

An Qualitative Research on Regional Brand Image and its Effect on Purchase Intention

1

Abstract

Purpose– The purpose of this paper is to examine the origin image of selected regional brands and its effect on consumer's purchase intention. It also seeks to examine the importance of regional brand and finally, define consumer preference for selected agricultural product, offering marketing strategies and practices for promoting regional brands of agricultural product.

Design/methodology/approach– Taking a semi-structured focus group interview to provide the researcher with the opportunity to gain further understanding of the participants' experiences in purchasing regional agricultural 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 regional brands as well as agricultural product. among them are brand managers, marketing executives, industry experts, retailers and consumers. A content analysis was conducted after interviews completed and transcribed.

Findings– The major findings of this research show that the dimension of origin image include region's economic, humanistic, industrial, typical enterprise and product itself. It also has a significant impact on consumers' purchase intention, especially for the regional brand of agricultural product. Interestingly, if origin is clearly indicated on the label, the sales of the agricultural products would be greater, but it plays the moderate role rather than key factor.

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 agricultural 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, agricultural product retailer, brand manager and regional brand associations alike as it synthesis the factors of country-of-origin effect in the consumer purchasing process and the impact of country-of-origin as a agriculture marketing strategy.

Keywords– regional brand image, country-of-origin effect, purchase intention

1. Introduction

As consumers, we may all have a similar experience of buying various brands of products in different place especially before covid-19. For example, 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, reputation, brand image, the country of origin 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 agricultural 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, 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 "country-of-origin" effect is defined as "a set of strengths and weaknesses linked to the country of origin that add or detract value from the product for consumers" (Papadopoulos and Heslop 2003³). Nowadays, consumer purchase process of agricultural product are more and more influenced by the COO effect or 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 agricultural products are born in the Chinese market, consequently, competition for agricultural products between regions is becoming increasingly fierce. These kind of products expressed as "regional name+ product type", 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. Regarding agricultural product marketing, country-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 agricultural 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, agricultural product retailers and some consumers, 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 determining the 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 agricultural 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 (Yunus, N.S.N.M., & Rashid, W.E.W., 2016¹⁰), 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, thus place-of-origin is more suitable instead of country-of-origin. 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 country-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 country-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 aFlexible 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 country-of-origin and the product attributes are equally important in affecting the product evaluation and the consumption attitudes, although the concept of country-of-origin can be viewed from the perspective of independent product attributes.

Recentempirical research on consumers' purchase intention show that the origin of agricultural products or brand originis 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 ison 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 agricultural 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, whether the country of origin image is directly or indirectly influence on product belief, brand attitude, brand association, brand trust, purchase intention, etc., its effect is enormous. However, previous researches basically focus on its effects, importance and mechanism, seldom pay attention to construct the regional brand image. What's more, the selected research objects range from fashion, electronic, automobile from different country in different brand, but no refers to agriculture industry especially.

With the development of globalization, competition among regions or cities are more fierce than among countries. Whether the country-of-origin effect applicable to the regional brand in the same country is worth to research. As we all know, China has a vast territory, with a total of 34 provincial administrative regions, 56 ethnic groups, its obviously differentiates in geographical regions, nature resources, culture, etc. are quite different from other countries. 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 origin effect, which is applicable to various urban areas in China.

3. Methodology

3.1. Selected regional brands

In this study we select 3 different regional brand of agricultural product as out objects which are quite popular and well-known in China market, even in the international market. They are Zengcheng silk seedling rice, Fuling Pickle and Hainan Coconut. These regional brand of agricultural products named by its origin + product type, represent China's National Geographic Indication Products.

The regional brands are selected by this research represent three most important parts of China, i.e. northern china, middle part of china, and southern china. The other reason we choose the regional brands is that consumers make rational brand choices by comparing and contrasting their various attributes, and the 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

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). Qualitative analysis is the analysis of the "qualitative" aspects of the research subjects. To be specific, the use of induction and interpretation, analysis and synthesis and abstract and summary methods to acquire various kinds of materials, so as to achieve the understanding of the nature of things and reveal complex phenomena (Hesse-Biber, 2017²⁴). It is clear that carrying out the research with the use of qualitative data will not only extend and broaden the understanding of the research but also allow the opinions of participants to be critically analyzed. Therefore, this research will rely on qualitative information from the focus group interview which will be used to gather the information to better understand their purchase experiences and present their ideas. Furthermore, as focus groups will be used, this means there will not be an extensive number of people taking part in the research, with a maximum of 15 participants. This allows the opportunity to take more text and in-depth data in the form of the understanding of activities, choices and attitudes which the focus group participants have.

A total number of (n = 15) participants were interviewed in the research, among them are brand managers, marketing executives, industry experts, retailers of regional brand of agricultural products and consumers. They are quite familiar with the selected regional brands not only due to its famous and popular in Chinese market, but also they are their frequently purchasers. The participants included both female and male from various education background, positions and incomes, these characteristics can help researcher to gain in-depth knowledge about the purchase intention to agricultural products.

The interview was conducted by asking specific questions whilst allowing the participants a degree of freedom to express points of interest although it has question outline(table 1). The process allows participants to comment on aspects that the researchers might not have considered, thereby providing additional information on the research topic. Audio recordings of the interviews were made in aid of transcription and coding. All recordings were stored electronically on a password-encrypted device. Ethical conduct was retained throughout the process.

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?

3.3. Content Analysis

After analysis interview materials and sorted out separately, 15 interview materials were adopted. Complete sentences or paragraphs were taken as the content analysis unit, the regional image, product image, industry image and brand trader image were defined as the dimension of regional brand of agricultural product which are the key factors influence purchase intention. The interview research respectively clarified the connotation these four dimensions, and established encoding table of as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Encoding of regional brand dimensions

Dimension	Connotation	Encoding Elements
Origin Image	Researches on origin image are developed under the theory of country-of-origin image. Empirically, scholars identified dimension of country-of-origin image from three perspective of view, there are general country image, product-related country image and consumer-related country image.	1. economy: the overall economic level, the level of consumption.
		2. politics: rules, regulations, ordinances, implementations that can promote economic development.
		3. technology: the overall R&D level, producing or brewing technology, handcraft skills and inheritance
		4. environment: ecological environment, unique or superior resources, geographic location
Product Image	It is a kind of characteristics, features and attributes that are derived from product itself. Product image is usually the primary aspect to be focus when customers make purchase intention.	1. quality: total features that meet consumer needs, including quality, supporting services, package, design, etc.
		2. price: the price paid for a product and it valuable compared with similar products.
		3. function: the degree of function that can meet consumer needs, and its benefits compared with similar products.
		4. value: product popularity and recognition degree to the product.
Industry	The subjective feeling and comprehensive evaluation of consumers on the development of a unique industry in the region.	1. unique resource: special cultural heritage, technology and skills.
		2. market performance: compared with same industry, its market share, competitive advantages, and influence position.

Image		3. scale of economy : the scale of output or operation in the same industry.
		4. industrial history: the duration and history of the industry.
Brand Trader Image	The overall image of all enterprise who produce the same kind of agricultural product in a specific region, which represent the sum of goodwill of enterprises and their brands in the region, it is quite similar to the characteristics of company image.	1. position: market position of the representative enterprises.
		2. reputation: reputation and word of mouth of the representative enterprises.
		3. strength: strength and competitive advantages. innovations of representative enterprises.
		4. market share: market share and ranges, wide of representative enterprises.

By further sorting out the interview materials, the frequency statistics of influencing factors of regional brand are shown in Table 3. From the relatively high frequency sentences, it can be seen that the contents of categorization can accurately reflect the corresponding categories in terms of meaning. It can be seen that the research results obtained from content analysis have good content validity.

Table 3 Classification of encoding of RBAP influencing factors (Partial selection)

Index	Dimensions	Decoding of each dimension	Freq.	%
1	Origin Image	The origin is quite popular and well-known by produce such types of product. The origin has a unique advantage of natural resources, such as superior geographic, suitable climate, land resource, etc. It has strong rural atmosphere.	13	72
2	Product Image	Authentic taste, good taste, the price is not expensive. Basically depend on product itself, color and lustre, feel, taste. The credibility of the product is relatively high. Safety, pollution-free, green.	11	61
3	Industry Image	industrial cluster, economic of scale, high efficiency of production, high innovation level. full of this product type. planting bases are numerous. It has a long history.	10	56
4	Brand Trader Image	There are lots of small related enterprises or individuals, It takes a very high market share. Brand marketing done well. It has a very strong competitive market advantage. The strength is relatively strong.	12	67

After research interview, the formation of regional brand image is further

clarified. Interviewees agreed that:

After research interview, the formation of regional brand image is further clarified. Interviewees agreed that:

1) The main factors affecting regional image is natural resources that include land, climate and related ecological environment. In addition, geographical location also plays a very important role. For example, as participants refers coconuts are not sweet anymore if it is not located in Hainan province (subtropic climate). From word frequency analysis, it can be seen that the geographical location is the most important factor affecting its agricultural product.

2) The economic of origin, its transportation, infrastructure and production technology affect both origin image and development of regional brands. For example, the interviewees believe that silk rice in Zengcheng city has a high degree of specialization and modernization in its brand, infrastructure and production technology. Because of this, its industry and product visibility have obvious competitive advantages in the market. Participants who have visited Zengcheng recall that the district has a rich culture of rice breeding.

3) The attributes of the product itself affect purchase intention. Agricultural products as edible products, its quality and food safety must be guaranteed, preferably pure natural and pollution-free. Price sometimes is not the most concerned factor, but most respondents said they would prefer to pay more for unique, high quality and good taste products. It is worth mentioning that taste of pickle is the most interviewees' concerned. It can be found in the word frequency analysis that the refreshing pickle is more favored by consumers; Sweeter and smelling rice is more likely to motivate consumers purchase intention. Some respondents believe that the taste and nutritional value will make consumers repurchases and ultimately gain customer loyalty.

4) The development of regional brand cannot be separated from origin industry. Only an industry with a certain scale can form a regional brand. It must be the pillar industry of the region, forming a certain advantageous production technology and production process, and having a competitive advantage in similar industries all over the country. Some respondents express their that regional brands which can enjoy high international reputation must have a long history, a reasonable industrial structure, a complete industrial chain, and their own leading enterprises, once formed scale effect, it has promising prospects.

5) The development of regional brand is inseparable from the joint action among enterprises, associations and institutions. These organizations unite and share the same public regional brand name, they have strong strength, high influence and popularity, good reputation, they also have a high level in terms of technical, production capacity, marketing ability and credibility in the market.

4. Result and Discussion

Regional brand image is developed under the theory of country-of-origin effect and brand image (Liu W. C.*et al.* 2021²⁵). It is an extension of the countryoforigin image with full of origin's industrial characteristics.The country of origin image is

different from regional brand image, as literature refers the country of origin image influenced by overall country' s image mostly while regional brand image not only influenced by origin image, but also influenced by origin' s humanistic, industry, historical and cultural, natural and geographical resources and etc (Boisen *et al.*, 2018b²⁶).

4.1 construction of regional brand image

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 brand comes up (Tiwari A K, Bose S., 2013²⁷). There hasn't had any unified definition about the regional brand of agricultural products yet, the explanation with higher industrial identification degree is: a certain type of agricultural product from the same origin with higher awareness and reputation in the market, then form a regional characteristic and image. Compared with the construction of enterprises or product brand, regional brand involves more stakeholders, and obvious function of the government and industrial associations, therefore, it is more complicated to construct its brand image. Generally speaking, regional brand is usually formed with the support of the government, under the planning and guidance of the government, with the assistance of industrial association, enterprises within the region jointly share the brand ownership, reputation and part of benefits. However, the regional brands of agricultural products formed by market spontaneous. Many small enterprises or individuals within certain region don't have brand, when selling products, they will uniformly use regional brand, expressed as origin name + product type, such as Pinggu Peach, Luochuan Apple, Peking Crispy Duck, West Lake Longjing Tea, Wuchang Rice, Changbai Mountain Ginseng.

The construct of regional brand image is more complicated than national brand, enterprise brand and product brand. It is more rely consumer cognition, this research conclude the dimension of regional brand of agricultural product into five aspect:

1) natural and geographical resource image: consumers are more willing to purchase agricultural product from an area rich in natural resource, 72% participants have mentioned geographical location, land, water, climate is quite important to the growth of agriculture. Therefore, natural and geographical resource image is the primary factor to consumer cognition when make agricultural product purchase.

2) product image: another important consideration for product evaluation is product attributes. People always focus on product itself when make edible product. As participants refers "subtropical fruits must be grown in subtropical areas", "perhaps I will choose Huai 'an Rice to make porridge while choose Zengcheng Rice to make Cantonese Clay-pot Rice"...obviously, product quality, function, taste and other product attributes are the main factors that consumers pay attention to.

3) industrial image: The industrial cluster determine the formation of regional brand; to corroborate this statement, one of industry experts cited "regional brand is the inevitable outcome of industry cluster development to a certain stage. Silk rice, its city (Zengcheng) 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 decides the development advantage of regional brand. Scholars pointed out industrial image refers to industrial status and characteristics, history and cultural, scale of economic, production technology and innovation level (Xiong A.H., Wang B., 2007²⁸).

4) enterprise image: based on the findings of the research, 57% of the participants indicated an enterprise image also contributed to their intention of purchasing regional brand of agricultural product. The leading enterprise in a region in some extent can determine 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.

5) humanistic image: it is interesting to point out, humanistic image is another reason affecting decision to make purchasing. As "it is full of rural atmosphere"; "people there are hard-working farmers"; "the hard-working farmers make me feel that the rice here is the real deal", "the strong rural atmosphere makes me feel that everything here is natural and pollution-free" have been mentioned. It is believed that humanistic image helps to create consumers' brand associations. Humanistic image refers to the region's cultural deposits and radiation, including the diligence and the friendliness of the people in the region (Li D.J., Dong J.Q., Zhou R. H., 2007)²⁹.

4.2 regional brand image effect

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 method, product category and country, there are still doubts about their magnitude (Gibaldi; Carvalho, 2009³⁰). It is believed that there are several factors that can increase or decrease this effect. The country-of-origin effects on product evaluation by consumer can be moderated by a variety of intrinsic and extrinsic cues. 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, while extrinsic refer to the country of origin image, brand and other external influencing factors (Ayrosa, 1998³¹; Chao; Rajendran, 1993³²; Usunier, 2006³³; Bloemer; Brijs, Kasper, 2009³⁴; Schultz; Jain, 2015³⁵). Consumers make rational choices on products by comparing and contrasting their various attributes. In this way, products with different physical characteristics will have different evaluations. The country-of-origin effect then varies among the various product categories (Ahmed *et al.*, 2013³⁶). 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 believed that there is no differences between the cues evaluations of agricultural product of the same category.

This research perceives intrinsic cues as more accurate indicators of product quality than extrinsic ones, thus having a more powerful effect on quality judgments. As most participants indicated that they rely more on the intrinsic characteristics of

agricultural product. 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. The country-of-origin effect as an extrinsic cue, has a limited influence on quality perceptions toward agricultural product. In many situations, consumers are unaware of the origin of the rice, they focus on its color, taste, function and hand feeling, even word-of-mouth. However, if the origin in the label, they will combination the origin image so as to make brand association. Obviously, regional brand effect can not directly influence their purchase intention, but plays a moderator role during the purchase decision.

5. Conclusions

Under the country-of-origin effect, regional brand affect consumer's purchase decision, people influenced by origin image, product image, enterprise image, industry image and humanistic image. This research conduct focus group interview with 15 participants considering three regional brands of agricultural products. Research findings present 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. More specifically, it helps highlighting the importance of regional image and their impact on regional branding practices. This research helps to understand the construction 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 consumer cognition point of view, findings point out that natural and geographical resource image are the primary factor impact their purchase decision, followed by product image, industrial image, enterprise image and humanistic image. However, it is worth to say, country-of-origin effect is not always significantly impact their purchasing decision. Origin only plays the extrinsic cue plays the moderator role during their purchasing.

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. 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 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.

The limitation in this research are the selected regional brands may not represent the whole agriculture industry, other categories of agricultural products can be investigated in future studies. Participants carried out from the perspective of Cantonese cultural in which the most important criteria may change among various consumers behaviors. Consumers' individual characteristics are out of consideration, like their age, gender, income, education, lifestyle as these factors are definitely influence their behaviors, further studies should control these variables when verify the country-of-origin effect.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study is a part of a larger study carried out by Mo Fan as part of her PhD research at City University of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur. The author is grateful to the Guangzhou Philosophy and Social Science Fund of China [Grant Number 2021GZGJ82] for the partial funding of this research.

The author is also grateful to the anonymous reviewers who provided useful comments on an earlier draft of the paper.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Reference

-
- ¹Batra, Rajeev, Homer, et al. The Situational Impact of Brand Image Beliefs.[J]. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 2004, 14(3):318-330
 - ²Caldieraro, Fabio. The Role of Brand Image and Product Characteristics on Firms' Entry and OEM Decisions[J]. *Management science: Journal of the Institute of Management Sciences*, 2016, 62(11):3327-3350.
 - ³Papadopoulos N , Heslop L A . Country equity and productcountry images:State-of-the-art in research and implications. 2003
 - ⁴Montanari M. G., Rodrigues J. M., Giraldi J. D. M. E., et al. Country of origin effect: a study with Brazilian consumers in the luxury market[J]. *Brazilian Business Review*, 2018, 15.
 - ⁵Durairaj M., Country of Origin as a Stereotype: Effects of Consumer Expertise and Attribute Strength on Product Evaluations[J]. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 1994(2):354-365.
 - ⁶Keown C., Casey M . Purchasing behavior in the Northern Ireland wine market[J]. *British Food Journal*, 1995, 97(1):17-20.
 - ⁷Dimara E., Skuras D., Consumer demand for informative labeling of quality food and drink products: a European Union case study[J]. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 2005, volume22(2/3):90-100.
 - ⁸Orth, U.R. and Krškab, P.,Quality signals in wine marketing: the role of exhibition awards[J].*The International Food and Agribusiness Management Review*, 2002(4):4, 385-397.
 - ⁹Chrysochou, P., Corsi, A.M. and Krystallis, A., What drives Greek consumer preferences for cask wine?[J].*British Food Journal*, 2012(114):8,1072-1084.

-
- ¹⁰Yunus, N.S.N.M.and Rashid, W.E.W., 2016. The Influence of Country-of-origin on Consumer Purchase Intention: The Mobile Phones Brand from China. *ProcediaEconomics and Finance*, 37, 343–349.
- ¹¹Bruwer, J. and Buller, C., Country-of-origin (COO) brand preferences and associated knowledge levels of Japanese wine consumers[J]. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 2012b(21): 5, 307-316.
- ¹²Han,The Role of Consumer Patriotism in the Choice of Domestic versus Foreign Products [J]. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 1988(1), 25-32
- ¹³Papadopoulous,What Product and Country Images Are and Are Not Product-country Images: Impact and Role in International Marketing [J]. *International Business Press*,1993(2), 3-38
- ¹⁴Wei, D., A review of relevant research on country of origin[J].*Foreign economic and trade*, 2017(1):135-137
- ¹⁵Zhang, S.J. Brand trust of featured agricultural products based on country of origin image in e-commerce environment[D].Hefei University of Technology, 2019
- ¹⁶Cao, H., Study on the influence of consumers' brand preference and purchase behavior of local daily chemical products[D].Yunnan University of Finance and Economics, 2019
- ¹⁷Zhang, Y.T. The influence of country of origin image on customer brand attitude from the perspective of degree of involvement[D].Harbin Institute of Technology university, 2017
- ¹⁸Fang, F.F., Analysis on the role of origin effect in international marketing strategy[J].*China Market*,2018(4):118-120
- ¹⁹China brand in 2021-Regional agricultural image brand Influence Index[J].*China Brand*, 2022(1):48-49.
- ²⁰Bryman, A., *Social research methods* (5th ed.) [M].Oxford University Press, 2016.
- ²¹Silverman, D., & Marvasti, A., *Doing qualitative research* [M].A comprehensive guide, Sage, 2008
- ²²Leavy, P., *The Oxford handbook of qualitative research* [M]. Oxford University Press. 2014
- ²³O'Reilly, M., & Kiyimba, N., *Advanced qualitative research* [M]. A guide to using theory. Sage. 2015
- ²⁴Hesse-Biber, S.N., *The practice of qualitative research*[M]. Sage.2017.
- ²⁵Liu Wenchao, Sun Lihui, Gao Qianqian. Development and Testing of regional brand image Scale based on consumer perception [J]. *Soft Science*, 2021,35(04):125-130.
- ²⁶Boisen, M., Terlouw, K., Grootte, P. and Couwenberg, O., Reframing place promotion, place marketing, and place branding – moving beyond conceptual confusion [J].*Cities*, (2018b): 80, 4-11.
- ²⁷Tiwari A K., Bose S., Place Branding: A review of Literature[J]. *Asia Pacific Journal of research in Business Management*, 2013, 4 (3):15-24.
- ²⁸Xiong A.H., Wang B., Research on regional brand Formation based on Industrial Cluster [J]. *Journal of ShanDong University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)*, 2007 (2): 84— 89.
- ²⁹Li D.J., Dong J.Q., Zhou R. H., Research on the Relationship between regional image and consumer product Evaluation-A Case Study of Shanghai and Zhengzhou [J]. *Nankai Management Review*, 2007(2):60-68.
- ³⁰Giraldi, J. M. E.; Carvalho, D. T. de. A imagem do Brasil no exterior e sua influência nas intenções de compra.[J].*RAC Eletrônica*,2009(3)22-40.
- ³¹Ayrosa, E. A. T. Imagem de País: Uma Escala Para Avaliar Atitudes Relativas a Países.[M].In:XXII Encontro Anual da ANPAD, 1998.
- ³²Chao, P.; Rajendran, K. N., Consumer Profiles and Perceptions: Country-of-origin Effects.[J]. *International Marketing Review*, 1993(10) 22-39.
- ³³Usunier, J.C., Relevance in business research: the case of country-of-origin research in marketing [J].*European Management Review*, 2006(3)60-73.
- ³⁴Bloemer, J; Brijs, K.; Kasper, H. The CoO-ELM model A theoretical framework for the cognitive processes underlying country of origin-effects[J].*European Journal of Marketing*, 2009(43), 62-89.
- ³⁵Schultz, D.; Jain, V., Exploring luxury brand country of origin impact on purchasing behaviors in India Asia-Pacific[J]. *Journal of Business Administration*, 2015(7) 216-236.
- ³⁶Ahmed, Z.; Ahang, R.; Othman, N.; Sambasivan, M. To purchase or not to purchase US products: role of religiosity, animosity, and ethnocentrism among Malaysian consumers[J]. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 2013(27)551–563.