



Bridging the gap between country and destination image: Assessing common facets and their predictive validity[☆]



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ABSTRACT

People form gestalt country perceptions encompassing production, investment, and tourism perspectives. Surprisingly, country image research exists in two parallel research streams—country of origin and destination—with almost no cross-references between them. This study develops a holistic model of country-of-origin image (COI) and destination image (DI) that unites both research streams and tests the relative importance of cognitive, affective, and symbolic country connotations to predict three consumer behavior outcome intentions (1) purchasing products and services, (2) traveling abroad, and (3) conducting business with foreign companies. Results reveal that overall, affective, and symbolic image dimensions complement and outperform cognitive dimensions. The article concludes with a discussion of the implications and guidelines for further research.

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1. Introduction

Increasing globalization and frequent travel increase people's exposure to products and services outside their daily environment. People are thus likely to dispose of pre-determined images when thinking about a certain country (Arnett, 2002). Despite considerable criticism about country image research's relevance (c.f. Samiee, 2010; Zeugner-Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2010) "all nations have images, whether deliberately cultivated or not" (Rojas-Méndez, Murphy, & Papadopoulos, 2013, p. 1028). Understanding these images is fundamental to managing the country as a brand, accounting for competitive strengths and weaknesses in the global marketplace (Anholt, 2002). Similar to corporations, countries are brands that encompass multiple roles, such as producers, exporters, investment locations, and migration or destinations (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). Country image research rarely considers all these roles (viz., Elliot, Papadopoulos, & Kim, 2011; Lee & Lockshin, 2012; Martínez & Alvarez, 2010; Nadeau, Heslop, O'Reilly, & Luk, 2008), focusing either on countries as product and service origin or a potential travel destination. Both concepts "refer to nearly the same area of applied marketing, namely export products to international

consumer markets" (Mossberg & Kleppe, 2005, p. 493). Integrating findings from both streams advances country image theory.

Country-of-origin (COO) and destination research offer similar conceptualizations for country-of-origin image (COI) and destination image (DI). The tourism literature overwhelmingly acknowledges that "destination image is a multidimensional construct comprising of two primary dimensions: cognitive and affective" (Hosany, Ekinci, & Uysal, 2006, p. 638). Similarly, a recent review of extant COI scales confirms that COI includes both cognitive and affective components (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). Surprisingly, especially in COO research, extant literature focuses primarily on cognitive and neglects affective components (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). Integrating both research streams helps to understand cognitive versus affective image dimension roles of countries as producers and travel destinations.

Apart from cognitive and affective image, both COI and DI research acknowledge a third component—country or destination personality. Like brand personality, country or destination personality captures a country's symbolic and self-expressive function by describing countries based on human personality traits (Hirschmann, 1994; Plummer, 1985). Fournier (1998) concludes that personality positioning helps legitimize the brand- (or country-) as-partner concept. People have little difficulty in assigning personality characteristics to inanimate objects (Aaker, 1997; Fournier, 1998). D'Astous and Boujbel (2007) develop a country personality scale that characterizes a particular country according to six personality dimensions. However, no known study explores the relationship and relative importance of a country's personality to (conventional) country image perceptions (i.e., beliefs and affect). Can a country portrayed as "aggressive" overcome this negative influence through economic development?

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This article uncovers multiple facets of consumers' COI and DI perceptions. The article's purpose is threefold. First, an inter-disciplinary literature review delineates the conceptual domain of cognitive, affective, and symbolic country and destination image dimensions, and develops a general model applicable to both the COI and DI contexts. Country and destination images “refer to the same object and are based in the same theory (beliefs, attitudes), [...] a review that compared constructs, measurement and findings across the two fields is much needed” (Mossberg & Kleppe, 2005, pp. 500–1).

Second, the study contrasts the predictive validity of cognitive, affective, and symbolic country connotations by employing three different outcomes frequently used in both research streams (e.g., Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011; Rojas-Méndez et al., 2013): intentions to (1) purchase products/services from that country, (2) travel to that country, and (3) do business with companies from that country or invest in that country. These outcomes are important because the notion of country image includes “the country as exporter, importer, and potential tourism, investment, or immigration destination, making its image a matter of vital importance to anyone living or otherwise interested in it” (Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2003, p. 427).

Third, variations exist in consumers' home country or destination perceptions (i.e., how consumers conceptualize their own country) and foreign country contexts (i.e., how consumers conceptualize foreign countries). This study explores these issues in the context of Europe due to the region's diversity of development levels (e.g., East vs. West) and cultural influence.

2. Conceptual background

2.1. Cognitive component

Country image's cognitive component is the model's most generic construct. The extant literature generally agrees that country and destination images represent consumers' attitudes toward a country or destination (Mossberg & Kleppe, 2005; Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009), and these attitudes' cognitive component summarizes their beliefs about that country or destination. For example, Martin and Eroglu (1993, p. 93) define country image as “the total of all descriptive, inferential, and informational beliefs about a particular country.” This definition is not materially different from destination image, which Crompton (1979, p. 18) defines as “the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination.”

At a foundation level, both COI and DI are generic constructs not linked to a specific context (Mossberg & Kleppe, 2005). However, both COI and DI can occur at different levels (see Fig. 1). Depending on the country's focal image, country persona occurs at product class and/or specific product level (Hsieh, Pan, & Setiono, 2004; Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2003). Country image's definition excludes products (Martin &

Eroglu, 1993), but the persona can pertain to specific products (e.g., COO refers to the place where certain products are made). In the latter case, researchers typically refer to the concept of product-country image (PCI) (Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2003), or the image products of a particular country have in the consumer's eyes (Roth & Romeo, 1992). Similarly, destination research examines destination image at a country, region, city, and tourist attraction level (Mossberg & Kleppe, 2005). At the country level, the focus is usually on the general place attributes (e.g., climate, social customs and characteristics, scenery), geographical notions, or categorization of attractions (Lew, 1987). The former especially is comparable to attributes typically present in COO research that characterize (general) country image (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009).

This study refers to the cognitive component of COI and DI as *country cognitions*. Country cognitions conceptualize at a general country level, focusing on attributes describing countries from both production and tourism perspectives (e.g., high standards, good education, high technical capabilities) (Coshall, 2000; Crompton, 1979; Nadeau et al., 2008; Parameswaran & Pisharodi, 1994).

2.2. Affective component

In contrast to the cognitive component, both COI and DI research largely neglect or wrongly conceptualize the affective component (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). The destination image literature primarily focuses on the affective (e.g., Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Walmsley & Young, 1998) or the cognitive component of DI (e.g., Oppermann, 1996; Schroeder, 1996), a paucity of studies focuses on both facets simultaneously (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; Elliot et al., 2011; Hosany et al., 2006; Martin & Cervino, 2011).

Images capture consumers' attitudes toward a country or destination, and attitudes commonly include both affective and cognitive components (Ajzen, 2001; Esses, Haddock, & Zanna, 1993). Following this common definition of attitudes as “a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object” (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, p. 6, emphasis added), attitude's affective part usually comprises *evaluative judgments* (e.g., like/dislike, pleasant/unpleasant, and positive/negative) (Ajzen, 2001; Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999).

Country affect refers to the affective component of COI and DI. Branding research uses evaluative judgments to conceptualize (affective) attitudes toward a brand (e.g., Schmitt, Pan, & Tavassoli, 1994). This study follows branding research and views country affect as the overall country or destination evaluation on a global dimension (e.g., favorable/unfavorable; positive/negative) (Bagozzi et al., 1999; Esses et al., 1993). This view follows previous research using evaluative judgments such as like/dislike (Heslop, Papadopoulos, Dowdles, Wall, & Compeau, 2004) and pleasant/unpleasant (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Elliot et al., 2011; Hosany et al., 2006; Walmsley & Young, 1998) to capture the affective part of COI and DI.

2.3. Symbolic component

Symbolic (country) connotations “reveal how product use and/or ownership associates the consumer with a group, role or self-image” (Lefkoff-Hagius & Mason, 1993, p. 101). The branding literature indicates that to capture objects' symbolic value for consumers, firms should animate, humanize, or somehow personalize brands. Anthropomorphism refers to people's tendency to attribute “humanlike characteristics to animals and nonhuman entities” (Kiesler, 2006, p. 149) and explains this phenomenon. Fournier (1998) contends that humans feel the need to anthropomorphize objects to facilitate interactions with the non-material world. Guthrie (1997) offers two complementary theories to explain this phenomenon. First, humans use their self-concept, or their extensive knowledge of themselves (familiarity theory), as a reference point to interpret the outside world. Second, humans feel

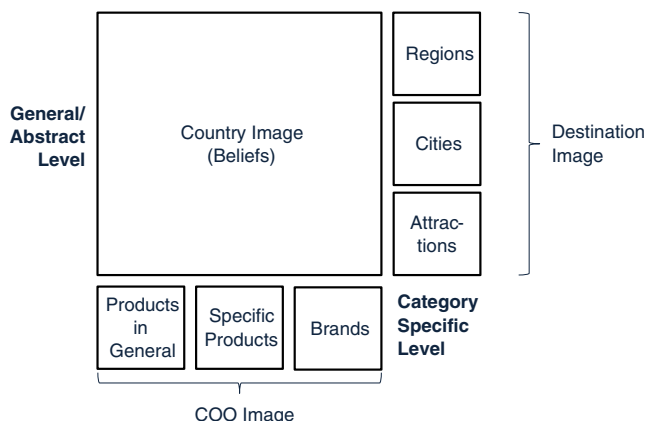


Fig. 1. Conceptualization of country beliefs (adapted from Mossberg & Kleppe, 2005).

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