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ATTITUDES OF STUDENTS TOWARD COUNTRY-OF-ORIGIN AND AUTO BRAND IMAGES

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Abstract

Personal and environmental factors determine the image of a company or a brand, which appears as an attitude of the perceiver. The attitudes of people against the products, countries and concepts are directly influential in their purchasing decisions. The objective of this research is to define whether there is a relation between the image of a country and that of the product. This study measures the attitudes of Turkish consumers against five countries and automobile brands from each of these countries. This study aims to identify whether there are any differences between the images of the countries and the respective automobile brands.

Keywords: Country of origin, country image, brand image, attitudes, perception, Turkey

1. INTRODUCTION

1. 1 Country of Origin Effects

The increase in the number of researches on country-of origin effect may be a sign of the increasing importance of the subject in the international marketing strategies in the late three decades. Country-of-origin effect has already been tested from the point of

views of different product groups, brands, purchase risks, prices, individual product characteristics and the level of social and economic development of the countries where the production is made. Besides these various aspects, the subject can still be investigated further, due to its unstable nature in time and geography. Some of the previous studies are Han and Terpstra, 1988; and Chao, 1993 related to country of origin.

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The products produced in the developing countries are not perceived of good quality and negative attitudes toward these are observed by Schooler (1965). In the succeeding investigations, the interest is to find out if the product quality perception and country-of-origin effects are general for all products or only for specific product groups (Reierson, 1966). It is also found that while there were some indications that a positive brand name does reduce the component origin effects, brand name's effect on assembly origin is much stronger and obvious. (Tse, D. K. and Lee, 1993: 39).

These researches, most of which were done and published in the developed countries, show that product perceptions are influenced by prejudgments (stereotypes) in a great extend (Cordel, 1992, Tse and Gorn, 1993). Such researches demonstrate a consumer's preference for the products of their own countries (Han, 1988; Hong & Wyer, 1989, Papadopoulas et.al.1990). This is defined as ethnocentrism (Hooley et.al.1988) which is also described as characterized by or based on the attitude that one's own race, culture, etc is superior. This attitude can be due to factors such as:

(1) a strong patriotism and national pride (Reierson 1966, Nagashima 1970);

(2) a threat for the native economies by the foreign products (Heslop & Papadopoulas, 1993);

(3) availability of the product related services (Han & Terpstra, 1988); and

(4) to be unaccustomed to the foreign products (Ettenson et.al, 1988). Pan, Lin and Tse (1999) also dwelled upon performance of foreign enterprises in China and the impact of mode of entry.

Even though in such researches on country-of-origin those related to the services are not numerous, the influence of

ethnocentrism is seen to be an important factor also in here. For example, it is determined that native airlines are preferred to others (Bruning, 1997). Nevertheless there are investigators who show that country-of-origin image can be changed by promotion campaigns (Nagashima 1970).

The next stage in the country-of-origin researches is generally aimed at the multi-country products. Due to the decrease of tariffs and non-tariff barriers and various cost advantages (such as economies of scale, inexpensive workmanship, raw materials and land) the distribution and concentration of assembling and item production in different countries is accelerated. This way of producing goods in different countries resulted in multi-country (hybrid) attributes and researchers of country-of-origin investigated besides the countries where the companies' main management center is located, where the product is assembled in or made in, also where the products are designed in, engineered in and the parts supplied from (Han and Terpstra 1988).

Seidenfuss (2005) also tried to give an automotive an automotive perspective to country of assembly and country of components effects for hybrid products.

2. DEFINITIONS

2.1 Definition of Brand

Many marketers say that branding is an art and corner stone of marketing. A brand is a name, term, sign, symbol, design, or combination of these that identifies the maker or seller of a product of service (Kotler & Armstrong, 2006). A brand is also some combination of attributes that identifies the products of one firm and differentiates them from competitor's offerings (Boone &

Kurtz, 1998). A brand is an audio-visual symbol for identifying and differentiating products from competitors. The words 'name, term, sign, symbol, design' that are almost synonymous are visual when written or drawn and aural when pronounced. For example, 'BP is a brand name composed of terms (British Petroleum or lately Beyond Petroleum...), signs, symbols (letters etc.) and their design are all visual on print and can be aural when pronounced.

2. 2 Definition of Image

A dictionary definition of image can be as the peoples' thoughts and perceptions for an object, institution or another person. In psychology, perception is a process whereby the organism selects, organizes and interprets sensory (related to the five senses) data available to it in the environment. In this context, perception is not only a physiologic phenomenon. If it were only physiologic, people with different experience and attributes would have the similar perception for the same object (Odaba?? & Bar??, 2002). According to Jungian psychology image is a personal facade that one presents to the world (<http://wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=image> 5/6/2007). While giving a general idea on image, these definitions are not operational, whereas definition of a construct has to be operational in order to be measured. An operational definition adds meaning to a construct by determining the necessary activities or operations for making measurements (Zikmund, 1991). A more operational definition for image may be an average of separate attitudes toward a product (a company, a brand, or a concept) (Kinneer & Taylor, 1996).

The product construct here has a broad

meaning as accepted by the marketing theorists. In another words, product can be anything that can be offered to someone to satisfy a need or want. Anything includes all goods and services, activities, events, persons (politicians, sportsmen, singers, fashion models, actors, etc.), places (continent, country, province, city, town, village, etc.), works of art (building, painting, statue, historical remnants etc.), businesses, institutions (government, hospital, educational institution, political parties, etc.) and ideas (inventions, philosophy, ideology, religion etc.) (Kotler, 1991).

Attitude is another basic concept for the marketing theory, for it influences the purchase behavior. According to Hawkins, Best & Conney (1998) an attitude is an enduring organization of motivational, emotional, perceptual and cognitive processes with respect to some aspect of our environment. Marketers generally try to understand the attitudes of potential customers and the people in contact with them. It is much more economical to understand the attitudes of the consumers and act accordingly rather than to try to change them. Attitudes seem to be enduring. But some times, changing present attitudes, especially negative ones, may be necessary and this is a very difficult job marketer's face (Perreault & McCarthy, 1997).

According to Penguin Dictionary attitudes are feelings, emotions or mental positions especially with regard to a situation, topic, person, etc. Attitudes are developed by individual experiences and personality traits. Consumers' attitudes toward the products of the enterprise are critical for the success of the marketing strategy. The number of personal attitudes is as many as the objects in the psychological

world. For this reason, every person has a broad set of attitudes toward things in the surroundings. On the other hand, the attitudes differ according to the level of perception and knowledge.

Some attitudes are sturdy due to the individual experiences. Because attitudes have verifiable traits, they can get weaker or stronger as a result of experience (Slamoğlu, 1996). All these may mean that attitudes, in a large extent, form by learning. An individual attitude doesn't prevail without changing till the end, but may transform with new information inputs (Arpacı, 1992). About a hundred attitude definitions were made in the last century, and over 500 scales were developed (Peter and Olson, 1990). A widely accepted definition can be, 'attitudes are a person's enduring favorable or unfavorable evaluations, emotional feeling, or pro or con action tendencies in regard to some object or data' (Boone & Kurtz, 1992).

In this definition the adjective 'enduring' is not explicit. It is not definite, if an hour, a month, a year, or a decade is considered. On the other hand, the stress put on the transformable feature of the construct in most definitions, increases the vagueness. The expression of 'some object or data' is covered by term 'product' in marketing. The phrases of 'evaluations, emotional feelings, or pro or con action tendencies' are related to the cognitive, affective and behavioral components respectively (Zikmund, 1997). In marketing, 'behavior' means intention to take action (for purchase, complaint), to converse in a positive or negative way in the neighborhood and to purchase or not to purchase. On the other hand in psychology, 'behavior' is defined as 'the response of a living thing to a stimulus.' Even though the definition covers cognitive, affective and behavioral components, with this later

definition, behavior can be learned by observation or in case of human by interviewing and for this reason can only be measured in the behavioral dimension with the available technology.

Attitudes measured by observations and interviews, try to learn consumers' attitudes on various subjects such as product safety, price, ordinariness, sturdiness, and etc., and can then be classified to be originating from cognitive, affective or motivating if the decision purposes demand as useful. By this approach, the adjective 'various' will have a more definite meaning that is questioning the customers on many different viewpoints of an attitude.

The term 'average' is considered in detail in statistics as, 'numerical summary measures of central tendency.' Although there is a controversy on the use of the mean in attitude measurements, it is widely used in practice. The median and the mode can also be used as averages in this subject. Various measures have to be taken in order to have a favorable image for a product or to improve it. Individuals may have different images toward products, but the same cultural group members' similar image perceptions. This is because group members are culturally conditioned to perceive in the same way (Kraft, 2000).

2.3 Country Image

Country image can be defined as an image that a country gains by other societies for a country's culture, products and people. When the subject is country image, we have to adjust the definition accordingly and use the term 'country' in place of 'product' -in which country is also included. Country image can be affected by direct experiences with a country and its products, and correct or

incorrect inferences from these, as well as outside sources of communication such as promotion or word of mouth (Martin and Eroglu, 1993). Commonly, country image is a reflection of the customers' general perceptions (attitudes) on the quality of the products, produced in a specific country, and the structure of the people in that country (Kraft, 2000).

Country image is affected by variables such as economic and political infrastructure, history and customs of the nation and other environmental factors representing the product. Most of the researchers accept the role of country of origin on the general evaluation for the product. In this way country of origin undertakes the task of standing for the attributes difficult to know (Nagashima, 1970).

Some researchers tried also to identify the inputs of the country of origin image. In these, they questioned the environmental factors in the willingness to accept a foreign product by the consumers in regard of the products' country of origin. They have investigated, if the culture, political climate and the development level of the country of origin effect, the consumers' purchase of a foreign product especially in the USA (Wang and Lamb, 1983).

Although previous studies used dissimilar variables to assess country image, four dimensions are common among the researchers: innovativeness (use of new technology and engineering advances in a product), design (the appearance, style, colors, and variety), prestige (the exclusivity, status, and brand name reputation), and workmanship (the product's reliability, durability, craftsmanship, and manufacturing quality) (Mohamed, Ahmed & Honeycutt, 2000).

2.4 Country of Origin

The country-of-origin can be defined as the country where the head office of the corporation marketing the product or brand is located. According to Phau and Prendergast (2000) country of origin is the location of production is not considered. Besides country-of-origin effect, we have also to mention the country-specific advantage (CSA), which means a trust for high-quality in the country where the production is made. For example, Germany is well known for high-quality manufacturing and this offers an advantage to firms with products made in Germany. When Volkswagen produced Rabbit model in the US in the late 1970s, many American customers preferred to buy the Germany produced cars. French fragrance products are also highly popular, so in the early 1980s the Japanese cosmetics firm Shiseido, hired Serge Lutens in Paris to do its new line of fragrances (Johansson, 1997). Despite this separation, it is not uncommon to see these terms united under the country-of-origin expression. We can see this meaning in the following extracts:

Many studies have shown that consumers evaluate a product not only by its appearance and physical characteristics but also by the country in which it was produced. Certain countries have a good image for certain products, such as Swiss for watches, France for women's fashion, Britain for men's fashion, Japan for electronics. If a firm is producing a product in a country which has no favorable image for that specific product, it may have a difficult job marketing it (Terpstra and Sarathy, 1997).

Sometimes some products, such as Honda Civic produced in USA are considered to be with double country-of-origin, that is the

head office of the firm marketing the product or brand is located in Japan and it is made in USA. How do the customers evaluate such product? Which country will have more weight? A research on colored TVs and small automobiles has revealed that both the country where the production is made and the brand name are effective on product image. In this research, country of origin (country-specific advantage) was more important than the brand name. But this does not mean that the product is perceived positively by all its attributes. For example German products are rated as being high quality, but from the point of economy they are considered to be low (Han and Terpstra 1988).

We can say that companies recognize the country of origin effects, sometimes as the country where the production is made,

origin of auto brands and if there is an association between the attitudes of the country image for the specified countries (namely Japan, Russia, USA, Germany and South Korea) and one of their automobile brands (Mazda, Lada, Chrysler, Mercedes and Kia). These brands are selected because of their production locations are not found in Turkey. We also wanted to get avoid of considering double country of origin.

The research is made in Kocaeli University Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences with a simple random sample of 125 students (n=125 students). Simple random sampling is based on a list of all students in the Faculty (N=3853 students). Therefore our results confine to this faculty and can be applied for the general future potential consumers only subjectively.

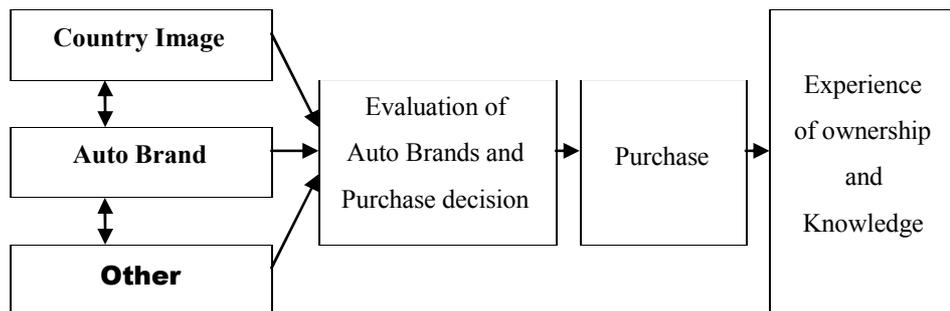


Figure 1. Effects of evaluation of Auto Brands and Purchasing Process

sometimes as where the brand originated and some times a combination of these, but as a useful marketing tool anyway and use it.

3. THE PURPOSE, CONTENT AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this research is to find out how well the future potential consumers (university students) know the country of

Other variables also shown in the first column may be much more effective in a purchase. Which we hold constant (*ceteris paribus*) These include situational factors such as needs and wants; competition; economic, technological and legal environments; and marketing mixes.

We can also show this model with symbols:

$$S = f(X_{bi}, X_{ci}, X_{ov})$$

Where;
 S = Purchase, X_{bi} = Brand image,
 X_{ci} = Country image and
 X_{ov} = other variables.

While country of origin image and automobile brand image are the two independent variables in the model these is a mutual effect between each other and the other variables as well. We will try to find out if there is an association between the auto brand images and country of origin images.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

Findings related to our first question, "Do the students know country of origin of the auto brands?" are as follows:

In the sample of 100, 99 answers were

and Chrysler giving a proportion of 0.888 and standard error of 0.031 and with 95 percent confidence interval 0.857 - 0.919 ($0.85 \leq \mu \leq 0.92$).

95 respondents correctly matched Germany and Mercedes giving a proportion of 0.959 and standard error of 0.019 and with 95 percent confidence interval 0.94 - 0.978 ($0.94 \leq \mu \leq 0.98$).

81 respondents correctly matched South Korea and Kia giving a proportion of 0.818 and standard error of 0.038 and with 95 percent confidence interval 0.78 - 0.856 ($0.78 \leq \mu \leq 0.86$).

Details of Brand - Country matches are in table 1.

Findings related to our second question, "What are the attitudes developed by students toward specific countries?" are as in the second table 2 below.

Table 1. Brand - Country matches (Unit: Person)

		KIA	LADA	MAZDA	CRYSLER	MERCEDES
Valid	S. Korea	81	9	6	1	1
	Russia	1	87	11	2	0
	Japan	15	2	80	5	0
	USA	0	1	2	88	3
	Germany	2	0	0	3	95
	Total	99	99	99	99	99
Missing		1	1	1	1	1
Total		100	100	100	100	100

valid and 80 respondents correctly matched Japan and Mazda giving a proportion of 0.808 and standard error of 0.03 and with 95 percent confidence interval 0.778 - 0.838 ($0.78 \leq \mu \leq 0.84$).

87 respondents correctly matched Russia and Lada giving a proportion of 0.879 and standard error of 0.03 and with 95 percent confidence interval 0.849 - 0.909 ($0.85 \leq \mu \leq 0.91$). 88 respondents correctly matched USA

Findings related to our third question, "What are the attitudes developed by students toward a specific automobile brand for each of these countries?" are as in the following Table 3.

Findings related to our fourth question, "Is there an association between the images of specific country and auto brands?" can be extracted from the above information by correlation analysis.

Table 2. Country Images (on a scale between -5 and +5)

	JAPAN	RUSSIA	USA	GERMANY	S. KOREA
N Valid	119	119	119	119	119
I Missing	6	6	6	6	6
Mean	2,6588	,6482	2,0131	2,3403	1,4674
Std. Error of Mean	,07040	,11686	,08245	,08291	,11377
Median	2,8571	,6552	1,9667	2,3000	1,7333
Mode	2,93	1,79	1,33(a)	1,23(a)	1,97
Std. Deviation	,76792	1,27474	,89942	,90449	1,24113

(a) Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

Table 3. Auto Brand Images (on a scale between -5 and +5)

	MAZDA	LADA	CHRYSLER	MERCEDES	KIA
N Valid	119	119	119	119	119
I Missing	6	6	6	6	6
Mean	1,7324	-,8430	2,4354	3,5441	1,3613
Std. Error of Mean	,11899	,14542	,10268	,07575	,12329
Median	1,9667	-1,0333	2,6000	3,7333	1,5517
Mode	1,83(a)	-2,07	2,70(a)	4,13	1,97
Std. Deviation	1,29801	1,58639	1,12009	,82637	1,34497

(a) Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

The calculated correlation between The Images of Russia and Lada:

r	r Square	Adjusted r Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
,403	,163	,156	1,17142

The relationship is a weak one, as it is less than 0,4 (Kinnear and Taylor, 1996; 593).

The calculated correlation between The Images of Germany and Mercedes:

r	r Square	Adjusted r Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
,398	,159	,151	,83322

The relationship is a weak one, as it is less than 0,4.

The calculated correlation between The Images of South Korea and Kia:

r	r Square	Adjusted r Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
,361	,130	,123	1,16251

The relationship is a weak one, as it is less than 0,4.

The calculated correlation between The Images of Japan and Mazda:

r	r Square	Adjusted r Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
,335	,112	,104	,72672

The relationship is a weak one, as it is less than 0,4.

The calculated correlation between The Images of USA and Chrysler:

r	r Square	Adjusted r Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
,225	,050	,042	,88018

The relationship is a weak one, as it is less than 0,4.

5. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

In this article we tried to analyze Turkish consumers attitudes toward country of origin for automobile brands. Globally known brands like Toyota, Honda, Renault, Fiat, Ford have some direct investments in Turkey however Mercedes, Mazda, Kia, Lada and Chrysler automobile brands have still not direct investment in Turkey. We also want to get avoid to consider double country of origin.

In our study respondents correctly matched country of origin and auto brands within ranges of %81 and %96 (Japan-Mazda %81, South Korea-Kia %82, Russia-Lada %88, USA-Chrysler %89, Germany-Mercedes %96). This may be inferred as country of origin of mature and well established auto brands (Germany-Mercedes) can be remembered more correctly, but new and weakly established (Japan-Mazda, South Korea-Kia, Russia-Lada, USA-Chrysler) are known less. In another words, to be a product (automobile) of a being strong, developed or wealthy country may be less important, than to be mature and well established in the market. Because Mercedes brand name has been always concession to the other brands in Turkish expatriates or immigrant workers in Germany and the brand has become credible to Turkish consumers while there were only

two brands of Renault and Tofas (later Fiat-Tofas) that produced as an import substitution in Turkey at the beginning of 70's. From that times Mercedes has also known as a wealthy car. This means Mercedes has also a CSA in Turkish Market. If we had asked respondents to match Germany with another German auto brand such as Audi, we would have a different proportion, but this issue may be the subject of a further research.

In the second group, although Lada and Chrysler are not well established brands in the market, their country of origin being of more current interest Russia and USA which were the two competitors of Cold war, they are remembered more correctly than Mazda and Kia, also not so well established brands of Japan and South Korea. Another reason for Kia being wrongly matched may be that both Japan and South Korea are from Far East and especially Kia sounds Japanese in Turkey, due to the popular Judo, Karate and Taekwando shouts. And it can also interpret as the less knowledge of Turkish customers about these Far East countries. Generally all qualified products from Far East countries are kept as Japanese and most non-qualified products are kept as Chinese in these days. We reached the result that Kia is perceived of good quality and there is no negative attitudes toward Kia brand even South Korea is a developing country which means Schooler's results are not suitable for Turkish Automobile Market.

Mazda and Kia auto brands are counted as the qualified products. This is important because this means not only the brand image the country image affects the customer's mind also the technological position. South Korea has a good position in consumers mind with all of the electronic devices mobile phones in Turkish market which also

brings a meaning of technology and innovation. There is also another interest to Koreans because of the Korean War which was held in 1950-1953 that some Turkish Troops sent by United Nations.

These are all means of prejudgements while buying a product like automobile however the prices, service quality and quantities etc. are also another issue.

This high proportion of correct matches of country of origin and auto brands provided us to go one step further and look for the rates of countries of origin and auto brands in order to be able to see if there is an association between these two.

For Countries of origin, respondents rated Japan with the highest score 2.66; next Germany with 2.34; third USA 2.01; fourth South Korea 1.47; and Russia 0.65.

For Auto Brands, Mercedes has the highest score (3.54), followed by Chrysler (2.44), Mazda (1.73), Kia (1.36) and Lada (-0.84).

Ordering these two image scores, while Japan has the highest image score, Mazda is in the third row. Germany is second on the country image score, but has the highest auto image with Mercedes. USA is on the third and Chrysler on the second row. South Korea and Kia are on the fourth row. Lastly Russia with Lada is rated to be the fifth.

There seems to be a very weak association between Auto and Country images. Correlation between the images of Russia and Lada ($r = 0.403$); Germany and Mercedes ($r = 0.398$); South Korea and Kia ($r = 0.361$), Japan and Mazda ($r = 0.335$); USA and Chrysler ($r = 0.225$) are all below 0.41.

There seems to be other important factors associated to the brand and country images, which is good news for established auto brands, because such auto brands as

Mercedes, Chrysler and Mazda have high scores. Good news also, for developing countries planning to enter the auto market in Turkey, because they don't need to be from a country with a good country image as the correlations between country and brand images are weak. But this study should also perform to other kind of consumer products to understand the consumers preferences better. This study could also be done in a cross cultural extent.

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