

Investigating Relationship between Internal Structure of Country Image and Product Attitude

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Abstract

The formation of consumer's attitudes toward products is rooted in different factors, including pricing, packaging, product design, brand, etc. Among these, this study examines the manufacturer's country, which in the international marketing literature is referred to as the Country image, and the relationships between its comprising components. Graduate and postdoctoral students of Ferdowsi University of Mashhad are considered as research population. The selected product in order to study the attitude is Automobile and four selected countries for studying country image are Germany, Japan, South Korea and China. Research data are acquainted and analyzed through 390 questionnaires distributed in June and July, 2013, in which the Cronbach's alpha is calculated as 0.91. Research hypotheses were tested by multiple regressions technique using SPSS 16.0 tool. Results confirm the triple structure of country image, indicating the country image's effect on product attitude. Furthermore, according to study results, cognitive component of the Country image has the most significant impact on the Beliefs. it's affective component has the most significant impact on the evaluation and conative component of the country image has the most significant impact on the purchase intention. Regarding to the internal structure of the Country image, results confirmed cognitive component's influence on affective component; while the impacts of the affective component on conative component and cognitive component on conative component were not supported by research findings.

Keywords: Country image, cognitive component, affective component, conative component, product attitude.

Introduction:

Understanding consumer behavior is one of the most important purposes of marketing research. That is why a wide range of studies has been conducted by researchers on this subject. A branch of these studies focused on understanding the consumer attitudes and identifying the factors that influence purchase intentions. The information and data that are given to the consumer, all aim to changing the existing attitudes or create new ones toward the product. The empirical evidence indicates that the majority of human actions are influenced by his attitudes. Pundits believe that attitudes determine behaviors, thus through studying individuals' behavior, we can anticipate or control their attitudes. In this regard, a variety of factors such as price, packaging, after sales services, brand, etc. are identified and introduced. Also, various studies demonstrate that consumers, faced with products made in different countries, reflect different reactions (e.g. Erickson, Johansson and Chao, 1984; Ahmed, Johnson, Yang, Fatt, Teng and Boon, 2004; Berentzen, Bachhaus, Michaelis, Blut and Ahlert, 2008; Brijs, Bloemer and Kasper, 2011).

This study is to examine the role of the country's image on the attitude toward the product and purchase intention. Papadopoulos and Heslop (2003) believe that the country image have an effect on the way we think about and evaluated a particular product. At the beginning stages when this concept introduced, it was being raised and studied alone and isolated in an environment without impacting the other factors (e.g. Erickson et al., 1984). Later, other operating factors such as price, warranty, packaging and guaranty received attention along with it (refer to Ahmed and D'astous, 1999). In a newer approach this concept was studied from a more psychology and semantic aspect (e.g. Heslop, Papadopoulos, the Dowdles, Wall and Compeau 2004). This study aims to examine the country of origin through semantic paradigm in order to study the signification that country of origin associates with the consumer as well as to survey the impact it inserts on the pragmatic aspect. In other words, the purpose is to study individuals' subjectivity toward the countries and how they influence purchase behavior.

Theoretical background

country image: Consumers have stereotypical assumptions about countries which are used as an informative sign of judgment about the goods manufactured in different countries (Lotz and Hu, 2001). . Ruth and Romeo (1992) define the country image as "The overall perceptions of consumers about products manufactured in a specific country as a result of previous perceptions of the extent of the strengths or weaknesses that country's products world-wide. Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999) refer to the country image as subjective representations of consumer's minds on people, products, culture and national symbols of a country, that are mostly focused on economic, technological, social and political factors. Among provided definitions, Nagashima's (1970) as the first conceptualizing of regarding the country of origin has been widely accepted. He refers to the country image as the reputation or a stereotype that businessmen and consumers impute to the products of a particular country and believes that several parameters are responsible for the creation of a image as a representative of country-specific products. For instance, national characteristics, political and economical background, history and traditions are of the kind. Bannister and Saunders (1987) in another definition stress images are created through different variables such as outstanding products quality, the level of country's economic and politics maturity, historical events and relations, traditions and industrial and technological level. Moreover, Allred, Chakraborty and Miller (1999) add three different elements to this conception, including the extent of conflict with other nations, working conditions and the level of attention toward environmental issues.

Scholars do not agree on the components the country image. A few believe that the country image is a single-component concept including cognitive elements. Bilkey and Nes (1982) evaluate country of origin solely consisting of a cognitive component. From this view point, the country of origin is a cognitive sign for the consumer that reflects quality of the product, based on economical and technological levels (Obermiller and Spangenberg, 1989). Martin and Eroglu (1993) was examined country image from three aspects of economic, political and technological, thus mainly focused on the cognitive component (Martin and Eroglu 1993). Shimp et al. (1999) surveyed the cognitive

structure of consumers about products and suggest that the cognitive categories of countries are associated with memory-based representations, where consumers classify the image of a country based on few well-known products.

Few others provide a two-component definition with cognitive and affective components. according to the Obermiller and Spangenberg (1989), sometimes consumers despite having positive beliefs about the key features of a product, due to negative perceptions of the country of origin, reflect varied purchasing behaviors. They consider this process under the name of the affective process. Jaffe and Carlos (1995), Häubl (1996), Fournier (1998) , Ashill and Sinha (2004) and Wang et al. (2012) consider the structure of the country image comprised form cognitive and affective components. Wang et al (2012) believe that cognitive component reflects the consumer's perspective about economic development, intellectual level, living standards, technological progress, industrialization, while, the affective component refers to the consumer's sentiments including affection or hatred as well as positive or negative attitude toward a country and its citizens (Wang et al., 2012).

Others refer Country image as a three-part concept and add the normative component or action intention. Smith (1990) administers the term "customer voting" in order to express the normative component. He states that the customer vote for a country's Government policies and measures by purchasing (or not purchasing) its products. Obermiller and Spangenberg (1989) consider three cognitive, affective and normative components country image. Affective component is a steryotype that repeals any assessment based on the characteristics of the product. The normative process occurs only upon existence of norms associated with the country (Obermiller and Spangenberg, 1989). Parameswaran and Pisharodi (1992) examined the structure of country image. Confirmatory Factor Analysis revealed that country image is a three-component structure including cognitive, affective and action intention component. Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999) also considered a three-component structure of cognitive, affective and normative for country image. They suggested that the cognitive component includes economic situation,

workforce and culture. The affective component includes affective and symbolic aspects as well as elements such as national pride, identity and previous using experience. Finally, the normative component reflects the consumer's vote to purchase or not to purchase products from a specific country, or in other words, to boycott or not to boycott such products for the sake of political issues (Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999).

product Attitude: attitude is an evaluation or an estimate either in favor or against an object, a person, or an event that reflects the way a person feel towards a subject (Robbins, 2009). Two distinct concepts in psychology literature has been developed concerning the attitude. One refers to attitude as a single structure. For example, Thurstone (1931) considers the attitude a psychological reaction against a subject. The second category sees it as a multi-component structure consisting of two or more components. According to Rosenberg and Hovland (1960) the attitude is an introduction to stimulate and provide behavioral, emotional and cognitive component (Ostrom, 1969). Kothandapani (1971) also takes into account three components of belief, assessment and action intention as the constituent components of the attitude, stating that the component of action intention is a better predictor than two other components (belief and affection) for behavior. Moreover, Heslop, et al. (2004) also considers the attitude as a three structural component: belief, assessment and purchase intention. By cognitive influences we mean the learning influences that include attention, awareness, belief, knowledge, perception and comprehension. This component includes all of

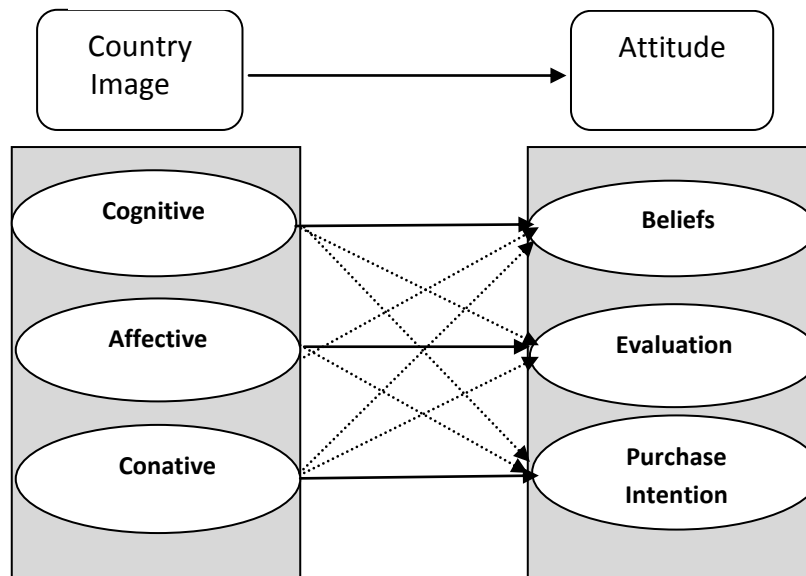
the influences that will make an overall understanding and conception about product and its features possible. Affective effects are emotional influences including interest, attitude, belief, desire and being evaluated. In other words, the affective component implies that how a potential consumer feels about a product. The practical component refers to the practical and action consequences that includes act, sell, intention, behavior and purchase (Shin, 2006). Thus it can be stated that the cognitive component, affective component and the practical component are synonymous with the concept of belief, assessment and purchase intention respectively.

Relation between country image and product attitude: Wang et al (2012) examined the country image components and their relationship with purchase intention and attitude. They surveyed 1200 individuals from five major cities in China and studied the country image of Germany, Japan, South Korea and the United States. They considered two components for the country's image including cognitive and affective. Results obtained revealed the significant relationship between the cognitive component of the country's image and product image, and the product image has an effect on customer purchase intention. In other words, product image moderates the influence of cognitive component on purchase intention, as this cognitive component has an indirect relationship with purchase intention. Also, the affective component of the country image affects product image; while, it influences purchase intention directly.

Brijs et al. (2011) surveyed a sample of 1225 consisting of two distinct groups of senior graduate students at the University of Belgium. They studied image influences of two countries, Denmark and Spain, on the attitude toward two products (DVD players and drinks) and suggest the impact of country's image on attitudes toward product. It was also revealed that cognitive, affective and action intentions exert impacts on three components of attitude, namely belief, evaluation and purchase intention. The results also indicated that among country image components, the effect of affective component was more significant in shaping the attitude toward drinks, while in the case DVD Players, cognitive component gained the position. Chandrasen and Paliwoda (2009) studied the effects of automotive manufacturing assembly location on perceptions of 186 Thai consumers regarding consumers' reviews about quality. Results demonstrate that vehicles assembled in the industrial countries were more preferred by consumers. It also became apparent that having a brand which associates a high quality product may weaken the negative impact of thoughts of a poor assembly location. Berentzen, Bachhaus, Michaelis, Blut and Ahlert (2008) studied the impact of the country image on purchase intention in service sector. The sample consisted of 208 students to review banking and airlines industries. In the banking industry three countries of Germany, Switzerland and the

Netherlands and in the airline industry, Czech Republic, Spain and Germany were selected to examine the country image. The research results disclosed in the absence of other signs of quality, country image affects purchasing intention positively; while other signs of quality may result in less intention. Laroach et al. (2005) also conducted a study among 1200 North American car buyers to experimentally verify the three component structure of the country image. The product being surveyed was vehicle and the countries of choice were Sweden and Japan. They expressed that the country image is a three-component structure consisting of consumers' beliefs about a country, their affection toward the people of that country and the desired level of interaction with the relevant country from the perspective of the consumers. In the suggested model, beliefs acts as a mediator variable in the relationship between country image and the product evaluation. However, they suggest a direct association between country image and product evaluation. Moreover, results analysis shows that when the affective component is greater than the cognitive component, the effects of image product evaluation, in comparison with beliefs toward, is more significant. Furthermore, same results are obtained when the affective component exceeds the cognitive one. Also, irrespective of the level of consumer understanding about a product, the country image significantly affects product evaluation as well as beliefs toward products. Ahmed et al. (2004) examined the impact of country image on the attitude of the customer toward products with lower levels of involvement. The results suggest the impact of country image on the attitudes toward given products. However, as the external factors such as price and brand name were entered, they weakened the effect. Butt (2001) carried out a study in Pakistan, aiming to study the effects of the country of origin on consumer attitudes in the countries of Germany, Japan and South Korea, major importers in Pakistan. Although the primary thought was that the country of origin has no impact on attitude toward the product, variance analysis of 145 cases concludes that the attitude toward a particular product is greatly under influence of the country of origin, as a labeled tag. Therefore, hypotheses regarding the country of origin not influencing the attitudes toward product were strongly rejected. Verleg and Steenkamp (1999) conducted a meta-analysis of 41 experimental studies about the influence of the country image on the attitude toward product and concluded that the country image exerts greater impact on product perceptual quality rather than attitude and purchase intention. They also expressed that the type of goods does not act as a moderator in the relationship between the country image and the attitude toward the product. Moreover, no significant difference between the extent of impact that the country image exerts on shaping the attitudes toward the Hybrid and non-hybrid products were revealed. Häubl (1996) studied the impact of the country image of the Chech Republic on the attitudes of German and French consumers toward Chech vehicles. One of the most important findings of this study was that the brand and the country image have a significant impact on evaluations about a new car. Also they believed that the affective component of the country image influences the cognitive component and discussed that the effect of the brand name on the attitudes toward a new car is direct. However, the country image has both direct and indirect associations with the attitude- the direct impact was more extensive. Assessment of the car's appearance and other characteristics act as mediator variables in the impact of country image on car's overall assessment. Overseas production not only has effects on buyers' overall assessments, but also it influences the perceptions about specific features, technical specification, appearance, etc. Findings suggest that the information about product manufacturing location generally affects beliefs about the characteristics of the product , which consequently affects the attitudes and behavioral intentions.

Figure1. Country image model



Research hypotheses

- H1: country image has an effect on the product attitude.
- H1a: The effect of the cognitive component of country image on beliefs exceeds two other components: evaluation and purchase intention.
- H1b: The effect of the affective component of the country image on evaluation exceeds two other components: beliefs and purchase intention.
- H1c: The effect of the action intention component of the country image on purchase intention exceeds two other components: beliefs and evaluation.

Methodology

This study is a descriptive survey to investigate the relationship between the country image and attitude toward the product, as well as to study relationship between components of the country image with components of the attitude. A questionnaire was used for data collection comprising two parts: demographic information and variables examination (including 13 items for the country image and 7 items for attitude components). The items related to cognitive components were derived from a standard questionnaire, presented by Papadopoulos and Heslop (1999), affective component items were extracted from Laroch et al (2005), items related to action intention component were derived from Verlegh, et al. (2001), and finally items related to attitude were extracted from Brijs et al (2010). To

assess all items, five-scale likert measure were utilized (1 = very low, 5 = very high).

In order to examine the reliability of the study, a pretest including 30 cases was conducted. Using the data obtained from the questionnaires, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for cognitive, affective and action intention components and for variables of belief, evaluation and purchase intention equaled to %91.82, %81.38, %81.87, %96, %92.5 and %92.7 respectively. These results indicate highly-leveled study reliability. Study population consists of 9103 graduate student from Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, including 6155 masters and 2948 doctoral students (table 1).

In order to assess content-related validity, five managerial scholars' feedbacks were gathered and confirmative factor analysis was applied in order

to assess the constructive validity. In the factor analysis of cognitive, affective and action intention component variables, the KMO measure equaled to 0.75, 0.51 and 0.51 respectively. Also, for variables of belief, evaluation and purchase intentions, the amount of KMO calculated as 0.75, 0.51 and 0.51, respectively, suggesting that the sample size suffices for the study structure. Furthermore, as the Bartlet Test coefficient equaled to zero, factor analysis confirmed relevant to identify the structure of both variables (table 2). Cluster sampling method has been used in this study. A total of 13 clusters consisting of university faculties were selected and within each cluster, class sampling is used. Appropriate statistical sample size at the error level of 5 percent using Cochran measures equaled to 369. For this, 420 questionnaires distributed. After eliminating unusable questionnaires, 390 cases consisting of 253 doctoral and 137 master students were obtained. In this study, in order to investigate the country image, four countries of Germany, Japan, South Korea and China are chosen, which according to the customs statistics

published in 2012, were most important importers of goods to Iran. Hence, the sample is divided into four groups and each group responded to the questions relating to a specific country.

Analysis and results: From the total of 390 sample members, 196 cases were men (%50.3) and 194 cases were women (%49.7). In aspect of education, %64.9 of the respondents was master's students and %35.1 was doctoral students. As can be observed, with the exception of the correlation of purchase intentions with cognitive and affective components, other measures are significant. Among the variables, the most significant correlation measure belongs to product attitude as the measures between evaluation and beliefs, purchase intention and evaluation and purchase intention and beliefs respectively equaled to 0.86, 0.84 and 0.75 (table3). To review the accuracy of the model, confirmative factor analysis has been applied, as a common statistical method to examine relationships among latent variables (obtained factors) and observed variables (items), representing research model (Byrne, 1994).

Table 1: Cronbach's alpha to to examine the reliability

components	variable	Cronbach's alpha	
Cognitive	Country image	0.88	0.91
Affective			0.81
Conative			0.81
Beliefs	Attitude	0.95	0.96
Evaluation			0.92
Purchase intention			0.92

Table 2: KMO measure and Bartlett's test to assess appropriateness of the data for factor analysis

Variable	Bartlet test	KMO	p-Value
Country image	7.29	0.88	0.00
Cognitive component	9.17	0.92	0.00
Affective component	1.40	0.70	0.00
Conative component	9.43	0.70	0.00
Attitude	8.32	0.91	0.00
Beliefs	7.91	0.75	0.00
Evaluation	5.5	0.50	0.00
Purchase intention	3.78	0.50	0.00

Table 3: Variables loaded in the factors using varimax rotated factor analysis

	Component	variable	Factor loadings
Country image	Cognitive component	culture	0.83
		Political climate	0.82
		Language	0.81
		History	0.82
		Economic	0.69
		Religion	0.81
	Affective component	people	0.78
		Likeable	0.75
		Hard working	0.84
	Conative component	Trustworthy	0.77
Work		0.68	
Do business		0.77	
shop		0.57	
Product attitude	beliefs	Durability	.68
		Performance	0.77
		Reliability	0.57
	evaluation	Appeal	0.68
		Overall quality	0.77
	Purchase intention	Buy	0.57
		consider	0.68

As can be seen, all factor loading measures exceed 0.5 which confirms the three-component structure of the country image and attitude toward the product.

Table 4: correlation coefficients between variables

	variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
Country Image	Cognitive component	1.00					
	Affective component	0.48*	1.00				
	Conative Component	0.24*	0.35**	1.00			
Product Attitude	Beliefs	0.20*	0.16*	0.62*	1.00		
	Evaluation	0.20*	0.18*	0.64*	0.86*	1.00	
	Purchase intention	0.02	0.01	0.68*	0.75*	0.84*	1.00

*significant at $\alpha=.05$, ** significant at $\alpha=.01$

Research hypotheses test: In order to test research hypotheses, regression analysis and using SPSS 0.16 software has been conducted. One of the primary premises for any regression analysis is normality of standardized residues. If they stand on a straight line, the normality assumption is confirmed. Moreover, Durbin-Watson test is used to examine independence of residues. The coefficient of this test is usually between 1 and 3, the closer to number 2, the more independent are residues. The R^2 measures upon different stages of the analysis indicate the extent of independent variable variance being explained by the dependent variable. In case this measure equals to 0.15 for each independent variable and also ΔR^2 exceeds 0.05, it shows that the independent variable is an appropriate predictor for independent variable variance, which leads to relevant hypothesis being confirmed.

- H1: country image has an effect on the product attitude

Table 5: Standardized beta coefficients for the effect of Conative component on beliefs, evaluation and purchase intention

Test Hypothesis	Un-standardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	T	P-value
	B	Standard Deviation			
Country Image → Product Attitude	0.42	0.05	0.72	20.40	0.00

Table 6: Hypothesis Test

Test Hypothesis	R	R ²	ΔR ²	Durbin-Watson Coefficient
Country Image → Product Attitude	0.42	0.18	0.18	1.88

As shown in table 5 and 6, standardized beta coefficients for the effects of Country Image on Product Attitude is 0.42 Also, R² measure for this relationship equals to 0.18, which is more than 0.15, while the measure of ΔR² exceeds 0.05 (equals to 0.18). This reveals that the hypothesized regression association is significant. Thus, H1 hypothesis is to be confirmed, according to research data.

- H1a: The effect of the cognitive component of country image on beliefs exceeds two other components: evaluation and purchase intention.

Figure 2, normality assumption of regression model for variables associated with cognitive component

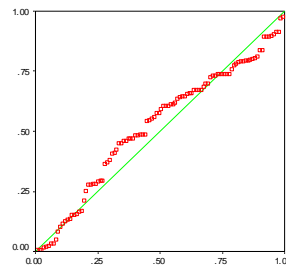


Table7: Standardized beta coefficients for the effect of cognitive component on beliefs, evaluation and purchase intention

Test Hypothesis	Un-standardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	T	P-value
	B	Standard Deviation			
Cognitive Component → Beliefs	0.26	0.05	0.23	4.67	0.00
Cognitive Component → Evaluation	0.01	0.06	0.14	0.23	0.78
Cognitive Component → Purchase Intention	0.03	0.08	0.02	0.41	0.67

Table 8: Hypothesis Test

Test Hypothesis	R	R ²	ΔR ²	Durbin-Watson Coefficient
Cognitive Component → Beliefs	0.39	0.15	0.051	1.89
Cognitive Component → Evaluation	0.01	0.00	0.00	1.56
Cognitive Component → Purchase Intention	0.02	0.00	0.00	2.44

As shown in table 7 and 8, standardized beta coefficients for the effects of Cognitive component on beliefs, evaluation and purchase intention are calculated. It is indicated that standardized beta coefficient for the effect of Cognitive component on Beliefs exceeds those of on evaluation and purchase intention (equaled to 0.23). Also, R² measure for this relationship equals to 0.152, which is more than 0.15, while the measure of ΔR² exceeds 0.05 (equals to 0.051). This reveals that the hypothesized regression association is significant. Thus, H1a hypothesis is to be confirmed, according to research data.

- H1b: The effect of the affective component of the country image on evaluation exceeds two other components: beliefs and purchase intention.

Figure 3, normality assumption of regression model for variables associated with affective component

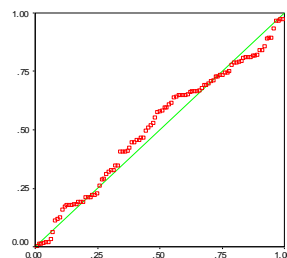


Table 5: Standardized beta coefficients for the effect of Affective component on beliefs, evaluation and purchase intention

Test Hypothesis	Un-standardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	T	P-value
	B	Standard Deviation			
Affective Component → Beliefs	0.18	0.05	0.16	3.33	0.00
Affective Component → Evaluation	0.23	0.06	0.18	3.36	0.78
Affective Component → Purchase Intention	0.06	0.08	0.03	0.72	0.42

Table 6: Hypothesis Test

Test Hypothesis	R	R ²	ΔR ²	Durbin-Watson Coefficient
Affective Component → Beliefs	0.16	0.02	0.05	1.98
Affective Component → Evaluation	0.18	0.152	0.00	2.50
Affective Component → Purchase Intention	0.03	0.00	0.00	2.41

As shown in table 5 and 6, standardized beta coefficients for the effects of Affective component on beliefs, evaluation and purchase intention are calculated. It is indicated that standardized beta coefficient for the effect of Affective component on evaluation exceeds those of on Beliefs and purchase intention (equaled to 0.18). Also, R² measure for this relationship equals to 0.152, which is more than 0.15, while the measure of ΔR² exceeds 0.05 (equals to 0.15). This reveals that the hypothesized regression association is significant. Thus, H1b hypothesis is to be confirmed, according to research data.

- H1c: The effect of the action intention component of the country image on purchase intention exceeds two other components: beliefs and evaluation.

Figure 4, normality assumption of regression model for variables associated with conative component

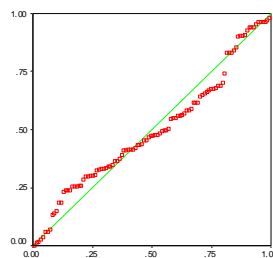


Table 7: Standardized beta coefficients for the effect of Conative component on beliefs, evaluation and purchase intention

Test Hypothesis	Un-standardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	T	P-value
	B	Standard Deviation			
Conative Component → Beliefs	0.59	0.03	0.61	15.21	0.00
Conative Component → Evaluation	0.71	0.04	0.63	16.08	0.00
Conative Component → Purchase Intention	1.04	0.05	0.72	20.04	0.00

Table 8: Hypothesis Test

Test Hypothesis	R	R ²	ΔR ²	Durbin-Watson Coefficient
Conative Component → Beliefs	0.61	0.37	0.37	2.45
Conative Component → Evaluation	0.63	0.40	0.38	2.11
Conative Component → Purchase Intention	0.72	0.51	0.51	1.98

As shown in table 7 and 8, standardized beta coefficients for the effects of Conative component on beliefs, evaluation and purchase intention are calculated. It is indicated that standardized beta coefficient for the effect of Conative component on Purchase Intention exceeds those of on beliefs and evaluation (equaled to 0.72). Also, R² measure for this relationship equals to 0.51, which is more than 0.15, while the measure of ΔR² exceeds 0.05 (equals to 0.51). This reveals that the hypothesized regression association is significant. Thus, H1c hypothesis is to be confirmed, according to research data.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the data analysis demonstrate that variance in cognitive component of the country image explains 15 percent of variance in beliefs. While it does not explain any variance in evaluate and purchase intention. Therefore, the effect of cognitive component on the beliefs component exceeds its impact on evaluation and purchase intention. This result is in congruent with the results obtained in Laroch, et al. (2005) and Brijs et al. (2011). Also variance in affective component of the country image explains 15 percent of variance in evaluation, 2.8 percent of

variance in beliefs and 0.1 percent in purchase intention. So, the effect of affective component on evaluation is greater than its impact on beliefs and purchase intention. The result of this hypothesis is consistent with Laroch, et al. (2005), Brijs et al (2011) while they are inconsistent with Ashill and Sinha (2004).

Furthermore, for conative component, 61 percent of variance in Beliefs, 63 percent of variance in evaluation and 72 percent of variance in purchase intention is explained. Therefore conative component explains the most variance in purchase intention and this hypothesis is to be

confirmed. These results are in congruent with Brijs et al (2011). According to the results obtained impact on the country image explains 18 percent of variance in product Attitude. Accordingly, it can be stated that in the research sample, the manufacturer country image influences the customer attitude toward the vehicle. The beliefs shaped regarding durability, quality and product reliability are under the influence of manufacturer country image. Also, consumer's evaluation of pleasantness and quality of the product as well as product purchase intention are influenced by the manufacturer country image. This result is consistent with Häubl (1996), Verlegh and steenkamp (1999), Butt (2001), Cai (2002), Hsieh and Pan (2004), Ahmed et al. (2004), Laroch, et al. (2005) and Brijs et al. (2011), all which confirmed the influence of the country image on attitude and purchase intention.

However, results are discordant with Montesinos, Roth, Diamantopoulos and Bigné, (2006), which did not provide sufficient grounds for accepting the impact of the country image on the product attitude. It also can be found from obtained results that among three components of the country image, conative component is the most influential on beliefs as it explains 37.4 percent of belief's variance, while affective and cognitive component explain 2.8 and 15 percent respectively. The conative component is the most effective on evaluation among country image components, as it explains 40 percent of affective cognitive component, while cognitive and affective components explain 0.1 and 15.2 percent of variance in evaluation. Finally, conative component is the most influential on purchase intention among three country images components, as it explains 51.8 of the variance in purchase intention, while cognitive and affective explain 0.01 and 0.1 of variance respectively.

Consequently, it can be noted that the most influential component of the country image on the attitude toward product is conative component. In other words, when the consumer intervenes the country image on the attitude toward product, the most impacting component is conative component and the desire to work, invest and live in one country can be a predictor of the attitude toward products manufactured in that country. According to the results obtained, importers are advised to

choose the country of origin with the necessary accuracy. Since, negative thoughts of a consumer about the country of origin, the possibility of the purchase of goods will be eased. Hence, trading companies willing to vehiclerly on a prolonged import from a specific country are recommended to study consumers' thoughts toward the country of origin, through marketing research.

This study revealed that, consumers would prefer vehicles imported from Germany, Japan, South Korea and China respectively. Chinese vehicles comparing to vehicles manufactured in other three countries, are relatively least popular and in case if the consumer is willing to purchase, price is likely to be a major factor. Therefore, importing expensive vehicles from China sounds unjustifiable. Also, considering that the most important component of the country image is conative component, importers must not worry about customers's negative feelings towards a country or their orientation in cognitive component and the country of origin's pleasantness to work, invest and live can be indicative of fortunate products. Domestic producers are also recommended to enhance the level of joint venture or production under license of countries that are considered more desirable by customers. To express brighter, a production under license Germany and Japan will significantly encourage consumer to buy the products.

Based on similar grounds, production under license China has not any compliance. Although, other benefits cooperation with China (e.g. lower manufacturing costs) must be taken into consideration before any final decision. It is also recommended to sale managers that in case that the product has a desirable country of origin, they should take credit of this advantage and emphasize on it, in their advertising campaigns. In case of an unfavorable country of origin, use other positive aspects of the commodity. This matter issue can be achieved with acquisition of international certificates for quality and healthy production sent out by the countries in which the consumer has the highest level of positive thoughts. For example, in the automobile industry, Iran Khodro Company, they should acquire international standard certificates in safety, quality or environment friendly issues issued by countries like Germany and Japan. This strategy can also be

utilized in the production personal hygiene products such as shampoo, hair color, etc.

Resources

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