The role played by country knowledge and product familiarity in the country-of-origin effect: a study on Brazilian Beef in Europe

El papel desempeñado por el conocimiento del país y la familiaridad con el producto en el efecto del país de origen: un estudio sobre la carne brasileña en Europa

O papel do conhecimento do país e da familiaridade com o produto no efeito país de origem: um estudo sobre a carne brasileira na Europa

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This study has sought to identify the influence of the image of Brazil on the European consumers' attitudes towards Brazilian beef, a phenomenon known as the country-of-origin effect. By applying a survey on four European countries (Ireland, England, Germany and France), it was found a low level of knowledge concerning Brazilian beef and also a low and positive country-of-origin effect. We have also identified that the effect is more positive when consumers have more knowledge of Brazil and more familiarity with Brazilian beef.

Este estudio ha tratado de identificar la influencia de la imagen de Brasil en las actitudes de los consumidores europeos en respecto a la carne brasileña, un fenómeno conocido como el efecto del país de origen. Mediante la aplicación de una encuesta realizada en cuatro países europeos (Irlanda, Inglaterra, Alemania y Francia), se encontró un bajo nivel de conocimientos relativos a la carne brasileña y también un efecto del país de origen bajo y positivo. También hemos identificado que el efecto es más positivo cuando los consumidores tienen más conocimiento de Brasil y una mayor familiaridad con la carne brasileña.

Este estudo procurou identificar a influência da imagem do Brasil sobre as atitudes dos consumidores europeus em relação à carne bovina brasileira, um fenômeno conhecido como efeito país de origem. Através da aplicação de uma pesquisa em quatro países europeus (Irlanda, Inglaterra, Alemanha e França), apurou-se um baixo nível de conhecimento sobre a carne bovina brasileira e também um baixo e positivo efeito país de origem. Também identificamos que o efeito é mais positivo quando os consumidores têm mais conhecimento do Brasil e mais familiaridade com a carne brasileira.

1. Introduction

The literature on national stereotypes and perception of nations dates from the 1930's (Roth and Diamantopoulos, 2009). However, it was not until the 1960's that the concept of country image draw more attention from marketing researchers as a result of the intensification of commercial exchanges and financial investments. These perceptions of a country have a significant effect on the consumer attitudes regarding brands of products made in certain countries (Balabanis, Mueller and Melewar, 2002; Han, 1989).

The first empirical test of the country-of-origin effect on acceptance and success of a product was conducted by Schooler (1965). Studies performed in the 1990's and 2000's showed as well that consumers evaluate identical products differently regarding all aspects, except the country of origin (Orbaiz and Papadopoulos, 2003; Verlegh, Steenkamp and Meulemberg, 2005). The positive image of a country can influence the consumers' evaluation of the products as well as their purchase intention (Han, 1989; Balabanis, Mueller and Melewar, 2002; Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2002).

Like Pharr (2005), Hsieh, Pan and Setiono (2004) believe that companies trading in several markets should identify the home country characteristics which can affect the success of strategies related to the image of their brand or product. By knowing the influence of the country image on one or more products, the managers of private institutions, like the export companies, can decide on emphatically using the country of origin as a marketing promotion strategy, or alternatively they can alter the product price to increase competitiveness and minimise the negative effects of the country's bad image among the consumers (Han, 1989; Jaffe and Nebenzhal, 2001).

In fact, consumers do stereotype quality and attractiveness of products made in other countries and regions (Bhaskaran and Sukumaran, 2007). A number of studies have tested a variety of cues which can decrease or increase the country-of-origin impact on product evaluations or purchase intentions (Pisharodi and Parameswaran, 2002; Pecotich and Rosenthal, 2001).With regard to the amount of product cues, Chao and Rajendran (1993) have stated that when consumers are given more information on the product, the influence of the country-of-origin effect on the consumer's evaluation may be reduced. It means that familiarity with brand or product is an important moderating factor of the country of origin effect. According to Zhang (1996), the familiarity with the product relates to the assessment of the country of origin, so we can expect that the familiarity with the country also affects these evaluations. In fact, Ahmed and Astous (2001) have shown that the consumers' assessment with respect to a country varies according to the level of familiarity they have with that country.

In this context, this study has sought to identify the influence of Brazil's image on the consumer attitude towards Brazilian beef, based on the views of a group of European consumers. This research has also tried to identify how the level of familiarity with Brazil and Brazilian beef could moderate the magnitude of the country of origin effect towards Brazilian beef. Brazil is the world's second producer and the world's first beef exporter (ABIEC, 2010) and it has become one of the major players in the international market of bovine meat.

2. Material and methods

This is a descriptive-type research, whose population consisted of under-graduate and post-graduate students and staff of business and economics schools in Dublin (Ireland), Paris (France), Münster (Germany), and Canterbury (England), with age ranging from 18 and 65 years old. England, France and Germany were chosen for this study as the most populated countries in the European Union, on the assumption that their residents are important consumers of bovine meat, including Brazilian beef. Ireland was chosen because it is one of the ten largest importers of Brazilian beef, as well as the largest meat producer in Europe. The European Union was chosen because marketing specialists consider it a highly demanding market.

This specific group of individuals was defined for study because they are a segment of interest for companies as they are potential buyers of foreign products. In addition, as shown by Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999), the magnitude of the country-of-origin effect does not differ between studies using samples of students and those using samples of consumers.

The present research used a non-probabilistic sample chosen according convenience criteria, as follows: 40 from French institutions, 111 from German institutions, 115 from English institutions, and 114 from Irish institutions. Because the sample elements were not randomly selected, it was not possible to assess the sampling error (Churchill, 1998) or therefore to set limits to the estimation precision. It was not possible to perform statistical tests of significance, and the results from the sample cannot be generalized to the entire study population, which is a limitation of this research.

For the operationalization of the variables, a seven-point Likert scale was used (1= totally agree and 7 = totally disagree). This measurement was based on Pisharodi and Parameswaran (2002) and Banovic et al. (2010). The dependent variable (consumers' attitudes towards Brazilian beef) was measured by using 14 sentences aimed at evaluating cognitive, affective and conative components of the attitude towards the product being studied, shown in Box 1.

Box 1. Measurement of consumers' attitude towards the Brazilian beef

Cognitive component of attitude
Brazilian beef is of good quality
Brazilian beef is easily found
Brazilian beef has an attractive image
Brazilian beef is cheap
Brazilian beef is sold in several European countries
Brazilian beef has a positive image
Product communication should be strengthened in the European market
Brazilian beef has a good texture
Brazilian beef is tasty
Brazilian beef is tender
Brazilian beef is adequately packaged
I consider the cattle-raising methods in Brazil adequate and sustainable
Affective component of attitude
How much do you like Brazilian beef?
Conative component of attitude
Would you buy Brazilian beef?

Source: Adapted from Banovic et al. (2010) and Pisharodi and Parameswaran (2002).

The following statistical analyses were applied according to Giraldi's methodology (2010): exploratory factor analysis for identifying the dimensions of Brazil's image, and regression analysis to know the impact of this image on consumers' attitude towards the Brazilian beef (thus evaluating the COO effect).

3. Results and discussions

A total of 382 questionnaires were completed and validated. Most questionnaires were distributed individually to undergraduates and post-graduate students and staff at four European universities between September and November 2010. The results showed that 60% of the sample had low levels of knowledge about Brazil and 40% knew the country reasonably or fairly well.

The exploratory factor analysis was aimed at creating a set of new variables to replace the existing ones about the image of Brazil. The Kaiser Meyer Olkin test presented a value of 0,816. Table 1 presents the rotated component matrix, factor names and respective Cronbach's alphas.

Table 1. Rotated component matrix, factors names and Cronbach's alphas

Factor name	Cronbach's alpha	Sentences on the questionnaire	Factor loads
Factor 1- Face of the Brazilian People	0.749	Brazilian people are hard working	0.769
		Brazilian people are well-educated	0.732
		Brazilian people have technical skills	0.679
		Brazilian people reached high standard of living	0.644
Factor 2 - General Image of the Brazilian products	0.707	Brazilian products are long-lasting	0.801
		Brazilian products have a good value	0.731
		Brazilian products have a wide range of models	0. 601
Factor3 Communication, Distribution and Differentiation of Brazilian Products	0.728	Brazilian products are easily available	0.740
		Brazilian products are prestigious	0.668
		Brazil is well known for producing mainly industrial products	0.618
		Brazilian products have high technology	0.523
		Brazilian products are intensively advertised	0.515
Factor 4- Perceived Similarity	0.720	Brazil is economically similar to my country	0.791
		Brazil has similar culture comparing to my country	0.770
		Brazil has similar political view comparing to my country	0.639
Factor 5- Internationalization of Brazil	0.507	Brazilian products are sold in many countries	0.688
		Brazil participates in international affairs	0.680
Factor 6 - Beliefs about Brazilian Arts and Sympathy for Brazil	0.697	Brazilian people are creative and artistic	0.864
		Brazil is friendly and likeable internationally	0.843
Factor 7- Negative Aspects of Brazilian Products	0.429	Brazilian products are imitations	0.723
		Brazilian products need frequent repair	0.721
		Brazilian products are not attractive	0.488

Factor 1 describes the Brazilian people in terms of quality of life, education, work and technical skills, being named as "Face of the Brazilian People". Factor 2 consists of sentences related to evaluations of Brazilian products in terms of model variety, durability, and price,

thus being named as "General Image of the Brazilian products". Factor 3 has sentences related to the access to Brazilian products, their differentiation and communication, and it was named "Communication, Distribution and Differentiation of Brazilian Products". Factor 4 contains sentences related to the evaluation of cultural, economic and political similarities between respondents' countries and Brazil. Therefore, this factor was termed as "Perceived Similarity". Factor 5 was termed as "Internationalization of Brazil", and it has a Cronbach's alpha equals to 0.507, indicating that this factor would not be acceptable. However, according to Cortina (1993), the value of Cronbach's alpha decreases as the number of variables of in a factor also decreases, since its calculation is directly proportional to this number (N). Because Factor 5 has only two variables, such a low Cronbach's alpha is the result of the small number of variables in the factor, and it was kept in the analysis. Factor 6 was termed as "Beliefs about Brazilian Arts and Sympathy for Brazil", and Factor 7 was named as "Negative Aspects of Brazilian Products". However, because Factor 7's reliability coefficient was 0.429, it was considered unacceptable for subsequent analysis.

Considering the rank order of Brazil's image dimensions, the most positive dimensions were "Beliefs about Brazilian arts and sympathy for Brazil", "Internationalization of Brazil" and "Face of the Brazilian people", with the latter being neutrally evaluated by the respondents. The dimension "General Image of the Brazilian Products" was also neutrally evaluated (i.e. scores very close to 4). Moreover, the respondents did not find that Brazil's culture and economic and political systems were similar to those of their countries, which are aspects represented in the dimension "Perceived Similarity". This fact is understandable, as the research was applied in European countries and not in Latin-American ones. The most negative dimension of Brazil's image is the one regarding "Communication, distribution and differentiation of Brazilian products", with a mean score close to 5.

The attitude of the consumer towards the Brazilian beef was represented by the mean score attributed to the sentences that measured attitude. As it was used a 7 point scale, mean scores lower than 4 meant a positive attitude towards the Brazilian beef; scores equal to 4 meant a neutral attitude; and scores greater than 4 meant a negative attitude. In general, the respondents' attitude towards the Brazilian beef had a mean score of 3.93, that is, close to a neutral assessment. Overall, the results showed that the respondents had very little knowledge about the product.

With regards to the multiple regression analysis performed to identify the country of origin effect, the six factors were used to represent the independent variable (Brazil image). Table 2 shows the summary of the estimated regression model for assessing the influence of Brazil's image on the respondent's attitudes towards the Brazilian bovine meat. The R^2 is the measure of the magnitude of the country-of-origin effect, as in Giraldi's (2010) work. Because R^2 measures the percentage of total variation in the dependent variable, one can observe that the relationship between the variables is weak (R^2 is equal to 0.137). For all the respondents, the Brazil's image did not influence significantly their attitudes towards the Brazilian beef.

Table 2. Summary of the regression model for all the respondents

Model	R	R²	Adjusted R²	Estimated standard error
1	0.370a	0.137	0.123	0.77674

In this research, it was found to be more effective to assess and compare both magnitude and valence of the regression coefficients than their R^2 values in the estimated model, in order to better understand the influence of Brazil image on the attitude towards Brazilian beef. By analyzing the non-standardized regression coefficients (Table 3), one can observe that the dimensions of Brazil's image having the higher values are "Beliefs about Brazilian arts and sympathy for Brazil", followed by "Communication, distribution and differentiation of Brazilian products". Although both were the most influential dimensions regarding the respondent's attitude towards the Brazilian beef, the former had a more positive influence and the latter a more negative influence.

Table 3. Coefficients of the regression models for all the respondents

	Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients
	B	Standard deviation	ß
Constant	2.134	0.276	
Face of the Brazilian people	0.026	0.053	0.027
General image of the Brazilian products	0.013	0.060	0.012
Communication, distribution and differentiation of Brazilian products	0.118	0.054	0.127
Perceived similarity	0.089	0.037	0.128
Internationalization of Brazil	0.040	0.038	0.056
Beliefs about Brazilian arts and sympathy for Brazil	0.196	0.039	0.252

Aspects related to communication, distribution and differentiation of the Brazilian products were negatively evaluated (mean score above 4.5) by the total of respondents. Because the highest non-standardized coefficient was that for the dimension "Beliefs about Brazilian arts and sympathy for Brazil", one can conclude that the country-of-origin effect was positive for all the respondents, although it was not very large.

This result is corroborated by other authors, who found that consumers evaluate identical products differently regarding all aspects, except country of origin (Orbaiz and Papadopou-

los, 2003; Verlegh, Steenkamp and Meulemberg, 2005). The image of a country can influence the attitude of the consumers towards its products as well as their purchase intention (Balabanis, Mueller and Melewar, 2002; Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2002).

3.1. Comparison by Familiarity with the Product

To measure the respondents' familiarity with the product, the variable "I know several brands of Brazilian beef sold in Europe" was used with a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("I fully agree") to 7 ("I fully disagree"). The variable "Have you ever bought Brazilian beef before" was also used, with the answers being "Yes, many times", "Yes, a few times", and "No, never before". Respondents who indicated that they had bought Brazilian beef many times or a few times were given, respectively, scores 1 and 2, whereas those who had never bought the product were given score 3. The answers to both variables were added and respondents having a total score lower than 6 were considered familiar with the product, whereas those with total score higher than 6 were considered unfamiliar.

It was found that 62% of the respondents indicated that they had never bought Brazilian beef, whereas 24% stated that they had bought the product a few times and only 2.6% many times. Respondents who were more familiar with the product rated more positively the dimensions of Brazil's image compared to other groups and considered that Brazilian culture, economy and political system were more similar to those of their countries. The aspects regarding communication, distribution and differentiation of Brazilian products were neutrally evaluated by the same group of respondents. For respondents with low familiarity with Brazilian beef, the aspects related to communication, distribution and differentiation of the Brazilian products were those with the worst results. For both groups, the most positive dimensions were "Beliefs about Brazilian arts and sympathy for Brazil" and "Internationalisation of Brazil". The general image of the products was negatively assessed by respondents who were less familiar with beef, whereas those having high familiarity with this product assessed it more positively.

With regard to the country of-origin effect comparisons, table 4 shows the regression coefficients for both groups of respondents (familiar and unfamiliar with Brazilian beef).

Table 4. Summary of the regression model according to level of familiarity with the product

Level of familiarity	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Estimated standard error
Familiar with the Brazilian beef	0.497a	0.247	0.169	0.78936
Unfamiliar with the Brazilian beef	0.316b	0.100	0.082	0.76362

Respondents with a high familiarity with the Brazilian beef were more influenced by the Brazil's image ($R^2=0.247$), whereas those having a low familiarity the product were less influenced ($R^2=0.100$). By analysing the regression coefficients (table 5), it was seen that for the respondents who were more familiar with the product, the dimensions influencing more positively their attitude towards the Brazilian beef were "Beliefs about Brazilian arts and sym-

pathy for Brazil" and "Internationalisation of Brazil". However, the dimension "General image of the Brazilian products" had a negative coefficient (-0.186).

This result indicates that the better the general image of the Brazilian products, which was positively evaluated by these respondents, the more favourable their attitude towards the Brazilian beef. This rationale is also valid to the dimension "Communication, distribution and differentiation of the Brazilian products", which was neutrally evaluated by respondents with high familiarity with the Brazilian beef. The better the image of the products, the more positive the attitudes of the respondents towards the Brazilian beef.

Table 5. Coefficients of the regression models for level of familiarity with Brazilian beef

High level of familiarity	Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients
	B	Standard deviation	ß
Constant	2.134	0.276	
Face of the Brazilian people	0.026	0.053	0.027
General image of the Brazilian products	0.013	0.060	0.012
Communication, distribution, and differentiation of the Brazilian products	0.118	0.054	0.127
Perceived similarity	0.089	0.037	0.128
Internationalisation of Brazil	0.040	0.038	0.056
Beliefs about Brazilian arts and sympathy for Brazil	0.196	0.039	0.252
Low level of familiarity			
Constant	2.498	0.337	
Face of the Brazilian people	0.011	0.056	0.012
General image of the Brazilian products	0.064	0.067	0.060
Communication, distribution, and differentiation of the Brazilian products	0.064	0.059	0.068
Perceived similarity	0.076	0.041	0.106
Internationalisation of Brazil	0.002	0.040	0.003
Beliefs about Brazilian arts and sympathy for Brazil	0.192	0.044	0.246

For respondents who were unfamiliar with Brazilian beef, the dimension influencing more significantly their attitudes towards this product was "Beliefs about Brazilian arts and sympathy for Brazil", which was positively evaluated by them. Thus, the country-of-origin effect was positive and more expressive among those who were familiar with the Brazilian beef.

In fact, familiarity with brand or product is an important factor moderating the country-of-origin effect. This finding is corroborated by Chao and Rajendran (1993), who have shown that consumers can trust the brand regardless of the fact that the product has been actually made in the country with which the brand may be strongly associated.

3.2. Comparison by Level of Knowledge of Brazil

Respondents were grouped according to their level of knowledge about Brazil. A 7-point Likert scale was used to identify their knowledge on Brazil as follows: "Considering the scale below, what level of knowledge do you have of Brazil?", with scores ranging from 1 ("I know a lot") to 7 ("I know nothing"). Respondents scoring less than 4 were considered as having good knowledge about Brazil.

Those having a high level of knowledge about Brazil assessed all the dimensions more positively compared to other respondents with a poor knowledge. They also regarded Brazilian culture, economy, and political system more similar to those of their countries. The dimension "Communication, distribution and differentiation of Brazilian products" were neutrally evaluated by these group of respondents. Respondents who had a low level of knowledge about Brazil evaluated negatively the dimensions "General image of the Brazilian products" and "Communication, distribution and differentiation of Brazilian products", with the latter having the worst result.

Among individuals with higher level of knowledge about Brazil, the country image had a stronger influence on their attitude towards the Brazilian beef, that is, there was a greater country-of-origin effect for this group of respondents ($R^2=0.185$) than for the other ($R^2=0.067$), as shown in table 6.

Table 6. Summary of the regression model according to level of knowledge about Brazil

Level of knowledge	R	R²	Adjusted R²	Estimated standard error
Good knowledge of Brazil	0.430a	0.185	0.150	0.74922
Poor knowledge of Brazil	0.258b	0.067	0.042	0.76723

By analysing the regression coefficients (table 7), it was concluded that the dimensions "Beliefs about Brazilian arts and sympathy for Brazil" and "General image of the Brazilian products" had a positive influence on the attitude of individuals who had a good knowledge about Brazil. The better the evaluation of these both dimensions, the more favourable is the consumer attitude towards the Brazilian beef. For respondents knowing little about Brazil, the dimension "General image of the Brazilian products" has a negative influence on their attitude towards the Brazilian beef. Thus, the attitude of this group of respondents towards the Brazilian beef tends to be more positive as the general image of the Brazilian products improves.

Table 7. Coefficients of the regression models for level of knowledge on Brazil

Good knowledge of Brazil	Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients
	B	Standard deviation	ß
Constant	1.765	0.368	
Face of the Brazilian people	0.065	0.080	0.076
General image of the Brazilian products	0.106	0.096	0.112
Communication, distribution, and differentiation of the Brazilian products	0.078	0.088	0.095
Perceived similarity	0.041	0.054	0.070
Internationalisation of Brazil	0.041	0.061	0.056
Beliefs about Brazilian arts and sympathy for Brazil	0.212	0.059	0.284
Poor knowledge of Brazil			
Constant	3.171	0.444	
Face of the Brazilian people	0.013	0.069	0.013
General image of the Brazilian products	-0.074	0.077	-0.069
Communication, distribution, and differentiation of the Brazilian products	0.085	0.068	0.088
Perceived similarity	0.038	0.054	0.048
Internationalisation of Brazil	0.041	0.047	0.060
Beliefs about Brazilian arts and sympathy for Brazil	0.169	0.050	0.227

According to the results, the country-of-origin effect was found to be positive for both groups of respondents, however it was more significant for those with higher knowledge about Brazil. It means that the image of Brazil has a stronger influence on the purchase intentions of respondents with higher knowledge on the country and more familiarity with the product. These results are in concordance with those found elsewhere (Zhang, 1996, Ahmed and Astous, 2001), that have shown that the consumers' assessment with respect to a country varies according to the level of familiarity they have with that country.

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4. Conclusions

This study has sought to identify the influence of Brazil's image on the consumer attitude towards Brazilian beef, based on the views of a group of European consumers. This research has also tried to identify how the level of familiarity with Brazil and Brazilian beef could moderate the magnitude of the country of origin effect towards Brazilian beef.

The results showed that country image is a multidimensional construct, with some dimensions of Brazil image being positively evaluated, while others were negatively evaluated. However, in general, Brazil was neutrally evaluated by the respondents. The influence of Brazil's image on the consumer attitude towards the Brazilian beef (i.e. the country of origin effect) was not considered much significant in this research. Therefore, both private sector and government need to invest more in measures aimed at promoting and differentiating the Brazilian beef overseas.

It was also concluded that the country of origin effect for Brazilian beef can be moderated by the level of knowledge of Brazil and by the familiarity with the Brazilian beef. It was found that the country of origin effect was more positive when consumers had more knowledge of Brazil and when they were more familiar with Brazilian beef. As a contribution to the theory, this paper provides more evidence for the existence of the COO effect and the role played by of two important moderators.

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