes are formed by accessing information about them in education processes or using media exposure. Authors have stated that such stereotypes are capable of causing reactions both cognitively and affectively.

Aligned with such definitions, Chattalas *et al.* (2008) have stated that stereotyping is a cognitive nature process that simplifies the relationship of the individual with its "environment complex." Using country stereotypes, consumers can infer about the quality of products they have no information about.

In his studies, Dinnie (2008) has pointed out the important role of the country of origin as a consumer-assessed differentiating element and has shown examples how the perception between a given country and the products coming from it can be combined in a stereotyped image, influencing consumers' perception. That is the case of French perfumes, Colombian coffee, Swiss watches, or Scottish whiskeys.

If certain countries' high-quality stereotypes positively affect the image and consumer's assessment of the products coming from them, the opposite situation is also present.

In a study conducted in 2016, Krummenawer has researched the "Made in China" label effect on consumers' assessment. The author mentions Chinoy's works, in 2009, and Bapuji's, in 2012, for remembering the recall cases of 20 million Mattel toys made in China and the presence of melamine in dairy products from Chinese

origin, resulting in the hospitalization of 300 thousand babies, out of which six died.

The author has mentioned market surveys conducted at that time that indicated a significantly large indisposition towards Chinese products, and she has concluded that the reported facts have resulted in a generalized negative vision regarding all products from that country.

Bassani et al. (2018) have stressed that perception in an experimental study conducted with craft beers. The same product was offered to four different groups of consumers, who have received the same information about the beer characteristics, except the country of origin topic. A group was told that the beer was from German origin, another that it was Brazilian, a third group that the beer was Chinese, and the fourth group has not received any information about the origin. The study has shown that for the group with information about German origin, not only the quality perception was superior, but there was also the willingness to pay for higher price and the purchase intent. On the other extreme, there was the group whose information indicated that the beer was from Chinese origin, reinforcing, in the authors' view, a negative image resulting from the country's stereotype.

Finally, what can be noticed is that "*perceptions of country of origin are mental associations and the beliefs activated by a country*" (Kotler and Keller, 2.012). That is why we can infer that the country's image or brand works as a *priming effect* on occasions where the name of a certain country is associated with a product, place, or service, which can result in a positive or negative influence to the consumer's purchase decision-making process.

From such considerations, another construct gains relevance, the Image of the Country of Origin.

Image of the country of origin and the "country brand"

It is known that a brand is a symbolic representation usually formed by a name and images, concepts, or even feelings that distinguish it. In the case of a country, the name has already been given and cannot be changed, as it happens to colors. However, images, concepts, and feelings are formed from a more complex process, as mentioned above, differently impacting each of the several target audiences. Such circumstance imposes a concern to governments to organize, plan, and implement this relationship process with other countries and peoples, which is classically studied within the Marketing of Cities, Regions, and Countries.

Actually, and more specifically, we are talking about an array of actions established for building a positive perception regarding the country brand towards its several target audiences. That is, we are talking about Branding. (Kavaratzis, 2004).

Already in 2002, Kotler and Gertner have stated that the image that people have about a certain country results from their knowledge about aspects such as history, art, and famous citizens from such a country; such aspects are strongly influenced by the media and the entertainment industry. Authors have defended that this image is, in fact, the simplification of a reality, which is not always consistent with truth, a stereotype.

Still, on the same line, these authors have said that people form images about countries even when such countries do not manage their names as a brand. And even further: that by merely mentioning the names of such countries, it is enough for activating such images.

Authors Roth and Diamantopoulos have deepened such idea, and in their studies performed in 2009, they have concluded that there was an evolution in the researches about the Country of Origin Effect, going from the simple assessment about the notion of origin of the product to a broader and more complex concept, which

took into consideration the entire image a country might have in people's minds.

These authors have advocated that the "country of origin" and the "image of the country of origin" are related constructions but with different contributions. While the survey about the Country of Origin Effect assesses consumers' preference, the one about Image of the Country of Origin is capable of explaining the whys of such preference.

Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009) have also mentioned that the "country of origin and its image" do not only provide a cognitive quality indication, but a broader approach related to emotions, identity, pride, and memories.

The study of its effects must consider three different dimensions: cognitive – related to beliefs about a given country such as, for instance, degree of economic development, technological advancement, political and social maturity, among others; affective – related to feelings and emotions towards that country; and conative – related to intents and behaviors regarding that same country.

In 2010, Fan presented a conceptualization of what was called "Country Brand," defining that it is the sum of perceptions audiences have about a nation, considering elements such as culture, language, gastronomy, fashion, and celebrities.

In line with such idea, Herz and Diamantopoulos (2013) have challenged the idea that the influence of the country of origin could be an exclusively explicit and conscient process, based on the deep knowledge of productive or technological characteristics of a given country, showing that only a suggestion about the country of origin was required for triggering stereotypes stored con consumers' minds, changing their assessments and behaviors.

In the same direction, Zdravkovic (2013) has stated the image of a country is like a Picture through which consumers assign value to products due to national characteristics and the economic, political,

historical, and cultural context of that country. Therefore, the influence of the country of origin attribute comes from stereotyped assessments individual create about countries and are expanded to the products coming from them.

In 2015, Prado and Giraldi thought over the contribution that a deeper analysis of Country Branding, or building the country brand image, could bring to studies in this area. These authors have advocated that it could explain why a consumer would choose products from a given country, overcoming the mere observation of the existing preference, or not, for a certain country of origin.

As a typical example of the strength of a Country's image with positive outcomes over everything it manufactures, we have Japan. This country was defeated in a world war, and as an alternative to its economy, it initially started copying products already existing in the market, producing something similar and much cheaper. For a long period, their products' image was not a good one; a victim of what was later called a Country of Origin Effect. With plenty planning and the complicity of its people, the country has changed its image towards the world and, nowadays, Japan can be seen as a strong brand, adding value to everything associated with it, especially its companies, its products and services. At the beginning of this century, Japanese company brands were in the second place of the world's biggest brand ranking, with 6% of references, and in similar conditions with Germany, only losing to the United States, which, as expected, held 73% of best assessed brands (Ambler, 2001). For such transformation, very peculiar cultural aspects have played an important role, which was vital for the achieved success. It could be noticed when, in the western world, blossomed the fashion for adopting Japanese management models and techniques; companies did not manage to achieve the same success as oriental companies simply because the reigning

cultural patterns were much different from those existing in that country.

Due to the complexity of factors composing it, the formation of the image of a country demands much time to be consolidated; however, it can quickly deteriorate in the face of flaws, accidents, negligence, or misinformation. As an example, we can mention what had happened to world-famous French wines, which were strongly rejected in the US market when France denied its support to the invasion of Iraq, in 2003, led by the United States. Here, we can see how sensitive markets are to factors from different origins and nature, much of which escape to the control of companies present in the international market.

Although it has been widely discussed and validated by several surveys, the relevance of the Image of the Country of Origin or the Country of Origin Effect finds opposers. This is the case of Usunier (2006), who had criticized a large number of surveys about the topic, saying that despite the academic value, these surveys are not relevant for the business world. For this author, studies in this area are only motivated by the easiness of getting information about the theme from empirical studies.

Opposing such idea, Diamantopoulos *et al.* (2011) have made studies to investigate if purchase intents were only driven by the brand image, without being influenced by the image of the country of origin. They have concluded that criticisms of the country of origin construct were unfounded, since the effect remained relevant, significantly influencing brand perception and international marketing practices.

Consumer's knowledge level influence the country of origin and variation per product categories

Resuming the idea that the influence of the Image of the Country of Origin comprises dimensions that exceed the simple cognitive vision about the country, it is necessary to think about the influence extent of each of such dimensions: cognitive, the one related to knowledge; affective, related to feelings; and conative, related to actions, within the consumer's final assessment.

According to Schaefer (1997), two different visions have been shown about the consumer's knowledge impact on the country of origin effects. According to her, an analysis is that consumers, when having little knowledge about the product quality, will tend to use the country of origin to infer such quality. On the other hand, another vision has defended that, greater knowledge about the product class would make the assessment easier and increase the use of extrinsic hints like the country of origin. In both cases, the result is that there is an influence of the country of origin effect in the consumer's assessment, but how does it occur in the face of different levels of objective product knowledge?

Since 1987, Alba and Hutchinson have defended in their studies that different types of experiences related to a product lead to different knowledge dimensions, which, by their turn, result in different effects in consumers' choice assessments and behavior.

Familiarity with a given brand, whether from a product, or a country, tends to expedite, according to the authors, the consumers' assessment process, without having to search harder for more information.

Authors consider that if the brand is familiar, the objective knowledge level of the product may not have a major impact on its assessment. On one hand, if the brand is not familiar, the product knowledge will probably influence more the assessment process. It is equivalent to say that when attribute information is available, one can expect that consumers with high levels of objective knowledge about a given product base their assessments in intrinsic aspects, instead of extrinsic hints. On the other hand,

in those cases when such information is missing or is difficult to get, consumers tend to trust in extrinsic hints, such as the country of origin, for instance.

Another variable considered in the survey about the Country of Origin Effect refers to the homogeneity, or not, of its influence per different product categories.

Costa, Carneiro and Goldszmidt (2016) have analyzed in their studies if the Country of Origin Effect would depend on the specific class of the assessed product. Therefore, they have used as a base for their study, products associated with different categories, as follows: hedonic products (clothes), industrialized products (home appliances), and natural products (fruits).

They have concluded that there are differentiated impacts on different product categories, but such differences have not been statistically significant within the assessed sample, which renders the result as inconclusive.

Methodology Procedures

Although it has been widely worked by the academic world, the "Country of Origin Effect" is too broad, featuring different faces and approach possibilities. Such situation gives more room for discussions about the subject and, especially, about certain aspects of its influence.

Within the conducted survey, it has been tried to identify the relationship between the Country of Origin Effect, and the knowledge level consumers have of a certain product from that country. If the knowledge about a certain product, and its consequent assessment, are capable of influencing the assessment of other products from that same country, for which we do not have effective knowledge. For this purpose, the quantitative analysis was started.

It has been chosen for the Survey, as a type of research, as Gil (2002) has mentioned, researches of this type are characterized by directly questioning people about the researched object for then, using quantitative analysis, arrive at conclusions about the gathered data.

The conglomerate sampling technique (cluster draw) was used. As selection criterion, interviewed persons, 1120 in total, have to live in homes located in the clusters drawn and be at least 18 years old. All of them lived in the region known as the Greater ABC Area formed by the cities of Santo André, São Bernardo do Campo, São Caetano do Sul, Diadema, Mauá, Ribeirão Pires, and Rio Grande da Serra.

Data was personally gathered by applying a structured questionnaire in the second half of 2018.

The estimated margin of error on each survey for the results obtained from all cases is 4.0% for 95.5% confidence. Gathered data has been statistically analyzed used SPSS Software.

In the survey, it has tried to identify the image the interviewed people have about some products manufactured in a certain country. Next, it tried to identify its effective knowledge level about these products.

The tested hypothesis was: upon having contact with a certain product from a country, will such experience, either positive or negative, influence the consumer's assessment regarding other products from that same origin?

For assessing products, a score from 0 to 10 was employed, where 0 corresponds to a very negative image, and 10 to a very positive one. For the knowledge level, the following score was established: High knowledge level or Low knowledge level. The option for the use of a binary score was intended to differentiate in a more possible and evident way, the difference between the product knowledge levels. The idea was to build a very effective filter to the experience than the researched one had with the product from a certain country of origin, avoiding that partial experiences could contaminate the results, bringing

other factors than only the effective experience with a product from the country.

For choosing the surveyed products, a preliminary survey of the most consumed foreign industrialized items by Brazilians was performed.

For selecting the countries in the study, the two largest exporters to Brazil have been identified: the US and China.

It was not within the work objective to study the relationship between the assessment of both countries in a deeper way, but we have decided to conduct two assessment rounds, one for each country, for validating the data found.

The first analysis tried to check the existence of each country's stereotypes. Therefore, only those cases where the interviewed participants did not know any of the products from both countries have been analyzed, and each product's assessment means have been compared.

Next, the means of both countries have been compared for those cases where no product was known versus the means when at least one product was known.

Finally, it has been tested the existence, or not, of correlations between knowledge level variables and product assessment.

Before the field survey, a pre-test was conducted to validate the questionnaire. A questionnaire was applied to a non-probabilistic sample defined by convenience, which has interviewed 100 college students from two different universities located in the Greater São Paulo Area. Out of the interviewed persons, 51% were men and most of them from Universidade Municipal de São Caetano do Sul, composing 65% of the sample. The remaining 35% consisted of students from

Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie. For the pre-test, the questionnaire was available on-line.

Besides contributing to perfecting the questionnaire, result tabulation has featured relevant aspects that were deepened in the field survey. Found results have shown that in all analysis situations, US products achieved a higher assessment.

When the analysis considered only people with stated low knowledge levels about the products, the performance of Chinese products was, on average, 20% lower than North-American ones, which has suggested the influence of the negative stereotype associated with products from that Asian country.

Another aspect identified in the pre-test that met the theoretical reference was the occurrence of different influences of the country of origin effect for different product categories.

Result Presentation and Discussion

The field survey has featured 1120 respondents. Out of them, 47.8% were men, and 52.2 %, women.

It is worth mentioning that for the purpose of this survey, eventual differences in the psychographic profile are not relevant to the analyses since data has only been assessed according to the knowledge level the interviewed person has shown about the presented products.

The first analysis conducted tried to identify the existence of stereotypes about both countries. Then, cases were separated when there was no knowledge about products from any of the countries, and their means, compared (Table 1).

Table 1 – Mean product assessment when the interviewed had no knowledge

	US Assessment	US standard deviation	China Assessment	China standard deviation	T-test significance
Passenger Car	7.95	2.312	6.3	2.817	,000
Tires	7.5	2.454	6.02	2.731	,000

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Mobile Phones	7.74	2.622	6.04	3.02	,000
Perfumery	7.4	2.587	5.55	2.758	,000
Toys	7.1	2.794	5.6	3.14	,000

Source: Survey data

The above data has shown that in the absence of knowledge, the interviewed persons have assigned a better assessment to US products. Their image has shown superior to the Chinese product image, without having any experience with the product. Such finding meets the studies made by Bredahl (2004), and Magnusson, Westjohn and Zdravkovic (2011), who have reinforced that in the absence of intrinsic hints, the consumer will be more strongly influenced by extrinsic characteristics as the country of origin, for example. Results have also confirmed the surveys conducted by

Yu, Park and Cho (2007), where they have stated that consumers tend to build a stereotyped image of countries, and, consequently, of the products manufactured there.

Then, each product means, for each country were compared according to the knowledge level (Table 2). The first part of the table shows assessments in a condition of not knowing the products from each country, while the second one features a condition of knowledge about one or more products.

Table 2 – Knowledge-based assessment comparison

	Does not know any product		Knows at least one product			
	Assessment	Standard deviation	Assessment	Standard deviation	T-test significance	Assessment Variation
Passenger Car - US	7.69	2.497	8.52	1.849	0.000	0.83
Tires - US	7.16	2.682	8.14	2.001	0.000	0.98
Mobile Phones - US	7.55	2.733	8.85	1.667	0.000	1.30
Perfumery - US	7.35	2.752	8.58	1.755	0.000	1.23
Toys - US	7.01	2.888	8.35	1.98	0.000	1.34
Passenger Car - China	6.31	2.858	6.45	2.735	0.394	0.14
Tires - China	5.9	2.959	6.2	2.62	0.075	0.30
Mobile Phones - China	6.09	3.044	6.51	2.77	0.018	0.42
Perfumery - China	5.62	2.751	5.5	2.724	0.47	-0.12
Toys - China	5.52	3.124	5.96	3.052	0.021	0.44

Source: Survey data

Data has shown that the interviewed people who know US products have a much better image of them in the face of those they do not know. In comparison with Chinese products, the knowledge has not promoted a significant improvement in the

assessment, except in the cases of mobile phones and toys. In case of perfumery products, the assessment was even lower than those who knew one or more products.

After the initial analysis, the Pearson correlation coefficient was checked

between knowledge level and product assessment variables for each of the

products and countries object of this study (Table 3).

Table 3 – Pearson correlation coefficients

Product	Correlation Coefficient
Passenger Car – US	.200
Tires - US	.209
Mobile Phones - US	.256
Perfumery - US	.205
Toys – US	.269
Passenger Car - China	.069
Tires - China	.099
Mobile Phones - China	.112
Perfumery - China	-.015
Toys - China	.081

Source: Survey data

A positive correlation, although weak, can be noticed among US products. On the other hand, for Chinese products, it was not possible to establish a correlation; that is, in case of US products, the biggest knowledge positively impacts the assessment that is done regarding products from the same origin. In the case of Chinese products, the negative stereotype was maintained even when knowing one or more products, in line with Krummenawer's studies (2016).

Analyzed data have allowed us to infer that the stereotype remains very present when assessing products coming from different countries.

For products with superior assessment, from countries with a positive stereotype, the greater knowledge, even for just one product, is capable of increasing the assessment of the others, thus reinforcing the high-quality perception. As Roth and Diamanopoulos (2009) have said, the good image of a country provides, in addition to the cognitive quality indication, favorable aspects associated with emotions, identity, pride, and memories.

On the other hand, for products coming from countries with a negative stereotype, the fact that the consumer knows one product is not capable of

significantly influencing the assessment he has about the other products, thus maintaining the stereotype relevance.

In general lines, the study has shown that the more negative the stereotype of a given country, the higher its influence. In this case, not even a higher knowledge about a given product is enough for changing the stereotyped perception of the country. No matter how positive the experience with a product from that country might be, the negative image continues to contaminate the evaluation of other items. However, in the case of positive stereotypes about countries, their products, and manufacturing processes, the knowledge of a product has the power to transfer a positive assessment from known products to others, although unknown.

Final Considerations

This study was intended to identify the occurrence of the so-called "Country of Origin Effect" from another angle, including in the analysis the influence of the knowledge level consumers have about products from a given country.

The survey conducted with participants who did not know the products

has revealed the strength of the stereotype, confirming previous studies. However, upon adding the product knowledge variable, we have seen different behaviors between countries, thus enabling us to say that knowledge has little influence on a negative stereotype and more significant influence in reinforcing a positive stereotype. The positive correlation between knowledge and the assessment is relevant in the case when the stereotype is already positive, but it has not been identified in the case of a strong negative stereotype.

In addition to academic contributions, namely towards the Evolution of a theory that has not been fully explored in the Marketing area, the study provides significant practical contributions. Findings allow inferring that countries' communication efforts regarding their characteristics, manufacturing processes and products have a fundamental impact on their international trade capacity. The creation of a negative stereotype has shown to be difficult to overcome, even in those cases when there are positive experiences with products from that country on another opportunity. A positive stereotype, on the other hand, opens the way for future improvements resulting from positive experiences with products from a given origin.

It is important to point out that the survey was conducted with a probabilistic sample, but from a specific region and covering only five products from two countries. Therefore, more comprehensive studies are welcome to expand the scope of the conclusions herein found.

The conducted studies also allow indicating a study trend regarding the Country of Origin Effect. While its influence acceptance is consolidated, the need for a further deepening about the conditions under which such influences occur grows. With Big Data and the consequent growth in access to the most different types of information, two paths can be seen. On a first approach, the easy access to information may reduce the impact of stereotypes, as consumers are empowered by a bigger knowledge level. On the other hand, communication massing may open space for brands, even country brands, to build stronger and more present images in the consumers' minds, more effectively impacting the product assessment done.

Another trend in this study field is due to the strengthening of larger company brands and their more and more globalized presence. It is already possible to see a study targeting a larger understanding of associating larger company brands with the countries where they have originated from, and also with countries where their production is effectively concentrated.

Now, we can notice the complexity of factors that have influenced the formation of the image of a country, and the academic importance becomes more important in searching for alternatives to improve the perception of values added to a country brand, to promote a positive Country of Origin Effect.

In the specific case of Brazil, whose economic development drastically depends on its foreign trade, it will be very difficult to succeed with the negative image we have been identified. In this survey, we could notice how difficult it is to revert the influence of the country's negative image over the products manufactured there. The Academic World must take on the important role to study the Country of Origin Effect to subsidize the planning process, the preparation and implementation of public policies that organize actions to associate a positive Country of Origin Effect to Brazil's international image.

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