1. About the special issue

The topic, “country of origin (COO),” garners great attention from the academic circle with recent attention given to how COO shapes consumer behavior and organizational behavior, and how marketers can overcome or take advantage of COO in their strategies. A high proportion of submissions to the International Marketing Review already focuses on COO topics. In fact, the International Marketing Review has published many of these in its regular issues, two formal special issues devoted to COO matters (Volume 25, Issue 4, 2008 and Volume 27, Issue 4, 2010), and a special issue covering COO debates (Volume 28, Issue 5, 2011). The journal has also conferred a best paper award to a COO-focused manuscript (Riefler and Diamantopoulos, 2007).

In recent years, this topic has gained new light through a lively debate on the relevance of COO research in marketing. Samiee et al. (2005) argue that COO may not be as important as previously assumed, claiming that COO researchers have been investigating the issue in not only the wrong way, but also often with flawed methods. Usunier (2011) and Usunier and Cestre (2008) largely concur with Samiee et al. Jointly, they conclude that COO research is unimportant and atheoretic, and lacks managerial relevance (Samiee, 2011; Usunier, 2011). However, others argue that COO research is relevant, asserting that there is no crisis or that concerns are exaggerated (e.g. Herz and Diamantopoulos, 2013a, b; Diamantopoulos et al., 2011; Magnusson et al., 2011a, b). This vigorous debate supports the notion of revisiting research on COO with a focus on adopting new methods and new variables, and seeking to answer new questions. In this special issue of International Marketing Review, we seek papers that advance the topic of COO by evaluating COO research conducted from new critical perspectives, questioning basic assumptions regarding the nature of COO, providing new theoretical insights, and/or providing solutions in the form of empirical data. Recent suggestions include the need to focus on brand origin (BO) rather than COO (Samiee, 2011). Usunier (2011) recommends focusing research on the brand’s country, looking into BO recognition accuracy, and examining BO assessment. Kim and Park (2010) suggest a need for a better understanding of how various COO dimensions (e.g. country of manufacture vs country of brand) affect evaluations and consumer behavior (Aiello et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2015; Pucci, et al., 2017). Moreover, comparing the impact of various COO dimensions as well as analyzing new individual psychological characteristics, such as product involvement and ethnocentrism, may help international marketing researchers to better understand the factors underlying the formation of COO evaluations. This may also help to uncover the role of brand awareness and brand preference in the context of COO concepts, thus suggesting further research avenues.

2. Overview of the papers

The first paper by Balabanis and Siamagka (2017) addresses the gap between academic literature and actual purchase behavior by investigating issues behind variation in consumer ethnocentric behavior (CET). This research explores influential factors of CET’s well-established impact into product category, product cost and visibility, and brand and COO of purchased products. The goal is to study how these differences can cause behavioral effects. Results indicates that product category is an important determinant of CET’s

Special thanks go to the editor on International Marketing Review, John W. Cadogan, Loughborough University, and all the reviewers and authors who contributed to this special issue.
behavioral effect, especially in high-prices product categories. Cultural similarity does not have a negative effect whereas product visibility can strengthen CET's behavioral effects. These findings provide marketing insight into understanding the determinants of ethnocentric behavior and importance of COO, thus providing a more effective way to reduce the negative effects of CET.

Diamantopoulos et al. (2017) investigate the “Made-in-EU” label to understand consumers' reactions to BOs. They focus on a specific superordinate entity (the EU) as BO to which a number of country-specific origin cues (i.e. Austria, Spain, USA, Romania, China) were compared. The results show that “Made-in-EU” is interpreted as a quality signal. However, the association of linking a brand to the EU fails to generate positive effects. Also, the exact impact of a “Made-in-EU” brand designation depends on the standard of comparison, that is, the specific country against which the EU is evaluated. They also provide guidance for practitioners on whether or not, and how to promote a “Made-in-EU” brand label.

García-Gallego and Mera (2017) examine BO and how it influences consumers' preference in terms of regional, national, or foreign-produced goods. Due to the growing importance of COO, it is necessary to determine consumers' perception of the attribute's origin. Results indicate that there is a great importance of the entity's origin, as consumers prefer regional over national or foreign institutions. This finding also suggests guidelines for financial entities (institutions) to make decisions on brand management regarding the communication of entities' regional origin.

Moon and Oh (2017) examine COO's effects in international marketing channels; specifically focusing on the role of distributors' behavior. This research investigates the attitude toward foreign brands, social valuation of the brand's origin, and perceived behavioral control influence overseas distributors place foreign brands. The results of this research shows that the attitude toward foreign brands, social valuation of the brand's origin, and perceived behavioral control influence overseas distributors place foreign brands. In addition, antecedents of behavioral factors are examined as country-induced bias factors (i.e. buyer animosity, country-related affect). This study also suggests that to build positive attitudes toward foreign brands, a firm needs to focus on promotions through several media channels in international markets to reduce the perceived risk of the manufacturer's origin.

Insch et al. (2017) investigate consumer willingness to pay a premium for domestically manufactured product in a “buy-national” campaign. Findings indicate a strong evidence for “buy-made-in” effect regarding muesli bar and toilet paper product categories with a 95 percent confidence level. The results suggest marketing implication for brand managers, retail partners, and governments, prompting them to reconsider the rationale for participating in a “buy-national” campaign. The results of this research introduce a unique COO as a choice set for a differential influence on context effect.

Kim et al. (2017) analyze how the concept of national stereotype and COO influence fashion brand images on consumers’ brand evaluation and purchase intention for fashion collections. Data are collected from Seoul, New York, and Paris fashion collections to compare the differences and similarities of consumers’ decision-making process. The key findings of this research indicate that consumers have high-brand evaluation and strong purchase intention from a country that has a stronger COO and fashion brand image. Results also indicates that COO is greatly influenced by countries’ political, economic, and cultural artistic image. Thus, this study suggests a basic foundation for establishing marketing strategies based on COO’s image in order to also increase the fashion collection’s image.

Garrett et al. (2017) examine the relevance of COO for product evaluation as an important information cue and factor in purchase intention on consumers’ decision-making process. This research addresses the role of COO and its place in conjunction with store image, another important informational cue, within an increasingly important product context, that of store brands. Researchers examine the relative effect of COO on store image and identify COO as an...
indicator of the effects on product evaluation and purchase intention. The results show positive effects of COO on brand store evaluation and purchase intention. In addition, COO impacts promotional-focused consumers and public consumed products such as puffer jackets.

Majid (2017) investigate how country of origin image (COI), and price and counterfeit likelihood affect consumer perceptions and choices of risk products. This study explores the positive and negative influences of counterfeit goods’ perceptions and choices. The results indicate that COI as a prominent or differentiating attribute depends on product and issue. In addition, COI is considered as significant factor in Chinese-made, lead-painted toys. Thus, marketing strategies must take into account that COI depends on product categories.

Reardon et al. (2017) attempt to fill the research gap by conducting empirical tests of how consumers’ COO theories influence complex decisions made by retail buyers. The focus is on how COO influences retail purchase processes, such as product involvement and new trial products retail buyers’ typically decide to test. COO has a strong and positive effect on retail buyers for both higher and lower involvement products. COO also has a significant impact on consumer behavior. These results enrich the theoretical foundation for retail buyers, providing knowledge on COO’s effects on all levels of the supply chain. This expands opportunities for manufacturer and retail buyers to better market their products, and highlights the important role of managing industrial sales, branding, and government officials.

The final paper by Zolfagharian et al. (2017) examines the effects of consumer ethnocentrism and COO across different immigrant communities. Previous studies on consumer ethnocentrism and COO focus only on one type of migration: consumers who move from developing to developed countries. This study investigates various patterns of immigrants’ migration in the USA and Mexico. Findings report that for immigrants with high levels of ethnocentrism, prejudice toward home and host country products interacts with COO effects; however, for immigrants with low levels of ethnocentrism, the COO effect is salient.

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References


