

Country-of-origin image and consumer brand evaluation: a meta-analytic review

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to draw on cue utilization and irradiation theories to: determine the extent to which country-of-origin image and its sub-dimensions exert an aggregate and relative influence on consumer brand evaluations; and identify the contextual and methodological factors that account for between-study variance in the focal relationship.

Design/methodology/approach – A random-effects model was used to examine 166 empirical articles encompassing 499,563 observations, and 282 effect sizes from 1984 to 2020 using Comprehensive Meta-Analysis software.

Findings – Results show that country-of-origin image has a positive, moderate effect on consumer brand evaluations. Moreover, findings reveal that each dimension of country-of-origin image – general country image, general product country image, specific product country image and partitioned country image – significantly influences consumer brand evaluation, but the effect of general product country image is the largest. What's more, the aggregate impacts of country-of-origin image on consumer brand evaluation – brand commitment, brand-specific associations and general brand impressions – show that the effect on brand commitment is the largest. Finally, findings show that contextual factors (brand source, product sector, culture [individualism vs collectivism], brand origin continents and respondents' continent) and methodological factors (cues, sampling unit, publication year and sample size) significantly account for between-study variance.

Originality/value – This study provides the first meta-analytic review of the relationship between country-of-origin image and consumer brand evaluation to help clarify mixed findings and balance out the literature, which has only seen quantitative reviews on product evaluation and purchase decisions.

Keywords Country-of-origin image, Brand management, Consumer brand evaluations, Branding, Meta-analysis, Consumer brand equity

Paper type Literature review

1. Introduction

A plethora of research has been conducted on the effects of country-of-origin image on consumer perceptions, preferences and attitudinal responses since the mid-1960s, resulting in over 1,000 publications (Rodrigo *et al.*, 2023; Nguyen and Alcantara, 2022; Samiee and Chabowski, 2021). Previous investigations postulated that the way in which consumers conceptualize (Samiee and Chabowski, 2021; Laroche *et al.*, 2005) and operationalize (d'Astous and Boujbel, 2007) country image phenomena reveals whether consumers' decision-making is tied to their perception of the country of origin (Zeugner-Roth and Diamantopoulos, 2010). Country-of-origin effect refers to the effect of consumers' country-related images on their product/brand attitude and purchasing behavior (Abdelwahab *et al.*, 2022).

Country-of-origin image involves stereotypical beliefs about specific country products due to their historical, socio-economic, political and cultural characteristics (Maheswaran, 1994). This could be general country image, general product country image, specific product country image or partitioned country image. Consumer brand evaluation involves consumers' overall evaluation of and attitude toward a brand (Zhou *et al.*, 2010) using brand-specific associations (e.g. brand associations, brand personality), general brand impressions (e.g. brand image) and brand commitment (e.g. brand loyalty) factors (Han, 2023). It expresses consumers' rational evaluative judgment of a physical product or service, using both intrinsic and extrinsic cues (Laforet and Chen, 2012).

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Country-of-origin image shapes consumer behavior (Kim and Yim, 2022; Magnusson *et al.*, 2022), and scholars have made considerable efforts to validate and link numerous methodologies to country-of-origin image and consumers' attitudes. But for all that the field has been criticized for sometimes being contradictory, atheoretical and lacking methodological and theoretical transparency (Kock *et al.*, 2019). For example, Liefeld (2004, p. 91) stated that country of origin "is not a relevant attribute for making choices between alternatives," while Usumier (2011, p. 61) also noted that the:

[...] "country-of-origin effect is no longer a major issue for international marketing operations: multinational production, global branding, and the decline of origin labeling in WTO rules tend to blur the country-of-origin issue and lessen its relevance."

As a result, numerous systematic reviews have been conducted to clarify theoretical and methodological ambiguities of the phenomenon (Magnusson *et al.*, 2022; Samiee and Chabowski, 2021; Lu *et al.*, 2016; Pharr, 2005). In spite of this, the "criticism has not always been substantiated by quantifying the actual practices in the field" (Lu *et al.*, 2016, p. 271), as these reviews are qualitative reviews that do not account for sampling, stochastic, measurement and external validity issues in studies, and are mostly not amenable to quantifying the relationships (Hunter and Schmidt, 2004).

On top of that, scholarly works investigating country-of-origin image have produced mixed findings. While some studies reveal positive, favorable findings for using country-of-origin image to predict consumer behaviors such as product evaluation, brand evaluation and purchase intentions (Magnusson *et al.*, 2022; Lee *et al.*, 2014; Pelet *et al.*, 2018), others indicate that country-of-origin image might provoke negative consumer responses (Pappu *et al.*, 2006; Chao, 1993). Still, some state that the effect of country-of-origin image on consumer behavior is inflated and misleading, arguing that most consumers usually have insufficient or limited knowledge of countries and seldomly use the country-of-origin image cue in making decisions (Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2004). To this end, "there is little consensus among academics on the magnitude and nature of these effects" (Rambocas and Ramsuhag, 2018, p. 23). The conflicting findings suggest contingent effects of a country-of-origin image on consumer behavior. A second reason is that country contexts present cultural factors in examining consumer behavior related to the effect.

Another gap concerns the absence of meta-analyses on the extent to which country-of-origin image influences consumer brand evaluations. Existing meta-analyses have examined different dependent variables as their focus: product evaluations, purchase intention or buyer behavior (Peterson and Jolibert, 1995; Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999; De Nisco, 2006). Finally, no study has captured the nature and magnitude of all dimensions of the country-of-origin image concept in a single study. This is despite the calls to decouple the country-of-origin image construct – *general country image, general product country image, specific product country image, and partitioned country image* – to provide a proper understanding of the effects and to ascertain which dimension exerts the most significant stimulating influence on consumer behavior (Roth and Diamantopoulos, 2009).

With this in mind, the present study explores a broad range of research on country-of-origin image across behaviors,

cultures and time to resolve the mixed results and combine extant literature on country-of-origin image. More specifically, the study draws on cues utilization theory and irradiation theory to:

- determine the extent to which the country-of-origin image and its sub-dimensions exert aggregate and relative influence on consumer brand evaluations; and
- identify the contextual and methodological factors that account for between-study variance in this focal relationship.

Accordingly, this study makes the following contributions to country-of-origin and brand management research and practice. First, the paper provides an evidenced-based quantitative analysis to ascertain whether the positive, negative or non-significant view prevails amid the conflicting results and baffling criticism. Lu *et al.* (2016) noted that "it is by comparing and synthesizing estimates across multiple studies that a better description and understanding of the phenomena may be obtained" (Lu *et al.*, 2016, p. 213). A meta-analysis allows researchers to ascertain the strengths of direct associations and permits the discovery and detection of moderating effects. It is the "best method to reach consensus" (Combs *et al.*, 2011, p. 194).

Second, because a meta-analysis of the country-of-origin image/consumer brand evaluation relationship is non-existent in this stream of research, this study helps balance the literature with earlier meta-analyses that focused on product evaluation, purchase decisions and buyer behavior. Third, previous studies have examined different moderators. This study investigates not only novel moderators of country-of-origin image but also new and managerially actionable moderators, such as culture, brand source, brand type, brand origin continent, respondent continent, time frame, etc., to ascertain numerous novel empirical generalizations.

Equally important, the present study decouples the country-of-origin image construct into its respective dimensions – *general country image, general product country image, specific product country image and partitioned country image* – to ascertain both their relative and joint effects on consumer brand evaluations in a single study for the first time. Finally, the study develops a comprehensive research agenda according to the insights from this meta-analysis.

From a practical perspective, the study specifies the effects of country-of-origin image on broad spectrum of consumer brand behaviors and elucidates how policymakers and practitioners can use actionable moderators, such as using appropriate communication tools for specific cultures, behaviors and consumers. Again, the study contributes to extant literature on cross-cultural marketing by demonstrating how cultural differences can determine the impacts of country-of-origin image on consumer brand evaluation.

The rest of the study is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the theoretical background and hypotheses of the study. Section 3 addresses the methodological spectrum, highlighting the meta-analytic process. The results and analysis follow in Section 4, while Section 5 delineates the discussion and conclusions. Section 6 contains the implications, and Section 7, the last chapter, presents the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

1.1 Theoretical framework

This study mainly draws on two theories for developing the hypothesized relationships: cue utilization theory and irradiation theory. With respect to cue utilization (Olson and Jacoby, 1972), consumers assess a product based on information cues, which could be intrinsic (e.g. taste, design, performance) or extrinsic (e.g. price, brand name, warranties) (Andersen and Chao, 2003). Research has shown that country of origin can be considered an extrinsic cue that consumers use to make inferences and judgments about a given product or brand (Peterson and Jolibert, 1995). Related to this, the irradiation theory addresses the “subjective interlinkage of perceptions whereby the evaluation of specific property transfers to the evaluation of another property and influences the latter” (cited in Diamantopoulos *et al.*, 2011, p. 4. from Florack *et al.*, 2007, p. 347). The fundamental tenet of the irradiation theory is that consumers’ image of a specific country shapes their perceptions of the image of a brand or product from that particular country. This way, a person’s perception and evaluation of the country transfer to his/her evaluation of products and brands from that country. These two theories therefore offer a solid foundation for understanding the association between country-of-origin image and consumer brand evaluation under varying contextual and methodological factors.

1.2 Country-of-origin image and consumer brand evaluation

The country-of-origin image construct can be viewed on four levels:

- 1 general country image;
- 2 general product country image;
- 3 specific product country image; and
- 4 partitioned country image (Martin and Eroglu, 1993; Hsieh, 2004).

General country image is the “sum of all descriptive, informational and inferential beliefs that a person has toward a specific country” (Martin and Eroglu (1993, p.11) and is measured using dimensions such as people facets, economics, technology, landscape, environment and politics (Roth and Diamantopoulos, 2009; Martin and Eroglu, 1993).

General product country image refers to “the overall perception consumers form of products from a particular country, based on their prior perceptions of the country’s production and marketing strengths and weaknesses” (Roth and Romeo, 1992, p. 480). On the other hand, specific product country image is consumer’s overall perception of particular product categories from a particular country (Roth and Romeo, 1992). Workmanship, innovativeness, technological advancement and design are key measures used to capture product country image (Roth and Romeo, 1992). Partitioned country image is a generic label for all the information about countries where the product was designed and assembled and where parts of the product were made (Meshreki *et al.*, 2018; Chowdhury and Ahmed, 2009). It is measured by country of design (COD), country of parts (COP), country of assembly (COA), country of brand (COB) and country of manufacture (COM).

Brand evaluation refers to consumers’ overall evaluation of and attitude toward the brand using both intrinsic and extrinsic

cues (Brunetti *et al.*, 2019; Zhou *et al.*, 2010; Laforet and Chen, 2012). Scholars have used diverse measures to capture consumer brand evaluations from the consumer–brand equity model. Aaker (1991) identified five primary dimensions: brand association, brand loyalty, market behavior, brand image, brand parity and perceived quality; Keller (1993) identified brand awareness and brand image, whereas Laforet and Chen (2012) found perceived value, brand personality, brand trust and brand parity. In spite of all that, considering the diverse nature of the measures used by scholars to examine consumer brand evaluations, coupled with the nature of the study, this study draws on the works of Dillon *et al.* (2001) and Lee *et al.* (2008) to classify the brand evaluation dimensions into three broad categories:

- 1 brand-specific associations;
- 2 general brand impression; and
- 3 brand commitment.

Brand-specific associations refer to “features, attributes, or benefits that consumers link to a brand and that differentiate it from the competition” (Dillon *et al.*, 2001, p. 417). This dimension includes perceived brand quality, perceived brand value, brand associations, brand personality and brand parity. General brand impressions involve “general impressions about the brand that are based on a more holistic view of the brand” (Dillon *et al.*, 2001, p. 417). It includes brand image, brand awareness, brand judgment, brand attitude and brand ownership. Brand commitment is the extent to which consumers are committed to a given brand, resulting from a previous satisfactory interaction with the brand, which drives the consumer to use the brand over time and withstand changes, creating an important and valuable relationship with it (Han, 2023; Ahn, 2023; Lee *et al.*, 2008). This dimension includes brand loyalty, brand preference and brand trust.

1.3 Hypotheses

Studies have shown that the multiple dimensions of country-of-origin image affect product beliefs and attitudes toward brands with diverse levels of equity (Halkias *et al.*, 2016; Escandon-Barbosa and Rialp-Criado, 2019). Scholars (Magnusson *et al.*, 2022; Lee *et al.*, 2020) have shown that the country of origin of a brand is potentially significant in determining brand image, brand awareness, loyalty and perceived quality. From the irradiation theory perspective, consumers can adjust their consumer brand evaluations based on the country-of-origin image of the focal product or brand. In view of this, it is hypothesized as follows:

- H1.* Country-of-origin image has a generally positive effect on overall consumer brand evaluations.

Research shows that general country image on cruise service is stronger for quality perception and attitude than brand effect, revealing that a strong country-of-origin image compensates for a weak brand effect (Ahmed and d’Astous, 2001). Herrero-Crespo *et al.* (2016) revealed that general country image impacts the brand awareness and perceived quality of universities, which in turn affects brand loyalty. Macro/general country image, including economic, technological and political conditions, positively and significantly influences brand associations, brand loyalty and perceived quality dimensions of

consumer brand equity (Pappu *et al.*, 2007). In contrast, some scholars (Bayraktar, 2015; Zbib *et al.*, 2010) have postulated that general country image does not significantly affect perceived brand quality, brand image or overall evaluations. Nevertheless, cue utilization and irradiation theories suggest that consumers evaluate brands using external cues such as a country's political, technological and economic development. That being so, it is hypothesized as follows:

H2. General country image positively influences consumer brand evaluations with respect to brand-specific associations, general brand impressions and brand commitment.

Research on the general product country image/consumer brand evaluation relationship has also revealed mixed results. For instance, some authors (Ahmed and d'Astous, 1996; Pappu *et al.*, 2006) postulate that a product's country image could cause consumers to develop brand loyalty, brand preferences, perceived brand quality and brand popularity. Contrarily, Diamantopoulos *et al.* (2017) observed that general product country image with the "Made in Europe" mark may act as a quality signal, but it may not elicit positive brand affective associations. General product country image significantly and negatively affects brand image, brand trust and perceived quality of global brands when consumers realize they were produced in China (Ar and Kara, 2014; Larofet and Chen, 2012). Despite the inconsistent findings, the irradiation theory suggests that an individual's perception of a given country's product innovation, design, excellence and workmanship can transfer to his/her evaluation of brands/products from that country. That being the case, the study hypothesizes as follows:

H3. General product country image positively affects consumer brand evaluations with respect to brand-specific associations, general brand impressions and brand commitment.

With regard to the specific product country image effect on consumer brand evaluations, the study by Ngan *et al.* (2020) on two famous brands – Adidas and Nike – found that a brand's country image has a significant and positive effect on brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association and brand loyalty. Likewise, other scholars (e.g. L'Espoir Andéhn and Dacosta, 2016) found that brand/product origin image positively and significantly influences consumers' evaluation of binational brands. Kim and Chao (2018) examined the impact of product country image on consumer-based brand equity for two global smartphone brands – namely, Samsung and Huawei – and found that product country image was more robust due to the perceived quality of Chinese products over Korean brands. On the contrary, some researchers (Listiana, 2015) found that the country-of-origin image of a product/brand may influence brand association but not perceived quality. Notwithstanding that these findings are conflicting, the cue utilization theory suggests that consumers use product country image as a surrogate to assess the quality of products/brands from a given country. To this end, it is hypothesized as follows:

H4. Specific product country image positively affects consumer brand evaluations with respect to brand-specific

associations, general brand impressions and brand commitment.

Finally, empirical studies (Hamzaoui and Merunka, 2006; Ahmed and d'Astous, 2001) suggest that partitioned country image dimensions such as COB, COA, COM, COP and COD broadly impact consumers' perception of a brand and their evaluative judgments. For example, Fetscherin and Toncar (2009) found that COB and COM influence brand personality. Mostafa (2015) disclosed that COM and COB both significantly and positively influence brand equity dimensions – namely, perceived brand quality, brand loyalty, brand awareness and brand image. Despite these positive findings, other studies (Tse and Lee, 1993) have postulated that the effect of country image is weakened when it is decomposed. From the irradiation theory front, an individual's perception of hybrid countries involved in product design, production, assembly and branding can transfer to his/her evaluation of the brand or product. As a consequence, it is hypothesized as follows:

H5. Partitioned country image positively affects consumer brand evaluations with respect to brand-specific associations, general brand impressions and brand commitment.

1.4 Study moderators

Arthur *et al.* (2001, p. 85) define a moderator variable in a meta-analytic review as "any variable that by its inclusion in the analysis accounts for, or helps explain, more variance than would otherwise be the case." Several studies in this stream of research (Pharr, 2005; Lu *et al.*, 2016; Mandler *et al.*, 2023) have underscored that the mixed findings and inconsistency could be attributed to the different contexts, operational definitions and measurement constructs used in the studies. Along these lines, the study examined six contextual factors (brand source, product sector, culture [individualism], brand origin, brand continent and continents of respondents) and five methodological factors (cues, brand type, sample size, theory use and year of publication).

Brand source divides the brands into local or global brands (Nguyen and Alcantara, 2022). For example, research shows that global brands receive positive and favorable consumer ratings (Kinra, 2006). Product sector divides a brand or product into industrial goods, consumer goods or services. Studies show that consumers' evaluations may be biased toward specific products and industries such as electronics and automobiles where brand and quality perceptions are strongly associated with the country-of-origin image (Ahmed *et al.*, 2001) in contrast to service, which is perishable, heterogeneous and intangible and demands simultaneous production and consumption (Feng *et al.*, 2021; Herrero-Crespo *et al.*, 2016). Culture has also been found to influence country of origin evaluations (Kim and Yim, 2022). Research shows that Caucasians and Americans underscore social independence, whereas African Americans, Hispanics and Asians all underscore social orientation and interdependence (Huntington, 2004). This study tested the individualism dimension of Hofstede's model to determine whether the country-of-origin effect was stronger in individualistic cultures than in collectivist cultures.

Again, research has shown that consumers strongly prefer brands from the Western world. Various researchers note that products/brands from the USA garner more favorable ratings than those from other countries such as Japan or South Korea (Sin et al., 2000). On that account, the study examined the contextual moderator of brand/product origin with this perspective, classifying them into North America, Europe, Australasia, Africa, South America and others (Oduro et al., 2021). Finally, scholars underline that brand evaluation can vary depending on the nationality of consumers and the proximity and knowledge of the country of origin (Amine and Shin, 2002). Following this, it is hypothesized as follows:

H6. Brand source, culture-individualism, brand/product origin continent, product sector and respondents' continent positively moderate the relationship between country-of-origin image and consumer brand evaluations.

Regarding the methodological factors, research suggests that the country-of-origin effect hinges on the number of cues presented in the choice situation (Insch and McBride, 2004), stressing that single cue models may overestimate effect sizes, as the only product cue consumers have for evaluation is the country-of-origin cue. Leonidou et al. (2006) noted that brand type has a tremendous moderating role in the country-of-origin evaluation, stressing that in contrast to artificial/fictitious brands, real (known) brands benefit from particular equity generated by their reputation, popularity and associated attitudes in consumers' minds. Research again reveals that personality development factors may account for differences in real customers and student samples used in a study. Students, for instance, are deemed fragmentary with unstructured preferences (Carlson, 1971), and their use may overestimate effect sizes and limit the validity of external results (De Nisco,

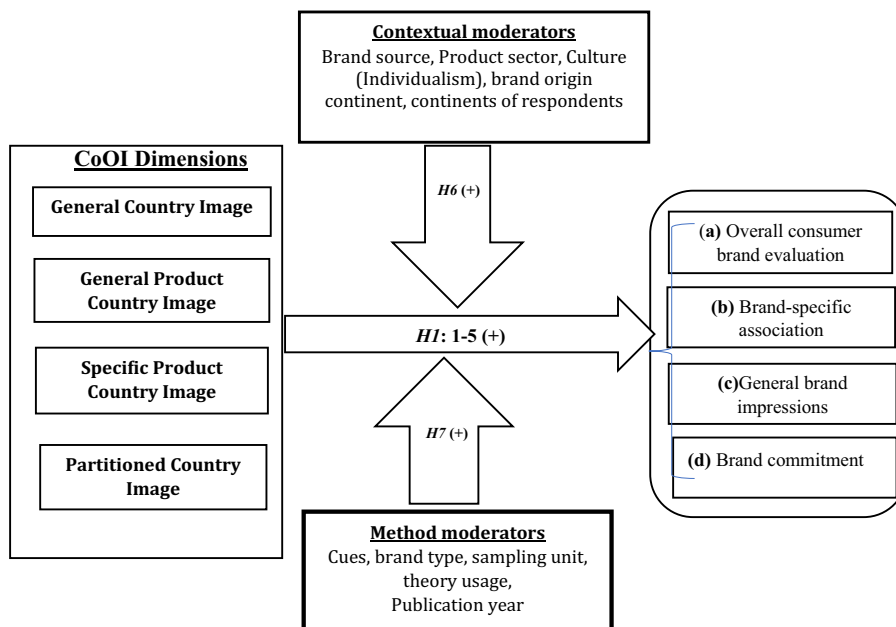
2010). Furthermore, the magnitude of an effect might differ based on the study sample size (Hedges and Olkin, 2014), and potentiation is more prevalent in small samples (Rosenthal, 1979). The study also tested the moderating effect of theory use in the studies, grouping articles into atheoretical or theoretical (Lu et al., 2016). Finally, one heated debate about the relevance of country-of-origin image constructs concerns time. While earlier researchers stressed the importance of country of origin in consumers' decisions (e.g. Peterson and Jolibert, 1995), later studies have debunked these findings (Usunier, 2011). To this end, the study examines the year of publication, classifying it as pre-2000, 2000–2010 and 2011–2020. For that reason, it is hypothesized as follows:

H7. Cues, brand type, sampling unit, sample size, theory use and publication year positively moderate the relationship between country-of-origin image and consumer brand evaluations.

1.5 The meta-analytic conceptual framework

Figure 1 illustrates the meta-analytic conceptual framework of the study. Drawing on the cue utilization and irradiation theories, it shows a positive association between country-of-origin image dimensions – general country image, general product country image, specific product country image and partitioned country image – and overall consumer brand evaluations and its sub-dimensions, namely, brand-specific associations, general brand impressions and brand commitment. The study's model further shows that the country-of-origin image/consumer brand evaluation relationship can be weak or strong depending on the level of specific contextual factors (e.g. culture, brand source) or methodological factors (e.g. cues, brand type) that may moderate the focal relationship.

Figure 1 A meta-analytic model



Source: Authors' own elaboration

2. Methodology

2.1 Data search

To identify eligible articles, this research used EBSCO, Web of Science and Scopus databases, as they are comprehensive multi-disciplinary databases of indexed scholarly works in social science research, and particularly important for collecting data over an extended period of time. They also have high-quality standards concerning the sources they incorporate, are extensively recognized and frequently accessed for quantitative analyses (Veloutsou and Liao, 2023).

Likewise, to identify and determine the appropriate keywords to access relevant and comprehensive articles on country-of-origin image, the study used the well-known “backward and forward approaches” (Levy and Ellis, 2006). In the backward process, research papers using the key concept “country-of-origin image” were restreamed as the seeding keyword, yielding the first-round of papers. The analysis of the first-round keywords and references helped identify search terms with meanings akin to “country-of-origin image.”

Similarly, in the forward process, additional keywords were included in the search terms through the review of articles citing the first-round papers and articles published by the scholars following the first-round articles. Finally, analogous to previous practice (Veloutsou et al., 2022), the three authors – who are experts in the field – reviewed the drafted list and refined the pool of keywords, leading to the final list of search terms below: “country(s) image,” CI, “country (of) origin,” “countries of origin,” “country-of-origin image,” “country of origin,” “country product image,” “product country image,” “PCI,” “specific product image,” “partitioned country image,” and “hybrid brands,” in combination with “brand evaluation,” “brand origin,” “brand perception,” “brand image,” “brand attitude,” “brand personality,” “brand awareness,” “brand association,” “brand trust,” “perceived quality,” “brand loyalty,” and “perceived value.” Articles were collected using the following keywords in the “document title,” abstract” or “subject terms” fields using BOOLEAN operations (i.e. AND, OR, NOT).

Finally, an issue-by-issue search was also conducted in some top International Business and International Marketing (IM) journals identified by Dubois and Reeb (2000) and some top Brand Management journals. They are as follows: *International Marketing Review*, *Journal of Global Marketing*, *Journal of International Business Studies*, *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Journal of International Marketing*, *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, *Journal of Business Research*, *International Business Review*, *Journal of Brand Management* and *Journal of Product and Brand Management*. These journals frequently publish IM or IM-related issues and brand management studies, which are defined as those addressing cross-cultural marketing subjects or marketing issues related to country-of-origin image and global brands.

The search was limited to only scholarly peer-reviewed, empirical, English language, full-text online articles published between 1984 and 2020, inclusive. This timeframe had witnessed a rapid expansion of IM and country-of-origin research (De Nisco and Oduro, 2022) and as review research, the authors considered a snapshot of 36 years’ publications as fairly adequate.

2.2 Data selection: inclusion and exclusion criteria

The preliminary collection process identified 1,317 articles. The study used three main inclusion criteria. The first required the inclusion of correlation or r -variant analysis to predict the value of the dependent variable (consumer brand evaluation) from the independent variable (country-of-origin image). This step eliminated 897 articles. The second criterion required reporting the outcome of the consumer brand evaluation (i.e. brand-specific associations, general brand impressions and brand commitment). This step reduced the sample by another 234 papers. The third criterion is that the sample had to be independent (i.e. does not present two different results from the same sample). This step eliminated additional 20 papers. The final sample, therefore, included a total N of 499,563 observations, 166 articles and 282 effect sizes.

Based on a suggestion by Wilson and Lipsey (2000), this study used a coding scheme to extract data related to all the relevant themes, including country-of-origin constructs, brand evaluation dimensions, moderators (e.g. brand type, culture), country of data collection, effect size, sample size and reliability indices. A pilot meta-analysis was conducted on a subset of the included effects (20 effects) using a Meta-Stat software to estimate a mean effect size. The reported effect sizes ranged from $r = -0.24$ to $r = 0.32$, and homogeneity statistic was $Q = 1341$; $p < 0.05$, which pointed to the need to identify and include potential moderators. The articles were coded by two of the researchers of the study, who were experts in meta-analysis. Analogous to previous meta-analyses (Junior Ladeira et al., 2022), two judges, who have expertise in meta-analysis, rated the content of the articles and coded them based on the coding scheme. Inter-coder reliability was 92% (Kassarjian, 1977). A third rater was available to solve coding differences.

2.3 Integration of effect sizes

The study used Pearson correlation coefficient (r), which highlights the effect sizes between a predictor and criterion. The reasons for its use are the following:

- it is the meta-analytic index generally used in marketing studies (De Nisco, 2010; Junior-Ladeira et al., 2022);
- it is easy to interpret; and
- it allows for r -contrast to be computed in cases where no correlation coefficients are directly reported (de Oliveira Santini et al., 2018).

When a study does not indicate the correlation, the statistics provided, known as the r -variants (e.g. t -test, f -test, z -test, b -values), were converted following standard guidelines as suggested by Hedges and Olkin (2014). Likewise, the study used the average effect sizes where studies reported multiple measurements of the focal effect (Borenstein et al., 2021). As far as the studies that reported non-significant effects are concerned, the corresponding effect sizes were set equal to zero.

2.4 Meta-analytic models

This study used the random effects model, which assumes that primary studies in the meta-analysis used diverse external validity elements and operationalizations of the design factors (Borenstein et al., 2021). This model contains a component that captures between-study and within-study variance

(Oduro *et al.*, 2023; de Oliveira Santini *et al.*, 2018), thereby producing more conservative and reliable estimates than the fixed effects model. Because the study collects and combines estimated effect sizes across multiple studies conducted with respect to different contexts, methods, model specifications and time, the random effect model is deemed to be the right approach.

2.5 Bias and error correction

The study adjusted for measurement error, sampling error and publication bias. The measurement error was corrected by dividing the “raw” effect sizes (correlation coefficients) by the product of the square root of the respective reliabilities of the two constructs (Hunter and Schmidt, 2004). Then, to adjust for sampling error, the reliability-corrected effect sizes were transformed into Fisher’s z -coefficients, weighted by an estimate of the inverse of their variance ($N-3$) to approach a standard normal distribution, thereby giving more weight to more precise estimates. Publication bias is checked using a funnel plot, which showed no publication bias in the study data since the effect sizes were spread around the mean effect size. As large sample sizes can generate influential cases that may significantly influence the findings, the study also followed a suggestion by Geyskens *et al.* (2009) to compute the sample-

adjusted meta-analytic deviancy statistic, but no potential outliers were detected.

2.6 Data analysis and techniques

This study used subgroup analysis and meta-regression (MARA) to analyze the data. Subgroup analysis provides much more statistical power compared to MARA. But for all that, Gonzalez-Mulé and Aguinis (2018) noted that subgroup analysis has two weaknesses: it considers moderators in isolation; and it forces the researcher to dichotomize continuous moderator factors such as year of publication. MARA overcomes these issues by simultaneously examining multiple moderators. This study analyses the coded data using Comprehensive Meta-Analysis version 4, a powerful statistical software program for meta-analysis.

3. Findings

3.1 Main effects: country-of-origin image and consumer brand evaluation relationship

Table 1 provides the results of the aggregate and disaggregate effects of country-of-origin image on consumer brand evaluations. First, the results show that the average strength of the aggregate effect sizes is moderate ($0.27-0.51$) based on the criteria suggested by Cohen (1988), where an effect size of 0.20 is interpreted as small, 0.50 is a medium effect and an effect

Table 1 Effects of country of origin image on overall and relative consumer brand evaluations

	N	K	rz	-CI	+CI	Z	P	Q	I-S
Aggregate effects									
CoOI → overall CBE	499,563	282	0.31	0.27	0.34	15.74	0.00	13003.14	98.27
Overall effect by CoOI dimensions									
GCI → overall CBE	22,115	71	0.31	0.26	0.35	12.04	0.00	1009.07	93.06
GPCI → overall CBE	28,138	50	0.46	0.35	0.55	7.72	0.00	5388.57	99.09
SPCI → overall CBE	385,356	80	0.29	0.25	0.33	13.10	0.00	2218.88	99.66
PACI → overall CBE	34,256	81	0.32	0.13	0.49	3.24	0.00	27662.66	99.71
Overall effect by CBE dimensions									
Brand-specific associations	56,958	135	0.34	0.25	0.42	7.15	0.00	17704.94	99.24
General brand impressions	418,786	95	0.32	0.27	0.36	12.02	0.00	4287.59	97.81
Brand commitment	23,819	52	0.37	0.15	0.55	3.22	0.00	16746.54	99.70
Disaggregate effects by CBE dimensions									
GCI → Brand-specific associations	10,522	31	0.35	0.26	0.43	7.21	0.00	745.07	95.97
GPCI → Brand-specific associations	11,126	20	0.51	0.35	0.64	5.54	0.00	1990.05	99.09
SPCI → Brand-specific associations	17,686	37	0.28	0.21	0.34	7.82	0.00	775.01	95.35
PACI → Brand-specific associations	17,624	47	0.29	0.05	0.49	2.38	0.02	11834.90	99.61
GCI → General brand impressions	8,011	25	0.27	0.21	0.32	8.30	0.00	191.32	87.46
GPCI → General brand impressions	9,115	19	0.43	0.23	0.60	3.99	0.00	1945.67	99.07
SPCI → General brand impressions	392,114	28	0.29	0.22	0.35	8.23	0.00	431.68	93.75
PACI → General brand impressions	9,546	23	0.30	0.22	0.37	7.31	0.00	307.91	92.86
GCI → Brand commitment	3,582	15	0.29	0.22	0.35	7.84	0.00	64.73	78.37
GPCI → Brand commitment	7,897	11	0.39	0.14	0.60	2.95	0.00	1327.93	99.25
SPCI → Brand commitment	5,254	15	0.33	0.23	0.42	6.25	0.00	210.85	93.36
PACI → Brand commitment	7,086	11	0.49	-0.28	0.88	1.28	0.20	9935.81	92.86

Notes: *Correlation significant at two-tailed; K (effect sizes); N (observations); rz (standardized correlations coefficient); CoOI = country of origin image; CBE = consumer brand evaluation; GCI = general country image; GPCI = general product country image; SPCI = specific product country image; PACI = partitioned country image

Source: Authors' own elaboration

size larger than 0.80 is deemed to be large. The results show that the general impact of country-of-origin image on overall consumer brand evaluations is positive and significant ($r = 0.31$; $CI = 0.27; 0.34$), as the confidence interval does not include zero, thereby supporting *H1*. The *Fail-safe N* is robust, as it shows that 18,471 primary studies are required to render this finding non-significant.

Second, the effects of general country image on brand-specific associations ($r = 0.35$), brand commitment ($r = 0.29$) and general brand impressions ($r = 0.27$) are positive and significant, thereby confirming *H2*. Nevertheless, the effect on brand-specific associations is shown to be stronger. Third, the effects of general product country image on brand-specific associations ($r = 0.51$), brand commitment ($r = 0.43$) and general brand impressions ($r = 0.39$) are positive and significant, which confirms *H3*. It is also seen that the impact on brand-specific associations is the strongest. Fourth, it was found that specific product country image also has a significant, positive effect on brand commitment ($r = 0.33$), general brand impressions ($r = 0.29$) and brand-specific associations ($r = 0.28$), confirming *H4*. Nonetheless, it strongly influences brand commitment more than general brand impressions and brand-specific associations. Again, the results show that while partitioned country image positively and significantly affects brand-specific associations ($r = 0.29$) and general brand impressions ($r = 0.30$), it does not significantly influence brand commitment. *H5* is partially supported, therefore.

With regard to the aggregate impact of the sub-dimensions of country-of-origin image, results show that general country image ($r = 0.31$), general product country image ($r = 0.46$), specific product country image ($r = 0.29$) and partitioned country image ($r = 0.32$) are significantly and positively related to overall consumer brand evaluations. Notwithstanding, it is important to note that the average effect of general product country image is the largest. Finally, in relation to the consumer brand evaluation dimensions, the aggregate impact of country-of-origin image on brand commitment ($r = 0.37$) is larger than on brand-specific associations ($r = 0.34$) and general brand impressions ($r = 0.32$).

3.2 Study moderators

Table 2 shows the subgroup analysis of the context and methodological moderators, respectively, whereas Table 3 shows the MARA.

Both subgroup and meta-regression analyses show ($QB = 2.93$, $p = 0.03$; $B = 8.01$, $p = 0.02$) that consumers rate global brands more highly ($r = 0.36$) than local brands ($r = 0.30$). Likewise, the subgroup analysis reveals that the effect sizes for industrial products ($r = 0.41$) are larger than those for consumer goods ($r = 0.35$) and service goods ($r = 0.27$). Interestingly, while the subgroup analysis did not show significant aspects ($QB = 3.46$, $p = 0.33$), the regression analysis found product sector to be significant ($B = 0.19$, $p = 0.006$). An interpretation of this unanticipated result is provided below. Both regression ($B = 0.05$, $p = 0.012$) and subgroup ($QB = 19.32$, $p = 0.001$) analyses also show that brand continent moderates the relationship between country-of-origin image and consumer brand evaluations, such that brands from Europe ($r = 0.41$) receive more favorable ratings

than brands from North America ($r = 0.22$) and Australasia ($r = 0.31$).

Besides, the findings show that culture (individualism) moderates the relationship between country-of-origin image and consumer brand evaluations ($QB = 12.83$, $p = 0.01$; $B = 0.13$, $p = 0.005$), such that it is stronger in countries with low individualism ($r = 0.39$) rather than high ($r = 0.26$) or medium individualism ($r = 0.29$). Both regression ($B = -0.24$, $p = 0.025$) and subgroup analyses ($QB = 23.16$, $p = 0.00$) again reveal that respondents' continent significantly moderates the country-of-origin image/consumer brand evaluation relationship, such that it is higher among respondents from Africa ($r = 0.44$) than respondents from Europe ($r = 0.38$), Australasia ($r = 0.33$), or North America ($r = 0.24$).

Regarding methodological moderators, the findings reveal that cues influence the effect sizes of the reported associations according to the sub-group analysis ($QB = 3.95$, $p = 0.05$), such that single-cue studies generate larger effect sizes ($r = 0.38$) than multi-cue studies ($r = 0.28$). Nevertheless, the regression analysis did not support this finding ($B = 0.08$, $p = 0.24$). Second, both subgroup ($QB = 11.33$, $p = 0.00$) and regression analyses ($B = 0.17$, $p = 0.07$, *sig. at one-tailed*) show evidence for a moderator effect for brand type, such that real brands receive higher ratings ($r = 0.35$) than fictitious brands ($r = 0.19$).

In contrast, the results reveal no confirmation for a moderator effect ($QB = 1.34$, $p = 0.25$) in theory use, which was grouped as atheoretical ($r = 0.30$) or theoretical ($r = 0.36$). Next, both subgroup and regression analyses show that the year of publication significantly moderates the country-of-origin image/consumer brand evaluation relationship ($QB = 11.11$; p -value = 0.00; $B = 0.07$, $p = 0.04$), such that the association is stronger in studies published between 2011 and 2020 ($r = 0.37$) than those published between 2000 and 2010 ($r = 0.32$) or before 2000 ($r = 0.23$). Finally, the subgroup analysis ($QB = 0.05$; $p = 0.82$) and regression analysis ($B = 0.14$, $p = 0.05$) reveal that the country-of-origin image/consumer brand evaluation relationship is significantly moderated by sample size, such that it is larger for small sample sizes ($r = 0.40$) than large sample sizes ($r = 0.24$).

4. Discussion

4.1 Country-of-origin image and consumer brand evaluations

Overall, the average strength of country-of-origin image was found to be moderate ($r = 0.31$), falling within the conventional magnitude range of small-medium effects of country of origin in other meta-analyses in the IM literature: quality/reliability perception ($r = 0.30$) and purchase intention ($r = 0.19$) (Peterson and Jolibert, 1995), product evaluations ($r = 0.39$) (Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999) and buyer behavior ($r = 0.25$) (De Nisco, 2006). The findings suggest that from the cue utilization and irradiation theories, the positive view of country-of-origin image effect prevails over negative and neutral views. Consequently, contrary to the heated criticism that country of origin "is not a relevant attribute for making choices between alternatives" (Liefeld, 2004, p. 91) and that the "country-of-origin effect is no longer a major issue for international marketing operations" (Usunier, 2011, p. 61), this finding

Table 2 Effects of contextual and method moderators on the overall country of origin–consumer brand relationship

	N	K	rz	–CI	+CI	Z	P	QB	p
Contextual factors									
Brand source									
Global brand	78,967	190	0.36	0.27	0.44	7.58	0.00	2.92	0.034
Local brand	8,076	28	0.30	0.22	0.38	6.86	0.00		
Product sector									
Consumer goods	81,896	172	0.35	0.26	0.44	7.23	0.00	3.46	0.33
Industrial	876	27	0.41	0.22	0.58	3.97	0.00		
Service	5,014	12	0.27	0.21	0.33	8.11	0.00		
Mixed	411,777	75	0.30	0.25	0.35	11.33	0.00		
Brand origin continent									
Australasia	24,114	78	0.31	0.25	0.37	10.24	0.00	19.32	0.00
Europe	35,610	59	0.41	0.21	0.57	3.83	0.00		
North America	10,689	34	0.22	0.18	0.26	9.94	0.00		
Mixed	429,150	111	0.34	0.30	0.38	15.48	0.00		
Individualism									
High	416,775	114	0.26	0.22	0.29	12.71	0.00	12.83	0.01
Low	61,328	113	0.39	0.27	0.50	6.03	0.00		
Medium	12,687	45	0.29	0.22	0.36	8.06	0.00		
Respondents' continent									
Africa	6,844	16	0.44	0.36	0.50	10.54	0.00	23.16	0.00
Australasia	41,692	113	0.33	0.29	0.37	14.71	0.00		
Europe	34,340	61	0.38	0.17	0.55	3.52	0.00		
North America	401,146	67	0.24	0.19	0.28	9.55	0.00		
Others	15,541	25	0.41	0.25	0.55	4.83	0.00		
Method moderators									
Cues									
Multiple cues	24,813	80	0.28	0.24	0.32	11.79	0.00	3.95	0.05
Single cues	474,750	202	0.36	0.29	0.41	10.74	0.00		
Brand type									
Fictitious	2,098	24	0.19	0.10	0.27	4.21	0.00	11.33	0.00
Real brands	412,020	252	0.35	0.30	0.40	3.30	0.00		
Mixed	936	6	0.24	0.10	0.37	12.53	0.00		
Sampling unit									
Managers/professionals	2,827	20	0.37	0.28	0.43	8.72	0.00	7.07	0.03
Real consumers	481,566	199	0.36	0.30	0.41	10.94	0.00		
Students	15,170	63	0.26	0.21	0.31	9.03	0.00		
Theory usage									
Atheoretical	433,413	112	0.30	0.26	0.33	15.15	0.00	1.34	0.25
Theoretical	66,150	170	0.36	0.26	0.45	6.77	0.00		
Sample size									
Large sample (>150)	478,929	154	0.29	0.24	0.34	10.33	0.00	6.02	0.01
Small sample (<150)	20,634	128	0.40	0.33	0.46	10.96	0.00		
Year of publication									
2011–2020	452,797	151	0.37	0.29	0.44	8.99	0.00	11.11	0.00
2000–2010	34,909	89	0.32	0.25	0.38	8.98	0.00		
Pre-2000	11,857	42	0.23	0.19	0.28	9.97	0.00		

Notes: *Correlation significant at two-tailed; K (effect sizes); N (observations); rz (standardized correlations coefficient); CoOI = country of origin image; CBE = consumer brand evaluation

Source: Authors' own elaboration

shows that the country-of-origin cue is a crucial extrinsic cue that shapes and drives consumers' evaluation of global and local brands.

The findings moreover demonstrate more nuances about the nature and magnitude of country-of-origin image sub-dimensions. First, results show that all dimensions of country-of-origin image

have a positive and significant aggregate influence on overall consumer brand evaluations. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the impact of general product country image on consumer brand evaluations is the largest, followed by partitioned country image and general country image, with specific product country image showing the smallest effect. This implies that when evaluating

Table 3 Meta-regression of moderators on the overall country of origin image–consumer brand evaluation relationship

	Coefficient	Standard error	LCI	UCL	Z	P	r ²
Contextual moderators							
Brand source	0.16	0.02	0.15	0.27	8.00	0.56	0.036
Product sector	0.19	0.07	0.06	0.33	2.76	0.01**	0.043
Respondent's continent	−0.24	0.11	−0.47	−0.03	−2.23	0.03**	0.039
Individualism	0.13	0.07	−0.02	0.27	1.93	0.05*	0.034
Brand origin (continent)	−0.35	0.29	−0.95	0.23	−1.18	0.23	0.004
Methodological moderators							
Cues	0.08	0.06	−0.04	0.19	1.27	0.204	0.006
Brand type	0.18	0.09	−0.02	0.37	1.79	0.07*	0.020
Sampling Unit	−0.11	0.12	−0.34	−0.13	−0.90	0.36	0.004
Theory usage	0.06	0.06	−0.05	0.18	1.08	0.27	0.019
Year of publication	0.07	0.06	−0.07	0.19	0.94	0.04	0.014
Sample size	0.14	0.06	0.002	0.28	1.94	0.05*	0.056

Notes: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.001
Source: Authors' own elaboration

brands/products, consumers give more premium to the overall product image of that country, whether the country is known for producing quality products or not.

This supports the strand of literature that found that micro product country image strongly influences consumer behavior over macro country image (e.g. Leonidou *et al.*, 2006), while it disagrees with Pappu *et al.* (2007) that the relationship is stronger for general country image than for general product country image. The accessibility–diagnosticity theory indicates that “any factor that increases the accessibility of an input is also expected to increase the likelihood with which that input will be used for the judgment.” That being so, general product country image reflects accessible, “ready-to-use” information that can guide consumers in their intended action – diagnostics – toward a brand from a given country.

The findings also show that partitioned country image is the second strongest country-of-origin image dimension for consumer brand evaluation. This means that when the country-of-origin image construct is parsed into its individual components, it allows for more accurate and reliable evaluation (Biswas *et al.*, 2011). Accordingly, decoupling the country-of-origin image into its sub-dimensions allows for a complete and comprehensive understanding of country-of-origin image effects (Insh and McBride, 2004). This disconfirms the notion in the literature that the effect of a country's image is weakened when it is decomposed (Tse and Lee, 1993).

Another interesting finding that requires a brief explanation is the low average effect of specific product country image on consumer brand evaluations. One likely reason for this exciting finding is the product-specific nature of country image measured by this dimension. Another plausible reason for this finding is the economic origin context of specific countries' products. For example, the literature shows that products or brands from advanced countries command favorable consumer attitudes compared to those from emerging economies.

Finally, the findings on the dimensions of consumer brand evaluations show that brand commitment (i.e. brand loyalty, brand trust and brand preference) is the most influenced outcome. Research has shown that the country-of-origin image

of a product can cause consumers to develop loyalty toward brands from that country, which may result in continuous purchases and brand preferences (Ahmed and d'Astous, 1996; Pappu *et al.*, 2006). Accordingly, contrary to the general thought in the literature that country-of-origin image influences brand-specific associations (e.g. perceived quality, brand associations) more than brand loyalty, brand trust and brand preferences, the findings show that when international consumers perceive that a particular country provides quality, reliable products, brands and valuable information and is trying to build a strong relationship with them through quality products and brands, they reciprocate such efforts by forming strong commitments and positive attitudes toward that country. This corroborates the reciprocal action theory that:

[...] “actions taken by one party in an exchange relationship will be reciprocated in kind by the other party because each party would experience the feelings of guilt for violating the norm of reciprocity” (Li and Dant, 1997, p. 1).

4.2 Study moderators

4.2.1 Contextual moderators

First, findings show that brand source partially moderates the country-of-origin image/consumer brand evaluation relationship, although the subgroup analysis revealed that global brands receive more favorable ratings from consumers than local brands (Tam and Elliot, 2011). Research has shown that factors such as xenocentrism and cosmopolitanism may account for these preferences and evaluative judgments (e.g. Diamantopoulos *et al.*, 2019). The findings also show that product sector moderates the country-of-origin image/consumer brand evaluation relationship (Aggarwal and McGill, 2007), indicating that industrial products receive higher ratings than consumer and service goods. This implies that managers/professionals give even more importance and weight to the country-of-origin cue in their evaluations of brands than end consumers.

Related to this, the results show that brand origin continent moderates the relationship between country-of-origin image and consumer brand evaluations. In particular, European brands receive more favorable ratings than North American,

Australasian, African or South American brands. This is not surprising because most European countries examined in the literature are very advanced, namely, the UK, Germany, Italy, France and Spain, which have good country and product image. Consequently, the study does not corroborate earlier views that US products garner more favorable ratings than those from other countries (Sin *et al.*, 2000).

The findings also show that individualism moderates the relationship between country-of-origin image and consumer brand evaluations, such that consumers from cultures with low individualism consider country of origin more in their brand evaluations than those in cultures with medium and high individualism. One probable reason for this is that people in collectivist cultures tend to rely more on external information when making decisions, thus their tendency to use country-of-origin image as a surrogate and extrinsic cue in their brand evaluation. Accordingly, the findings confirm the study by Dimofte *et al.* (2010), which found that consumers in the USA – an individualistic society – look less favorably on global brands than the minority group of Asian, African American, Hispanic and Asian consumers.

Finally, the results reveal that respondents' continent significantly moderates the relationship between country-of-origin image and consumer brand evaluations. It is worth remarking, however, that African consumers pay more attention to a brand's country of origin than their European, Australasian and North American counterparts, favoring brands from the developed world over domestic brands. This finding implies that consumers in economically less developed regions have the tendency to perceive foreign brands as superior to domestic products. As stated before, the culture of the various regions could account for this result. According to the hierarchy of biases theory, there is a positive relationship between the economic development of a country and consumers' specific brand evaluation (Mandler *et al.*, 2017).

4.2.2 Methodological moderators

First, the study found that the country-of-origin image effect is significantly larger for single cues than for multiple cues, which is consistent with previous studies (Peterson and Jolibert, 1995; Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999). Second, brand type accounts for between-study variance in country-of-origin image/brand evaluation relationships, such that the country-of-origin image effect is significantly larger for real brands than fictitious ones. This finding implies that brand type plays a tremendous moderating role – both positive and negative – in country-of-origin evaluations, and that unlike artificial/fictitious brands, real brands benefit from a certain equity generated by their reputation, awareness, popularity and associations in consumers' mind (Leonidou *et al.*, 2006).

Third, the study shows that sampling unit partially accounts for between-study variance in the country-of-origin image/consumer brand evaluation relationship, such that the effects are larger in samples of managers/professionals than for students or real consumers. This implies that the country-of-origin cue is even more relevant in the business setting than in individual settings, highlighting the relevance of emphasizing the country-of-origin effect in B2B contexts. For that reason, the study disagrees with the view that student samples would yield larger effect sizes than real consumers or manager

samples. The findings revealed no confirmation of a moderator effect for theory use, whether atheoretical or theoretical.

Finally, the study shows that the year of publication moderates the country-of-origin image/consumer brand evaluation relationship, such that the association is stronger in studies published between 2011 and 2020 than those published between 2000 and 2010 or before 2000. To this end, despite arguments that the country-of-origin effect is no longer relevant to consumers' evaluation of alternatives (Usunnier, 2006), the results of the study show that consumers still give much attention to country-of-origin image in their evaluative judgments and that “country image can evolve over time and that its effect on brand evaluation persists even when inaccurate brand origin associations are made” (Magnusson *et al.*, 2022, p. 1). Conclusively, the country-of-origin effect does not abate over time.

5. Implications

5.1 Theoretical implications

The findings of the study offer the following implications for theory and research. First, by applying cue utilization and irradiation theories, the study contributes to the literature on IM and brand management by comprehensively examining how country-of-origin image influences consumer brand evaluations. The focus on consumer brand evaluations helps to ascertain whether the positive, negative or non-significant view prevails by enhancing the accuracy of estimates and offering a holistic view of the country-of-origin image by correctly examining the different dimensions of country of origin and different types of consumer brand evaluation (Hong *et al.*, 2023). The findings that the positive view prevails *vis-à-vis* the country-of-origin image/consumer brand evaluation relationship advance the cue utilization and irradiation theories (Diamantopoulos *et al.*, 2011; Florack *et al.*, 2007) and confirm prior literature theorizing a positive nexus between country image and brand evaluation (Rodrigo *et al.*, 2023; Kim and Yim, 2022; Magnusson *et al.*, 2022).

What's more, this study helps balance the literature with the earlier meta-analyses that focused on product evaluations, purchase decisions and buyer behavior without recourse to consumer brand evaluations (Peterson and Jolibert, 1995; Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999; De Nisco, 2006), thereby contributing to recent theorizations concerning country image and brand management in the global market (De Nisco and Oduro, 2022).

The focus of the study on specific dimensions of the country-of-origin image and related dimensions of consumer brand evaluations also adds theoretical value because it enables investigations of the decoupled components of the country-of-origin image construct to ascertain both their relative and joint effects on consumer brand evaluations. In general, the findings highlight the need to decompose and parse the country-of-origin image construct into its respective dimensions (Ahn, 2023; Ahmed and d'Astous, 2001; Hamzaoui and Merunka, 2006), and especially to consider how they vary in terms of their influential impact or “force” on consumer behavior (Pelet *et al.*, 2018; Roth and Diamantopolous, 2009). By assessing the dimensions jointly in a single study, this study introduces an organized, comprehensive conceptual framework that theorizes

country-of-origin image and its dimensions as well as its attitudinal and evaluative outcomes across context, periods and disciplines (Ahn, 2023).

Besides, the findings highlight the need to incorporate contingent effects and boundary-spanning factors in IM and brand management research (Mandler *et al.*, 2023; Ahn, 2023), and particularly to consider differences in institutional and cultural environments (Hong *et al.*, 2023). The examination of novel moderators, both contextual and methodological, advances context-sensitive perspective of country-of-origin and consumer evaluative judgments, thereby furthering knowledge of the boundary-spanning mechanisms that propel the country-of-origin image/consumer brand evaluation relationship (Mandler *et al.*, 2023; Lu *et al.*, 2016).

On top of that, the results regarding the regional and cultural contexts and their moderating influence are in line with perspectives of institutional-driven propositions and theories that institutional support systems, cultures and learning systems can affect country-of-origin image (Dimofte *et al.*, 2010).

Finally, the study clarifies whether country-origin image influences consumer behavior by integrating fragmented evidence across disciplines, cultures and countries, thereby laying a foundation to motivate future research on country of origin in consumer behavior (Hong *et al.*, 2023; Mandler *et al.*, 2023).

5.2 Implications for management and policies

The findings of the study are also significant for management practice. First, the results show that the average effect expected from country-of-origin image advertising and promotional campaigns is 0.31, or within the range of 0.27–0.51. This implies that the effect of country-of-origin image on consumer brand evaluations is *moderate/medium*. For this reason, marketers and international brand managers should not view the country-of-origin image as a short-term strategy that can yield immediate dividends/returns.

Second, the finding that general product country image has the largest impact on consumer brand evaluations implies that firms must work constructively with national governments and industry players to ensure high-quality standards for products and brands. One conceivable way to accomplish this is to work with the government through strategic collaborations and stakeholder engagement to establish stringent measures such as minimum quality and reliability standards and “best practices” for local companies that produce and sell products abroad, with appropriate sanctions in place to discipline any company that breaches the protocols.

Another finding of the study that demands managers’ attention is the strong impact of partitioned country image on consumer brand evaluations. Because an unfavorable country-of-origin image can distort consumers’ perceptions of quality within a given product category, firms must use partitioned country image to counter this unfavorableness of country of origin for affected products or brands. This could be done, for instance, by shifting some value chain activities such as design, assembly or manufacturing to highly industrialized/advanced countries with good product images to mitigate the negative image effect, while highlighting these taxonomies in advertising and promotional campaigns, particularly in developing countries.

Again, the varying comparative effects of country-of-origin image on the relative dimensions of consumer brand evaluations – stronger at certain levels and weaker at others – implies that country-of-origin image marketing campaigns should be tailored to the specific brand evaluation dimension expected for that period. For instance, firms could use the specific product country image to stimulate brand commitment, or partitioned country image to stimulate brand-specific associations and general brand impressions.

Likewise, managers must consider the contextual factors examined in this study. Global brands operating in low-development economic regions should prominently highlight and promote the country-of-origin image, as consumers in these regions tend to favor foreign brands over local ones. For instance, brands operating in Africa could emphasize the country of origin of their brands through product labeling, logos and advertising, as consumers in this part of the world place more importance on “Made ins” in their brands and product evaluations. For international brand managers, the findings also reveal the critical role of culture in country-of-origin promotional campaigns. The results of the study show that consumers in cultures with low and medium individualism pay more attention to country-of-origin image than those with high individualism. This means that firms operating in cultures with low individualism, where consumer animosity and ethnocentrism – among others – are low, should highlight and promote their country-of-origin image through advertising and promotional campaigns by recognizing cultural disparities and emphasizing the “Made in” in product labels and promotional campaigns, particularly among countries in Asia and Africa (Witek-Hajduk and Grudecka, 2022).

Policymakers could also benefit from the insights of this study. First, since consumers’ overall perception of general products from a given country is even stronger than their perception and judgment of the general country image, policymakers must adopt country branding strategies on both local and global levels to promote national products and brands. One practical way to accomplish this is by refocusing nation branding campaigns on “strategic” general products from the country that sell well in international markets. For example, they could develop special promotional campaigns that focus on the specific positive country and product images, such as quality, innovation, reliability, safety, excellence, etc., through press releases, advertising spots and national exhibitions on the manufacturers and exporters in the country.

Another aspect of the findings that demands the attention of policymakers concerns the impact of partitioned country image on consumer brand evaluations. Partitioned country image shows that products from one country may be manufactured, designed, assembled or sourced by parts from different countries. Bureaucratic and stringent trade regimes may create bottlenecks in the production and distribution of global brands, which can, in turn, affect consumer choices related to products and brands. For this reason, policymakers must ensure that trade rules, policies and cross-border regulations are well-developed and standardized to create an environment conducive to the free flow of value chain activities between firms and countries.

Finally, to strengthen government-business collaboration, policymakers can provide support services (e.g. training, consulting services, tax incentives and other provisional subsidies)

for exporting companies to assist them in internationalizing and improving their global management practices to produce and sell products that meet international standards and profitably satisfy consumers' needs and interests.

6. Limitations and recommendations for further research

This study suffers from some limitations that provide grounds and avenues for future research. The first limitation is the inclusion of effect sizes that is contingent upon their data availability in empirical studies. Moreover, the study did not include unpublished papers or papers published in languages other than English. Accordingly, future studies should develop a more extensive database to include these papers while accounting for publication bias.

The study also did not account for causal effects in the country-of-origin image/consumer brand evaluation relationship. In effect, the study suggests that future meta-analyses examine the causal relationship between country-of-origin image and consumer brand evaluations by exploring factors such as ethnocentrism, xenocentrism, nationalism and patriotism to ascertain how they shape the country-of-origin image/consumer brand evaluation relationship (Lee, 2023). The use of advanced meta-analysis techniques such as meta-analysis structural equation modeling will help in this regard.

The study also examined only one dependent variable. As the country-of-origin image effect depends significantly on the nature of the dependent variable, it may be useful for future meta-analytic reviews to replicate the conceptual framework of this study by examining other dependent variables, such as purchase intention and willingness to pay more.

Likewise, comparative and cross-regional studies on country-of-origin image involving two or more countries merely consider the level of economic development of the focus countries, mostly one from a developed country and another from a developing economy, without considering the cultural landscape of those nations. The results show a significant difference between consumers from collectivist and highly individualistic cultures. Because consumers from countries with low, medium and high individualism differ significantly in their country-of-origin image and brand evaluations, comparative country-of-origin research involving two or more countries must consider not only the level of economic development but also individualism.

Finally, the results that the nexus between country-of-origin image and consumer brand evaluations grow stronger with the evolution of time is worth future research in this area. To this end, future research should use multi-level growth modeling or longitudinal methods to address the systematic patterns of country-of-origin image/consumer brand evaluations over time (Lu et al., 2016).

Despite these limitations, the study adds significant insight to ongoing scholarly research on country-of-origin image and its impacts on consumer brand evaluations.

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Further reading

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