

Original Research Article

The Place-of-origin Effect on Consumer's Purchase Intention

Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to analyze the “place-of-origin” effect on consumer’s purchase intention to buy agriculture products, offering marketing strategies and practices for promoting Chinese regional brands.

Design/methodology/approach – Taking a semi-structured focus group interview, this study adopts purposive sampling to provide the researcher with the opportunity to gain further understanding of the participants’ experiences in purchasing regional agriculture products. The length of the interviews is approximately 1.5 hours for each of the three groups of five people. The fifteen selected interviewees familiar with all kinds of rice are brand managers, marketing executives, industry experts and retailers of regional brand of agriculture products. A content analysis was conducted after 3 semi-structured group interviews were completed and transcribed.

Findings – The major findings of this research show that the “place-of-origin” effect has a significant impact on consumer’s purchase intention, especially for the regional brand of agriculture product. Interestingly, if place of origin is clearly indicated on the label, the sales of the agriculture products would be greater.

Practical/managerial implications – This research suggests that regional brand image is important in the eyes of a potential consumer in that it could to some extent induce the consumer to purchase the agriculture product. The results of the research provide insights into regional branding strategies to better manage and design marketing practices and activities to increase consumer preferences.

Originality/value – This paper is of value to academic researcher, agriculture product retailer, brand manager and regional brand associations alike as it synthesis the factors of country-of-origin effect in the consumer rice-buying process and the impact of place-of-origin as a agriculture marketing strategy.

Keywords – Place-of-origin effect, Purchase intention, Regional brand, Agriculture product

1. Introduction

As consumers, we may all have a similar experience of buying various brands of products especially before covid-19. Whenever you have multiple dairy products with the same price of the unfamiliar brands with the origin information provided, you would possibly buy dairy products from Australia and New Zealand. From this, we can see that consumers' purchase intention is not only affected by such factors as quality, price, etc. which we call "internal clues" of the product, but also by the external clues such as the product brand, the origin image and other production information (Batra & Homer,2004¹; Caldieraro,2016²). In buying certain categories of foodstuffs, when the intrinsic attributes of the product is difficult to evaluate, its

extrinsic attributes have an important role to play in consumers' decision-making. One such extrinsic attribute that can be a key factor to this differentiation is the provenance or geographical origin of the product. One recent research on an agriculture product shows that adding origin information to product labels can effectively increase consumer confidence in the quality of product, and the consumers' purchase intention can be strengthened.

The origin information is usually indicated in terms of "made in". In academia, the terms "made in" effect, "country-of-origin" (COO) effect, "place-of-origin" effect, or, in general, "place-of-origin" effect, etc. reflect that the geographical provenance of the product has great influence on consumers' purchase decision-making processes, apart from such factors as the perceived quality, preference, or intention to purchase a particular product. The "place-of- origin" effect is defined as "a set of strengths and weaknesses linked to the place of origin that add or detract value from the product for consumers" (Papadopoulos and Heslop 2003³). Nowadays, the consumer purchase process of more and more agriculture developed regional brands is influenced by the COO effect or place-of-origin effect. Regional brand managers try to build good regional brand image, relying on the advantages of region's natural resources, traditional techniques and crafts resources, historical, culture and folk resources to attract consumers.

In recent years, more than hundreds regional brand of agriculture products are born in the Chinese market, consequently, competition for agriculture products between regions is becoming increasingly fierce. Among them are: Beijing Duck, Shanxi Vinegar, Hulunbuir Pasture Land Mutton, Qaidam Wolfberry, Aksu Red Dates, and Changbai Mountain Ginseng, Dalian Sea Cucumber, Heilongjiang Cold Black Soil, etc. in Northern China, and Jinxiang Garlic, Anji White Tea, Yingde Red Tea, Yangcheng Lake Hairy Crab, West Lake Longjing Tea, Meixian Golden Pomelo, etc. in the southern part of China. Regarding agriculture product marketing, place-of-origin is a concept encompassing the physical characteristics of the land and natural resource (mineral composition of the soils, climate, and topography) and its human dimensions (culture, history, technology).

In this paper, we mainly focus on how consumers make sense of the regional brand of agriculture product, and how their understanding impacts regional branding activities. We try to answer questions such as "How do branding experts fashion a regional brand image for regional brands? How do brand trader contend with the regional brand marketing activities of region when building regional brand image?" We take an interpretive approach and conduct focus group interviews with branding, marketing and industry managers, as well as Chinese rice agriculture product retailers, aiming to build good brand image associated with the region.

2. Literature review

2.1 Country-of origin (COO) effect

Studies of the COO effect are mostly concerned with whether the COO of a product influences its evaluations by consumers, and/or their purchase decisions, which implicates a differential consumer response to a product. The country perceived

as the source of this product, it plays an important role in consumers' purchasing decision, since all companies undoubtedly remain associated with their countries-of-origin (Montanari M. G., Rodrigues J. M., Giraldi J D M E, et al., 2018⁴). Consumers, whether consciously or subconsciously, incorporate a stimulus from the COO (e.g. the label "made in") as an evaluative criterion in the formation of their attitudes towards a product. Thereby, "German cars", "Japanese electronics", and "French wines" are evaluated differently from "Italian cars", "Taiwanese electronics", and "Greek wines" due to the fact that factors such as the image, the political and commercial reputation of the country, etc. interact with one another in terms of the COO effect. This may have implications for the determining marketing strategies and actions taken by companies and governments. Despite the large number of studies in the literature on the theoretical utility and practical relevance of the COO construct have been criticized, the COO impact on the consumer's behavior definitely existed (Durairaj, 1994⁵).

Previous studies reveal that COO plays an important role in promoting the perceived quality of an agriculture product and consumers' purchase decisions. Keown and Casey (1995⁶) found that COO was the most influential factor influencing the consumers' decision-making in Ireland, followed by brand name, grape variety and volume of alcohol; Dimara and Skuras (2005⁷) found that information that links place and product is the most important information on wine labels sought by the Greek wine consumers. By contrast, Orth and Krškab (2002⁸) found that the most important attribute for the Czech Republic consumers is grape variety, followed by COO or region-of-origin (ROO), and the price and packaging were secondary attributes, and Chrysochou et al. (2012⁹) found that the most important attributes were price, quality and convenience packaging, whereas brand, grape variety and origin were found to be the least important ones. In some eastern countries, Chinese consumers consider COO as a key element that influences their choice most (Balestrini & Gamble, 2006¹⁰), but the Japanese consumers consider COO as a "neutral to somewhat important" cue, ranking only ninth of the 15 attributes therein taste, variety and price are the most important buying cues (Bruwer; Buller 2012¹¹). In wine production, regions are much more homogeneous in terms of human and natural factors than countries. Hence, regional branding allows the possibility of differentiating a product from both the foreign and domestic competitors. It is suggested that place-based marketing be a good strategy of differentiation, since by associating the wines with a set of regional characteristics assumed to convey desirable qualities, places themselves become part of a branding process.

The COO effect studied in this paper refers to a regional brand of agricultural product from a specific protected region. Due to the advantages of natural endowment and superior environment, the quality of the agricultural product is superior to that of similar products from other regions, and its characteristics cannot be imitated and replicated. That is why place-of-origin is used instead of country-of-origin in this study. The place-of-origin effect of agricultural products is different from that of the industrial products due to its special characteristics. Firstly, the quality of agricultural products is greatly affected by the environmental factors. Due to the influence of the

natural resource and geographic resource conditions, the planting range of agricultural products is much smaller than that of the industrial products. Secondly, the regional image of the agricultural products is more dependent on the environmental and cultural factors whose characteristics cannot easily copied by other regions. This implicates that the place-of-origin has a certain influence on consumers' purchase intention, and it is easy for us to form regional agricultural products brand.

2.2 Status quo of research on the COO effect

A lot of research related to the COO effect have been conducted. Among them are: the Halo Effect, the Summary-Construct Model, the Flexible Model and the Independent-Attribute Hypotheses. The Halo Effect first proposed by Han(1988¹²), refers to the fact that when consumers are not familiar with a product, then the place-of-origin is an inspiration or stimulus to influence the consumers' mind. In the process of purchasing, consumers' evaluation of the product depends on the place-of-origin image. Obviously, this effect is not applicable to the familiar products. As consumers' cognition of a product or brand is enriched, they can abstract and summarize the image of the country or the region, thus generating new product beliefs and attitudes so as to make purchase decisions. Such a process is summarized as the the Summary-Construct Model (Papadopoulos,1993¹³). As a flexible model, it holds that the image of the COO directly affects the consumers' attitudes towards products or brands, but it can also indirectly affect the consumers' attitudes by influencing their product beliefs(Wei, D., 2017¹⁴). The Independent-Attribute Hypotheses is that consumers regard place of origin as an independent attribute, which affects the consumers' evaluation, together with the product attributes. In this hypothesis, it is suggested that place-of-origin and the product attributes are equally important in affecting the product evaluation and the consumption attitudes, although the concept of place-of-origin can be viewed from the perspective of independent product attributes.

Recent empirical research on consumers' purchase intention show that the origin of agricultural products or brand origin is the main component of food tourism destinations, which has great practical significance for making the marketing strategies. Under the e-commerce environment, it is found that the origin image and the consumer perceived image have a positive impact on brand association and brand trust(Zhang, S.J., 2019¹⁵), and price, brand image and origin image directly affect consumers' purchase intention through quality and perceived value (Cao H. 2019¹⁶).

However, with different degrees of product involvement, the influence of origin image on product attribute and brand attitudes are different. Investigation by Zhang.Y.T.(2017¹⁷) proved that as the moderator variable, the higher the product involvement, the less dependent the evaluated product is on the origin image; Fan F.F.(2018¹⁸) concluded that the origin image has a positive effect on purchase intention; According to China Brand Research (2021¹⁹), consumers' evaluation of the regional image directly affect consumers' purchase intention, especially toward the regional brand of agriculture products. In fact, the concept of COO has far greater implications for marketing research on international trade. Simply put, the origin image can enhance the value of products or brands, making them better recognized and accepted by the public.

From the modals or hypothesis introduced above, we can see the impact of the COO effect on product belief, brand attitude, brand association, brand trust, purchase intention, etc. is enormous. However, most research basically focus on some relatively simple factors, i.e. origin image, product attribute and brand attitude. Few further research have conducted regarding aspects such as dimension division of origin image, consumers' intention, etc.. With the development of globalization, competition among regions or cities are more fierce than among countries.

China, a big country with a total of 34 provincial administrative regions, obviously differentiates itself in geographical regions, nature resources, culture, etc. from other countries. All these differences naturally have impact on consumer behavior. In addition, different types of products in various regions have different characteristics with different images. Therefore it is not reasonable for us to simply mix various types of products to conduct an overall research on country-of-origin effect, but to extend it into the place-of-origin effect, which is applicable to various urban areas in China.

This study selects 4 different regional brands of agricultural product as our object of study, aiming to find out how institutions of these brands interact with their consumers to promote their images. We choose these regional brands because they have a higher brand value in the Chinese markets. More importantly the data obtained from investigation into the consumers' purchase intention could be representative, effective and valid. With these reasons and purposes in mind, we propose the research question:

RQ: What connotations does a regional brand of agriculture products have in promoting a regional brand image?

3. Methodology

3.1. About the selected regional brands

In this study we select four well-known regional brands of agriculture product from the China market. They are Heilongjiang Wuchang rice, Jilin rice, huai'an rice and Zengcheng silk seedling rice. These four regional brands of rice named by region are China's National Geographic Indication Products.

Wuchang Rice: a specialty of Wuchang in Harbin City, Heilongjiang Province, is a national geographic indication product of China. Wuchang, a typical agricultural city at the county level, is the most important grain production base in Northeast China, and one of China's top five rice production city. Its rice planting area accounts for one quarter of Harbin City and is known as the "rice kingdom". Wuchang rice with dry matter accumulation, moderate amylose content and high amylopectin content is famous for its unique geography, climate and other factors in the production area. Due to the large temperature difference between day and night in the mature rice producing area, there is a large accumulation of instant double chain sugar in rice, which is very beneficial to human health.

Jilin Rice: a specialty of Jilin Province. Jilin, a big province of grain and rice, has 13,000,000mu of the rice planting area in the entire province, and the coverage rate of fine varieties can reach up to 80% and above. The unique resources have

advantages to produce qualified rice, that's why Jilin City(named the same as the province) and Changchun City are known as "the Home of Tribute Rice" and "the City of Qualified Japonica Rice in China".

Huai'an Rice: a specialty of Huai'an City, Jiangsu Province. The city has a perennial rice planting area of 4.4 million mu, accounting for one fifth of the rice area in the whole province. Its regional brand has a long history with high market share and moderate price, which is quite popular among the Chinese citizens. Its ambitions to be the regional leader in its product category is recognized by the public in that it plays an important role in southern part of China.

Zengcheng Rice: As a specialty of Zengcheng City, Guangdong Province, *Zengcheng Rice* is a high-quality indica rice with obvious local characteristics. With its beautiful appearance and quality, *Zengcheng Rice* has a shape of being long, slender, crystal white, mercerized and glassy. With a medium amylose content and soft texture, *Zengcheng Rice* hard with a fresh flavor and good taste, is strip-shaped but not rotten. It is known as the Jasper in rice or the best in rice. The brand has already won the trust of consumers by virtue of its stable quality and excellent after-sales service. Taking high market share, *Zengcheng Rice* has become one of the most influential agricultural product brands in the international market, especially in south Asian markets.

These brands represent two most important parts of China, two of them are from the north, and the other two are from the south. The reason why we choose the above four regional brands is that consumers make rational brand choices by comparing and contrasting their various attributes, and the place-of-origin effect then varies between different regional brand. It is worth mentioning that only one product category to control possible variations of the intrinsic product information cue would imply different consumer evaluations. Therefore, by selecting products of the same category, the evaluation of the same intrinsic cues by consumers is guaranteed.

3.2. Research Design

3.2.1 research approach

The research is qualitative, as this method of research entails exploring and understanding the meaning behind the experiences of participants (Bryman, 2016²⁰; Silverman & Marvasti, 2008²¹). A qualitative method enables the researcher to describe, explain and unpack experiences of participants (Leavy, 2014²²), thus allowing the researcher to examine new concepts or thoughts that might arise (O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015²³). A phenomenological approach was utilised in the research to allow the researcher to gain a better understanding of the participants' experiences from an objective perspective (Starks & Trinidad, 2007²⁴). Phenomenology is critical in assisting the participants to describe their experiences (Grbich, 2013²⁵). To better understand the meaning ascribed to these experiences, semi-structured interviews were used to aid participants to share their experiences with the researcher.

3.2.2 research participants and sampling methods

Purposive sampling was utilized to identify potential participants for the research. Purposive sampling is done with a specific objective in mind and is

therefore particularly successful (Palys, 2008²⁶). Purposive sampling is done with specific characteristics of participants as qualifying criteria because of the nature of inquiry of the research (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016²⁷). Purposive sampling is essential in the study as it allowed the researchers to meet the main purpose of the study and allowed for variety within the sample to ensure that participants met the inclusion criteria for the research (Bryman & Bell, 2017²⁸).

A target population of (n = 12) participants was originally determined by the researchers. However, a total number of (n = 15) participants were interviewed because of the availability of interviewee that were willing to participate in the research. The researchers deemed it ethical not to exclude willing participants even though data saturation was met.

Participants were characterized as follows: They were brand managers, marketing executives, industry experts and retailers of regional brand of agriculture products. They were familiar with the selected four regional brand. The participants included both female and male customers from various education background, positions and industries to gain in-depth knowledge about the purchase intention to agricultural products.

Permission to contact participants was granted by the researcher. Formal emails were sent to recruit participants as interested participants could respond. Firstly, consent was obtained from participants to continue with the research. Thereafter interviews were set up with participants. The researchers could draw specific information about the phenomenon being investigated as the participants were well informed about the topic of interest and, therefore, shared knowledge and experience regarding the topic under investigation with the researchers. The ethical process required only interviewing participants willing to participate in the research.

3.2.3 research procedure

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 participants across the institution. Audio recordings of the semi-structured interviews were made in aid of transcription and coding. All recordings were stored electronically on a password-encrypted device. Participants were allowed to raise any questions or concerns through the research leader, and all matters were addressed. Ethical conduct was retained throughout the process.

3.2.4 data collection

Potential participants were identified through open-source platforms. Recruitment took place through emails inviting them to participate in the research project. To maintain anonymity throughout the research, emails were sent to each participant individually. Participants consented to be audio recorded whilst being interviewed.

The data were protected by ensuring the encryption of devices and documents with passwords. All participants were ensured of confidentiality, anonymity and privacy throughout the process and in future publication of the research.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted by asking specific questions to guide the interview process whilst allowing the participants a degree of freedom to express points of interest (Hesse-Biber, 2017²⁹). The process allows participants to comment

on aspects that the researchers might not have considered, thereby providing additional information on the research topic. The following interview questions were utilized (as shown in Table 1) :

Table 1: The Interview Questions Outline
1. what do you think the differences between regional brand and enterprise brand?
2. when refers the four selected regional brands, what is your overall impression of the region?
3. how do you evaluate the political image of the region?
4. how do you evaluate the economic image of the region?
5. how do you evaluate the historical and cultural image of the region?
6. how do you evaluate the natural and geographical resources image of the region?
7. what is your impression of the people there?
8. how do you evaluate the industry in the region?
9. how do you evaluate the region's enterprise image?
10. what is the difference to similar product from other regions?
11. what do you think other products from the region?
12. will these images affect your purchase intention? Why?

4. Research findings

When searching for information on regional brand image, it was taken into account that country-of-origin image and brand image to express this activity (Liu W. C. et al. 2021³⁰). Nevertheless, the analysis showed that, in general, the regional brand image is an extension of the country-of-origin image, is full of its regional industrial characteristics. Considering the different attributes of regional brand image, it share a lot of characteristics of the country-of-origin brand image. Academia tend to operate with the general concepts of “regional image”, “brand image” and “regional brand” without making significant differences between them, which broadly is in line with the current situation of using these concepts (Boisen et al., 2018b³¹).

The findings of the study indicate that there are several differences between regional brand and enterprise brand, thus, various reasons effect consumers' purchase intention toward regional brand and enterprise brand. For regional brand, consumers concerns much more factors rather than enterprise brand, it include region's humanistic environment, industry environment, historical and cultural, natural and geographical resources and etc. However, lack of evidence shows these reasons are influencing factors for enterprise brand that effect consumers' purchase intention.

4.4.1 comparison of regional brand and enterprise brand

Regional brand image is a concept based on consumer cognition and evaluation. When a certain region is rich in a kind of product, after industrial agglomeration is formed, then regional brands comes up (Tiwari A K, Bose S., 2013³²). There hasn't had any unified definition about the regional brand of agricultural products yet, and the explanation with higher industrial identification degree is: certain type of agricultural

products from the same region can have higher awareness and reputation in the market, trusted by customers, and then form a regional characteristic and image; generally, it is constituted by a regional brand plus the name of the agricultural product, such as Changbai Mountain Ginseng, Jilin Rice, and Anji White Tea. When being compared with the brand construction of common enterprises, the construction of regional brand involves more stakeholders, and obvious function of the government and industrial associations, so all of these have made the construction more complicated. Refer to Table 2 for the difference.

Table 2 Characteristic comparison of regional brand and enterprise brand³³

Regional brand characteristics	Enterprise brand characteristics
Comprehensive representation of multiple enterprise regional brands	Single enterprise name, logo and association
Thousands of motive forces	Only one motive force
The regional brand effect is large and durable	The brand effect is small and short
Scale and scope economic effects of advertising, promotion, research and development, etc.	It is weak and difficult to exert its scale and scope economic effect
The association is rich, non-exclusive and non-competitive and it has positive external effect	The association is lacked, the emotion is single, and the enterprise life cycle is relatively short
Public articles	Private products, and they are competitive and exclusive
Government plays important role in constructing brand image	The role of the government is little in constructing brand image
The success probability is higher	The success probability is lower

More specifically, enterprise brand is much more easier to convert to regional brand if it is the leading enterprises, which within certain region have brand ownership, the management right, disposal right and residual claim right. The regional brand is usually formed with the support of the government, thus government plays a very important role when constructing regional brand. Under the planning and guidance of the government, with the assistance of industrial association, enterprises within the region will jointly share the brand ownership, reputation and part of benefits. However, some regional brands are the market spontaneous type, especially for the agriculture products. Many enterprises within certain region don't have brand, when selling products, they will uniformly use regional brand, expressed as place name + product type. spontaneously form regional characteristic commercial brand, such as Pinggu Peach, Luochuan Apple, Peking Crispy Duck, West Lake Longjing Tea, Wuchang Rice, Changbai Mountain Ginseng and other characteristic agricultural products have been shown initially. In a word, successful regional brand construction can drive the development of local economy, increase the income of local individual households and farmers.

4.4.2 influencing factors to purchase intention

Natural and geographical resource image: based on the findings on intention to purchase of the participants, the natural resource is indicated as the most important reason why consumers would purchase regional brand of agricultural product. Natural and geographical resource include geographical location, land, water, climate, industrial resources and traffic situation. This dimension of image have been proposed 19 times in 72% during the interview. Participants believed that agricultural products cannot growth without natural resource environmental factors; Climate and land is the most important to all kinds of agricultural product, especially to rice; The taste, lustre of rice are heavily rely on geographical location and nature resources.

Economic image: economic image was found to be the second leading reason for consumers to purchase regional brand. In this article, economic image is viewed as the development level, economic potential and benefits of the region (Zhao W.H.,et al., 2016³⁴). The development level of regional economy will affect the development of regional brands; The study revealed reasons, such as external economic effect can effectively change the pattern of regional economic growth and promote the development of regional brands; Only with the development of regional economy, the regional brand can be recognized by the market, thus the regional brand will be recognized by the market as well as guaranteed quality, so that attract more consumers willingness to buy. On the other hand, participants indicated that regional brands can also drive regional economic development.

Humanistic image: participants indicated that another reason affecting decision to make purchase was the humanistic image. It refers to the region's cultural deposits and radiation³⁵, it also include the diligence and the friendliness of the people in the region³⁶. For instance, some indicated humanistic image helps to create consumers' brand associations; for example, 'the hard-working farmers make me feel that the rice here is the real deal', 'The strong rural atmosphere makes consumers feel that everything here is natural'. Obviously, the difference of regional culture can lead to the difference of regional brand connotation. The humanistic image is an invisible force that affects the activities of regional subjects.

Industrial image: regional brand image are influenced by the industrial cluster. The industrial cluster determine the formation of regional brand; to corroborate this statement, participants cited regional brand is the inevitable outcome of industrial cluster development to a certain stage, for example, Hui'an Rice, its city (Hui'an) has a perennial rice planting area of 4.4 million mu, accounting for one fifth of the rice area in the whole province, with the development of rice cluster, the regional brand comes out. This indicates the scale of industry directly affects the scale of regional brand, scale of economy industrial decides the development advantage of regional brand. Scholars pointed out industrial image refers to industrial status and characteristics, industrial history and cultural, industrial scale, industrial production technology and industrial innovation level (Xiong A.H., Wang B.,³⁷).

Enterprise image: based on the findings of the research, 57% of the participants indicated an enterprise image also contributed to their intention of purchase an regional brand of agricultural product. The leading enterprise in a region in some extent can determines the development of regional brand, its social responsibility,

enterprise scale, market share, reputation and word of mouth effect consumer perceived value, therefore indirectly influence purchase intention.

Product image: another consideration for consumers was the product image. Product image include quality, price, function, technical and reputation (Han.M.C., Terpstra V.,³⁸). People always focus on the product itself when make purchase whatever the kind of product. For example, 'perhaps I will choose Huai 'an Rice to make porridge while choose Zengcheng Rice to make Cantonese Clay-pot Rice'. Quality, price, functions and reputation as a product image are the important factor to regional brand.

4.4.3 Place-of-origin plays a moderators role in purchase intention

Despite the numerous attempts to measure the country-of-origin effect and the evidence of its existence being pointed out by several studies, using different methods, products, and countries, there are still doubts about their magnitude. It is believed that there are several factors that can increase or decrease this effect. Therefore, the country-of-origin effects on the evaluations of products by the consumer can be moderated by a variety of intrinsic and extrinsic cues about the product (Giraldi; Carvalho, 2009³⁹).

Intrinsic cues are related to the inherent traits of the products such as ingredients that cannot be modified without changing physical attributes: weight, taste, color, performance, potency, composition (materials), temperature, and product durability (Ayrosa, 1998⁴⁰; Chao; Rajendran, 1993⁴¹; Usunier, 2006⁴²; Bloemer; Brijs, Kasper, 2009⁴³; Schultz; Jain, 2015⁴⁴).

Regarding this information, we know to begin with that consumers make rational choices on products by comparing and contrasting their various attributes (Ahmed et al., 2013⁴⁵). In this way, products with different physical characteristics will have different evaluations. The country-of-origin effect then varies among the various product categories (Apil; Kaynak, 2010⁴⁶; D'Astous; Ahmed, 1999⁴⁷). Considering the agricultural product category, we believe that the agricultural product will be evaluated in a similar way, because, although the brands are different, the consumer considers the same intrinsic and extrinsic cues to compare and evaluate them. Hence, we are able to develop the research hypothesis considering the context of regional brands of agricultural product:

RH: The differences between the cues evaluations of agricultural product of the same category will not be significant.

This research perceive intrinsic cues as more accurate indicators of product quality than extrinsic ones, thus having a more powerful effect on quality judgments . In this regard, a research has shown that consumers rely more on the intrinsic characteristics of the product while forming their opinions (Godey et al., 2012⁴⁸). On the other hand, extrinsic cues are related to the product but if they change, they do not directly affect it, covering the price, brand, product warranty, store, and country-of -origin(Kavaratzis, M., et. Al., 2013⁴⁹).

The place-of-origin, as an extrinsic cue, has a limited influence on agricultural product quality perceptions. In many situations, consumers are unaware of the origin of the rice they buy and, if they know it, they use it in combination with other

information cues such as price, brand, and retail store image. As some part of participants mentioned that 'compared the Wuchang Rice, the Jilin Rice, the Huai'an Rice and the Zengcheng Rice, the only thing I focus are their color and taste', some part of participants stated that 'word of mouth is important, other brand information may not affect my purchase intention'. Obviously, the place-of-origin can not directly influence their purchase intention, it only plays an moderator role during the purchase decision. Thus, the hypothesis is supported.

5. Conclusions

5.1 research results

Considering that country-of-origin research still presents many controversies and difficulties in measuring the country-of-origin effect, this research aimed to find out the connotation of regional brand of agriculture products have in promoting a regional brand image and to verify the extent of place-of-origin in the decision to consume agricultural product when make purchase intention. For this purpose, we conducted a study with 15 participates considering four regional brands of agricultural product from four different region: the Wuchang Rice, the Jilin Rice, the Huai'an Rice and the Zengcheng Rice.

This analysis presented that take a region as the unit of analysis, the country-of-origin effect is not only happen between countries but also applies within the country, can be expressed as the place-of-origin effect. It contributes to the country-of-origin effect theory and practice. More specifically, it helps highlighting the importance of regional image and their impact on regional branding practices.

This research helps to understand the connotation of regional brand having in promoting a regional brand image, especially to the agricultural product which has the seldom case in the previous studies. From the consumer point of view, these results point out that natural and geographical resource image, economic image, humanistic image, industrial image, enterprise image and product image are the influencing factors affect consumers' purchase intention. However, it is worth to say, place-of-origin is not important when purchasing a same category of agricultural product, the differences between the cues evaluations of agricultural product of the same category will not be significant. The place-of-origin only plays the moderator role when consumers buying the same category of agricultural product.

5.2 study limitations

However, this research has some limitations. First, in this examination we analyzed only the category of rice. Other categories of agricultural products can be investigated in future studies. The analysis of these regional brands of agricultural products was carried out from the perspective of Cantonese consumers, it might not be replicated in other cultures, in which the most important criteria may change among consumers, especially in the northern part of china.

Second, we used a non-probabilistic and convenience sample with retailer, brand managers and specialists. This type of sampling prevents the generalization of results, so other population segments should be taken into account in future research to strengthen the results obtained.

Finally, there are other moderators that can increase or decrease the place-of-origin effect present in the literature and that were not considered in this study: the individual characteristics of the consumers which could encompass demographic factors such as age, gender, income, education, as well as motivation, lifestyle, familiarity with the product and the brand, degree of involvement with the product, personal values, fluency in the language of the country, and ethnocentrism. These moderators and the extrinsic and intrinsic cues of the products can be explored together in future studies to verify the magnitude of the place-of-origin effect.

5.3 practical implications

The development of regional brand is inseparable from the joint action among leading enterprises, the whole industry and related institutions. Establishing a regional brand is a difficult task, where marketers have to compete against familiar regional brands and enterprise brand, it suggested that analyzing regional brands should proceed in a qualitatively different way to analyzing enterprise brands.

With the fierce competition of resources and industries among regions, the construction and promotion of regional brand image are the objective requirements of developing regional economic advantages. Regional brands promote industrial agglomeration, improve the market competitiveness of cluster enterprises, enable consumers to establish the association between products and origin, and improve the visibility and market share of regional products. The promotion of regional brand image should be promoted from six dimensions, that are the natural and geographical resource image, the economic image, the humanistic image, the industrial image, the enterprise image and the product image. The regional government can improve the regional natural environment, explore the potential of regional resources, improve the degree of openness and realize the external market difference of regional natural resource and economic image. Regional industry associations enhance the industry visibility, cultivate more enterprises, improve the scale of production and marketing to highlight the regional industry image externalized market differences; Enterprises producing regional characteristic products should improve technological level and innovation, enhance social responsibility and promote regional enterprise image to externalize market differences.

Reference

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