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Article

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Differences on the image of Brazil in external markets according to consumers' age, gender, knowledge about the country and country of residence

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Abstract

A country's image could be managed to give greater value to products from that country, while making the country more attractive to investors and more desirable as a tourism destination. Considering two important gaps in the literature on country image (discrepant results on the influence of socio-demographic characteristics on the image of a country and few studies on the image of Brazil), this paper's objective is to check for differences on Brazil image according to the following consumers' characteristics: age, gender, knowledge about Brazil and country of residence. A quantitative survey was distributed to 380 respondents from four European countries: Germany, Ireland, England and France. This study concluded that beliefs about countries may differ according to the degree of perceived similarity with a given country and to certain demographic issues, and respondents that had better evaluations on Brazil's image were: young, men, with a high level of knowledge about Brazil and from France. Moreover, aspects related to communication, distribution and differentiation of Brazilian products were those that received the worst evaluation by consumers participating in the survey, which indicates the need for greater investments from both the Brazilian government and the private sector in communicating and promoting Brazilian products abroad.

Keywords: country image, Brazilian products, European market

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1 INTRODUCTION

Several studies on country image have been conducted since the 1960s (Pharr, 2005; Usunier, 2006). In general, they point to the idea that consumers have very distinct but generalised perceptions of products from other countries. These perceptions of a country have a significant effect on consumer attitudes regarding brands of products made in certain countries (Balabanis, Mueller & Melewar, 2002; Han, 1989). Several authors call this phenomenon the “country-of-origin effect” (Han, 1989; Jaffe & Nebenzhal, 2001; Martin & Eroglu, 1993; Pappu, Quester & Cooksey, 2007).

By analysing the research on country image and its relevance in a decade when global brands were already consolidated (i.e., the 2000s), Pharr (2005) reports that one conclusion can be unequivocally drawn: the origin of the product continues to influence the evaluation the consumer makes of that product. According to Pharr (2005), to oppose the rules of origin as well as to search for reduced trading tariffs or to reduce the labour costs by reallocating manufacturing facilities, including lower salaries, major companies are redefining the country of origin of their products and services.

Bhaskaran and Sukumaran (2007) indicate that the findings of past country image studies can sometimes be contradictory, with some authors concluding that country image is a salient variable that influences product evaluations and purchase intentions, and others concluding that many other factors influence customer beliefs and purchase intentions much more strongly. They have suggested that country image beliefs are highly contextual and evolve over time, and that past studies may have not considered the potential influences, interactions and interconnectedness of factors such as brand names, hybrid offerings, communication and promotional activities, customer characteristics and market dynamics.

Thus, the image of a country can be influenced by exogenous factors such as the level of economic development, national identity, people, political factors, culture and personal values (Jaffe & Nebenzhal, 2001; Balabanis, Mueller & Melewar, 2002), leading to different results. Specifically, studies involving age as an influential factor have presented significant results, with younger consumers more open and receptive with regard to foreign products (Good & Huddleston, 1995). Gender also plays an important role in the perception of “made-in” images (Johansson et al. 1985), but results are not consistent and this is one of the motivations for developing this research. For instance, Balabanis, Mueller and Melewar (2002) explain that females have a higher bias against foreign products and in favor of domestic ones. On the other hand, Good and Huddleston (1995) indicate that women tend to evaluate foreign products in a more favourable manner. This discussion leads to the idea that the consumers’ perceptions actually can change based on their socio-demographic or cultural characteristics, which is an influence investigated in this research.

By understanding the influence of a country’s image on one or more products, the managers of private institutions, such as the export companies, may or may not use the country of origin emphatically as a marketing strategy, or they can alter the product price to increase competitiveness and minimise the negative effects of the country’s negative image among consumers (Han, 1989; Jaffe & Nebenzhal, 2001).

Additionally, companies, industries and government should work collaboratively so that the nation’s image can be positively formed and successfully explored. Individually, a company cannot control the image of its country overseas. At the same time, managers of both private and public institutions should be aware of the magnitude of the “country-of-origin effect” in terms of consumer perception and market competition (Jaffe & Nebenzhal, 2001).

Considering the existing scales for measuring country image, despite the fact that there are many of them, only a few correlate with one another; researchers develop a new approach rather than improve an already-existing scale (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). Many scales have sought to assess the dimensions of country image, while others try to evaluate how this image can affect purchase intentions regarding foreign products. In addition, the majority of these scales have been used in countries such as Germany, France, Canada, and the USA, and only few studies regarded the image of Brazil (Giraldi & Carvalho, 2006), despite the growing importance of the country in the world economy. Brazil is the 7th economy in GDP numbers (US\$ 2,304.646 million in 2011), with a population of around 196.7 million inhabitants (The World Bank, 2012). However, according to Usunier (2006), Brazil has served as a research topic for only 2% of the total amount of work on this theme.

Considering two important gaps in the literature on country image (discrepant results on the influence of socio-demographic characteristics on the image of a country and few studies on the image of Brazil), this paper’s objective is to grow the current literature on the topic, by checking for differences on Brazil image according to the following consumers’ characteristics: age, gender, knowledge about Brazil and country of residence.

The present study sought to evaluate the image of Brazil from the perspective of a group of European consumers through a quantitative survey. Some European market countries were chosen for this survey, as consumers from these countries tend to be environmentally conscious and active, thus resulting in their consumption behaviours having as little impact as possible on the environment (Prieur, 2001).

2 COUNTRY IMAGE

There have been many studies on country image (Pharr, 2005; Usunier, 2006). In fact, the academic community has sought to deepen the analyses of country image, particularly in the last 30 years, and to determine how these images can influence individuals' purchasing decisions and attitudes as well as their choice of country to visit. In addition, a country's image affects other governments' decisions regarding partnerships for development of joint projects or even companies' choices of new regions for investment (Han, 1989; Jaffe & Nebenzhal, 2001; Pappu, Quester & Cooksey, 2007; Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009; Roth and Romeo, 1992).

The literature on national stereotypes and perceptions of nations dates from the 1930s (Child & Doob, 1943; Katz & Braly, 1933; Klingberg, 1941 apud Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). However, it was not until the 1960s that the concept of country image began to draw more attention from marketing researchers as a result of the intensification of commercial exchanges and financial investments. Research on country image indicates that, despite globalisation and the growing economic interdependence between nations, countries have been analysed differently in various regions of the world (Papadopoulos, 1993).

Nagashima (1970) was the first author to define the concept of country image in terms of origin of products, that is, of country image as being the picture, reputation, and stereotype that businessmen and consumers associate with the products of a country. This image is created by variables such as history and tradition, representation of products, political and economic systems and the consumer's emotional experiences. For Roth and Romero (1992), country image is the real perception that consumers have of products from a certain country based on their previous perceptions of the country's production, market resistance and weaknesses, while Martin and Eroglu (1993) define country image as the sum of all of the informative, inferential and descriptive beliefs that an individual has of a country.

For Nebenzhal, Jaffe and Usunier (2003), country image is formed by the consumer's perceptions of attributes of a product made in a given country, by the emotions the consumer has regarding the country and by the perceptions resulting from the social desire to have products manufactured in that country. According to D'Astous and Boujbel (2007), other countries are strongly present in people's consciousness through mass media, products and brands, and travel experiences, and individuals possess organised mental representations of other countries as they do with other objects (brands, stores, persons) related to personal characteristics (e.g., brands) (Aaker, 1997) and stores (D'Astous & Lévesque, 2003).

Beliefs about country image are important when consumers have difficulty distinguishing different offerings or when they do not have enough information to reduce risky buying behaviour (Heslop & Papadopoulos, 1993). Therefore, a country's image affects the consumer's mind cognitively and intuitively in four ways: general image of the country based on previous contacts or experiences; general image of the country in addition to other affective and cognitive influences derived from experiences with its products, thus forming a country-of-origin image of the product or brand; image of the country in addition to functional and aesthetic attributes of the product or brand, thus creating beliefs and attitudes; and finally, comparisons with other countries' products, thus creating cognitive and affective behaviours (Bhaskaran & Sukumaran, 2007; Heslop & Papadopoulos, 1993).

An individual's image of a given country can affect his or her attitudes towards the same country. In other words, in addition to being a cognitive cue of the quality of the product, the country of origin also evokes emotions, identity, pride and memories. These symbols and emotions transform the country of origin into an image attribute, which has been shown to be significant in the decision making regarding purchases and an important source of brand equity (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999).

Some studies show strong evidence that country image changes over time and that beliefs about the country of origin are indeed changeable as well (Verlegh, 2007). The influence of communication strategies on such beliefs has been studied by Lotz and Hu (2001), who conclude that a negative country-of-origin image can be more favourable when products are associated with a prestigious retail market, thus serving as an effective marketing strategy tool.

For Nagashima (1977), negative beliefs about a country can also change through advertisements and national campaigns to promote exports. Thus, countries with unfavourable images can change those images over time, though it is necessary to invest in research that is focused on consumers and investors to improve the production, logistics and tourism structures of those countries.

Conceptually, the most recent research on country of origin has gradually shifted from a mere assessment of the product differences and preferences based on a country of origin premise to the analysis of a "more complex construct", that is, the country image that is currently accepted (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). While these conventional studies allow researchers to analyse whether consumers prefer products or brands of one country over another, the focus on the image perceived by other countries allows these perceptions to be analysed.

Recent attempts have been made to organise different conceptualisations of country image. For example, Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009) have established three groups to define country image. The first definition uses country image (CoI) as a construct involving general images created not only by those products

representing the country, but also by the country's degree of economic development, the political maturity, the culture and traditions, the level of technological advancement and the industrialisation (Allred, Chakraborty & Miller, 1999; Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). The second group defines country image in terms of origin of products, the so-called product-country image (PCI), while the third and last group exclusively defines the product image (PI) of a country, as described by Nagashima (1970).

According to Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009), the inconsistencies in defining the country-image construct have resulted in considerable confusion. Some authors define country image as "perceptions" (Han, 1989; Nebenzahl, Jaffe & Usunier, 2003), while others suggest that it represents impressions or associations (Ittersum, Candel & Meulenberg, 2003), and still others support the premise that country image is a stereotype (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999) or schema (Askegaard & Ger, 1998). Finally, there are those who identify country image as "beliefs" (Martin & Eroglu, 1993), i.e., a trait that represents one of the attitude components. This lack of consensus seems to be the result of a lack of consensus about the country's image itself (Poiesz, 1989).

Although none of the aforementioned definitions are incorrect (perceptions, stereotypes, schema, and beliefs), Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009) believe that they are not broad enough to capture the entire scope of the country-image construct. According to Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009), the theory of attitude is the only concept in the literature that has no limitations and attempts to explain how country image is formed and how consumers perceive it. For these authors, this concept can explain both favourable and unfavourable evaluations about country image. Furthermore, attitude involves not only cognitive aspects but also affective (feelings and emotions) and conative (behaviour) ones (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999).

Most studies on the factors determining country image are based on the country's characteristics and on the demographic differences between the countries analysed (Balabanis, Mueller & Melewar, 2002), indicating that the country image formation is dependent on different antecedents (precursors or determinants), which have been the focus of investigation of an increasing number of researchers (Balabanis, Mueller & Melewar, 2002; Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009; Pharr, 2005; Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). Among the antecedents contributing to the country image formation, one can mention: the level of contact between countries, language similarity, demographic factors, lifestyle, culture and personal values (Balabanis, Mueller & Melewar, 2002; Chao & Rajendran, 1993).

With regard to consumers' characteristics investigated in this research, the age group is related to differences in the consumer receptiveness to foreign products (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). Interestingly, studies based on age groups have reported significant results for younger consumers, who seem to be more receptive to foreign products (Good & Huddleston, 1995). Wall, Heslop and Hofstra (1988) have found gender differences in evaluations of foreign products, with men relying on technological development and political orientation to form their opinions about the quality of the products made in another country, whereas women used different criteria, such as geographical proximity and product specificity (e.g. clothes, shoes), to evaluate the countries. Balabanis, Mueller and Melewar (2002) have also reported that women have a bias towards foreign products, being more favourable to national products. On the other hand, Good and Huddleston (1995) found that women tend to assess foreign products more favourably than men. Therefore, one can observe that despite the consensus on the fact that consumer gender influences evaluations of the country-of-origin image, the results are indeed conflicting. In addition to gender, Ahmed and D'Astous (1996) showed that young consumers and individuals belonging to higher-income classes have more positive beliefs about foreign products.

3 SCALES TO MEASURE THE COUNTRY IMAGE AND ITS DIMENSIONS

Based on the review conducted by Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009), we see that the literature contains at least thirty studies on ways of measuring country image and another forty studies using methods to measure a product's image. In one of the first reviews of the research on country of origin, Bilkey and Nes (1982) criticised the large number of samples used in the USA, as approximately one-third of the studies used developing or emergent nations as country of origin for products (Usunier, 2006).

Two-thirds of the scales developed to measure country image were also aimed at measuring product image, with most scales using "global products" rather than specific categories. The reasons for this methodology are related to the fact that images of specific products from a given country may not be generalised, thus limiting the value of such research (Papadopoulos, 1986). Therefore, if the main objective of the research is to explore general images of countries and their products, global product evaluations are more suitable for measuring the image of products. If, on the other hand, the objective is to assess the impact of country image on both purchase intention and evaluations of a product or brand, then researchers should ask about specific products or brands (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009).

Some of the most important scales are presented herein, as they have been largely used in research and demonstrate a better capacity to measure images within a multidimensional context. In one of the first studies on country image, Nagashima (1970) evaluated attitudes towards foreign products by comparing those of Japanese and American origins. Country image was evaluated using twenty questions that covered five dimensions: price and value; service and engineering; advertising and reputation; design and style; and consumer profile.

Nagashima (1970) considered the image of a country to consist of several associations with the country's products rather than the general image people have of the country itself. Nagashima's analysis falls into the third group of definitions suggested by Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009), that is, the image of a country is the result of various associations with its products.

Han (1990) has sought to measure country image using five dimensions: technical advancement, prestige value, workmanship, price, and serviceability. For Roth and Romeo (1992), four elements are considered when assessing a country's image: innovation, design, finishing, and prestige. Innovation refers to both the inclusion of new technologies and a product's technological advances. Design refers to a product's appearance, style and colour, and finishing refers to a product's level of reliability, durability and quality. Finally, prestige refers to the exclusivity, status and reputation of a product's brand. These elements are related to aspects of products made in a given country rather than to the general characteristics of a country.

One can find that the variables adopted by Han (1989) and Roth and Romeo (1992) to assess country image are only related to the product's attributes, that is, these variables are not correlated to the country's attributes. Therefore, this scale cannot detect any correlation between country-of-origin image and product image, which suggests a one-dimensional concept based on the product's quality, not including other important elements, as observed in a multidimensional concept (Giraldi & Ikeda, 2009).

According to some authors, the concept of country image is not one-dimensional but rather multidimensional. The focus is no longer the characteristics of the products but the country and those issues related to its image, such as the country's economy, history and international importance (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001; Pisharodi & Parameswaran, 2002; Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). Since the 1990s, studies have considered dimensions other than product-related images that impact a country's image.

Martin and Eroglu (1993) measured country image using three dimensions: political, economic and technological. Based on the items established by Martin and Eroglu (1993), Pappu, Quester and Cooksey (2007) sought to investigate country image using two categories of products (television sets and automobiles) and their dimensions (i.e., innovation, prestige and design) as well as the country-image dimensions (technological, economic and political).

Pisharodi and Parameswaran (1992, 2002) also sought to measure country image in a multidimensional manner by using three groups of country-related aspects with their own dimensions. The first group of items, called "general country attributes" (GCA), is aimed at capturing the respondents' attitudes towards a given country. The second group, "general product attributes" (GPA), is aimed at identifying attitudes towards the general characteristics of the products made in the country under study. The third group, "specific product attributes" (SPA), identifies attitudes towards specific products.

By studying the Canada's image and its products, Papadopoulos and Heslop (2000) presented a group of variables utilised as mental models that are used by consumers to evaluate a country and its products. The criteria used to evaluate a country were the following: level of country development (technological development, total growth, level of education), feelings related to people (honesty, hostility, dedication to work) and established narrow relationships with the country (intent to invest and purchase more products made in the country). For the product evaluations, the variables used as criteria by the consumers included the following: price, market presence, and responsibility.

In addition to the scales described above, the personification approach developed by Nebenzahl, Jaffe and Usunier (2003) measures the image of a country as the origin of products. This scale contains 27 items and has been tested in Canada, France, Israel, Mexico and the USA. The scale is based on specific questions (e.g., "People who buy products made in X are...") and includes the evaluation of statements made according to an agreement scale (e.g., "Products made in X have high quality..."). These statements involve evaluative dimensions as well as the social-emotional dimensions that the consumers attach to the evaluated products. Consequently, three major dimensions were obtained, representing different personality profiles that are associated with individuals who buy foreign products, namely, "underdog", "economic value seeker", and "quality and satisfaction seeker".

More recently, D'Astous and Boujbel (2007) developed a scale to rank countries according to the respondents' personal characteristics. The authors listed relevant adjectives obtained from personality scales and individual interviews with a sample of Canadian French-speaking adults. The authors identified six dimensions of "country personality": agreeableness, wickedness, snobbism, assiduousness, conformity and unobtrusiveness.

4 METHODOLOGY

Considering empirical studies samples to measure the country image, different types were used, including students (Martin & Eroglu, 1993; Pereira, Hsu and Kundu, 2005; Brijs, 2006), housekeepers (Ittersum, Candel & Meulenberg, 2003; Nebenzahl, Jaffe & Usunier, 2003), consumers (Pappu, Quester & Cooksey, 2007) and business men (Kuhn, 1993). Concerning the method of sampling, the majority of the studies utilizes convenience sample (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009).

In this regard, this research population consisted of a group of European consumers who were represented by under-graduate students, post-graduate students and staff of five European institutions, including the Business School of the University College in Dublin (Ireland); the IESEG School of Management in Paris (France); the International Office of Sorbonne-Paris (France); the University of Münster Schools of Management, Economics and Law in Münster (Germany); and the University of Kent Business School in Canterbury (England). The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 60 years.

Including all five institutions, the entire population included approximately 4,000 students and staff.

This group of individuals was defined for the study because they represent a segment of interest for companies as potential buyers of foreign products. In addition, as shown by Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999), the magnitude of the country-of-origin effect does not differ between studies using samples of students and those using samples of consumers. However, the choice of this population may have brought some bias to the results of the evaluation of Brazil's image, as the sample includes individuals with higher levels of education than the general population. This element is one of the limitations of the research.

This research used a non-probabilistic sample and convenience criteria. As the elements of the sample were not chosen randomly, it was not possible to objectively evaluate the sampling error (Churchill, 1991). Thus, it is not possible to place limits on the accuracy of the estimates. In other words, no generalisations can be made of the results obtained from this sample for the entire survey population, since the key characteristic of a sample allowing generalization is its probabilistic versus non-probabilistic nature (Mazzocchi, 2008). Therefore, the t-test to check the statistical significance of differences was not employed. However, the magnitude of differences was evaluated by the coefficient of variation, which is a way to express the variability of the data from the average (Anderson, Sweeney & Williams, 2010).

According to Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009), non-probability sampling techniques prevail among studies on country image, and they are considered acceptable for theory testing purposes, as it is the case in this study (the investigation of differences on the image of Brazil according to consumers' age, gender, knowledge about the country and country of residence).

The variables used in this study to measure Brazil's image were adapted from a study by Pisharodi and Parameswaran (2002). This scale was chosen, since it has good reports on both reliability and validity, which according to Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009) is a critical problem in country image research. Moreover, considering that the attitude theory perspective is the best way to conceptualize the country image construct (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009), Pisharodi and Parameswaran's (2002) proposal comprises cognitive, affective and conative components of attitude.

The items of the scale proposed by Pisharodi and Parameswaran's (2002) considered in this research are the ones comprising the dimension "general country attributes" (GCA), which is aimed at capturing the general attitudes towards a country, and the dimension "general product attributes" (GPA), which is aimed at identifying general attitudes towards the products made in the country. The items evaluated in this research are presented in Exhibit 1.

Exhibit 1: General country attributes and general product attributes used to measure the image of Brazil. Adapted from Parameswaran and Pisharodi (2002)

General country attributes
Brazil is friendly and internationally admired
Brazilian people are creative and artistically gifted
Brazilian people are well-educated
Brazilian people are hard working
Brazilian people reached high standard of living
Brazilian people have technical skills
Brazil is economically similar to my country
Brazil is politically similar to my country
Brazil is culturally similar to my country
Brazil plays a significant international role
Brazil is well known for producing mainly industrial products
General product attributes
Brazilian products are expensive
Brazilian products are luxury
Brazilian products have quality workmanship
Brazilian products are imitations
Brazilian products are sold in many countries
Brazilian products are not attractive
Brazilian products are heavily advertised overseas
Brazilian products need frequent repairs
Brazilian products have a wide range of models
Brazilian products are long-lasting
Brazilian products have a good value
Brazilian products are highly technological
Brazilian products are easily found
Brazilian products are prestigious

We used a seven-point Likert scale of agreement (1=strongly agree to 7=strongly disagree), and we sought to reduce data relating to questions about Brazil's image and its products through exploratory factor analysis to facilitate the identification of the key dimensions that compose Brazil's image. New variables were created from the observed composition of factors (mean values of the questions that compose them). Thus, it was possible to identify those aspects of Brazil's image that were evaluated more positively and those that were evaluated more negatively, as well as to check for differences on the evaluations according to consumers' age, gender, knowledge about the country and country of residence.

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In total, 382 questionnaires were obtained during the months of September and October 2010, in the four countries mentioned, but two were dropped due to outliers' identification. According to Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009), the average sample size of studies on country image is 338, which makes this study's sample consistent with the sort of sample sizes typically found in cross-sectional research. Questionnaires were applied individually to under-graduation and post-graduation students as well as to the staff of the four aforementioned European universities.

With regard to the sample obtained from the four countries, the mean age of the respondents was 24.4 years, with standard deviation of 6.4 years. The youngest respondent was 18 years old, whereas the oldest was 61. Of the total sample, 60% of the respondents were between 18 and 24 years old, whereas 40% were older, which justifies the sample being spilt into two age groups. Table 1 lists the participation of each country in the sample of respondents.

Table 1: Participation of each country in the total sample

	Frequency	Percentage
France	40	10
England	116	30.5
Germany	112	29.5
Ireland	114	30.0
Total	382	100.0

The level of knowledge about Brazil among the respondents was assessed by means of a 7-point itemized scale, ranging from 1 (“I know a lot”) to 7 (“I know nothing”). The mean score was 5.0, with standard deviation of 1.4, which indicates in general a relatively poor knowledge of Brazil among respondents. Respondents scoring less than 4 were considered as having good knowledge about Brazil, whereas those scoring more than 4 were considered as knowing little about the country for group comparisons.

It is observed that for the analysis, the variables "Brazilian products are not attractive", "Brazilian products need frequent repairs" and "Brazilian products are imitations" were recoded because they are sentences with negative connotations and should thus have their valences reversed. Accordingly, all of the questions had the same valence as part of a consistent procedure scoring.

Regarding the critical assumptions necessary for running a factor analysis, the Bartlett's sphericity test was performed, which confirmed the suitability of the technique. In addition, to measure the fit of the data to factor analysis, we employed the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test, with a value obtained of 0,816. This result can be considered excellent, according to Hair et al. (2005). Furthermore, the commonalities of the variables were evaluated, and those less than 0.5 were excluded (“Brazilian products are expensive” and “Brazilian products are luxury”).

The choice of the number of factors to be retained was made by analysing the eigenvalues. We obtained seven factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, thus explaining, together, 61.045% of the total variance. Following the suggestion of Hair et al. (2005), we rotated the factors using the VARIMAX method, which is the most commonly used method for this type of analysis (Malhotra, 1996). Table 2 shows the factor loadings obtained.

Table 2: Rotated component matrix, name of the variables and Cronbach’s alphas coefficient

Factor name	Cronbach’s alpha	Statements	Factor loads
Factor 1- Face of the Brazilian People	0.749	Brazilian people are hard working	0.769
		Brazilian people are well-educated	0.732
		Brazilian people have technical skills	0.679
		Brazilian people reached high standard of living	0.644
Factor 2 - General Image of the Brazilian products	0.707	Brazilian products are long-lasting	0.801
		Brazilian products have a good value	0.731
		Brazilian products have a wide range of models	0.601
Factor3 - Communication, Distribution and Differentiation of Brazilian Products	0.728	Brazilian products are easily found	0.740
		Brazilian products are prestigious	0.668
		Brazil is well known for producing mainly industrial products	0.618
		Brazilian products are highly technological	0.523
		Brazilian products are heavily advertised overseas	0.515
Factor 4 - Perceived Similarity	0.720	Brazil is politically similar to my country	0.791
		Brazil is economically similar to my country	0.770
		Brazil is culturally similar to my country	0.639
Factor 5 - Internationalisation of Brazil	0.507	Brazilian products are sold in many countries	0.688
		Brazil plays a significant international role	0.680
Factor 6 - Beliefs about Brazilian Arts and Sympathy for Brazil	0.697	Brazilian people are creative and artistically gifted Brazil is friendly and internationally admired	0.864 0.843
Factor 7- Negative Aspects of Brazilian Products	0.429	Brazilian products are imitations	0.723
		Brazilian products need frequent repair	0.721
		Brazilian products are not attractive	0.488

Once the rotated solution with seven factors was obtained, the factors were interpreted. According to Hair et al. (2005), it is necessary to verify the practical significance of the factors found. The authors determined that the factors that have factor loadings close to .50 are considered to be significant and must be retained. Virtually all of the factor loadings from the analysis have values greater than 0.50, except for the factor loading on the correlation between the variable "The Brazilian products have quality workmanship" (0.465) and factor 5. Therefore, this variable was deleted from the analysis.

Moreover, variables cross-loadings in different dimensions were analysed. Two cases were detected: "Brazilian products are highly technological", cross-loading more intensely in Factor 2 (0.444) and Factor 3 (0.523); and "Brazilian products are not attractive", cross-loading more intensely in Factor 5 (0.482) and Factor 7 (0.488). In the first case, the variable was kept in Factor 3, since the load was higher than 0.5 and, in the second case, the whole Factor 7 was withdrawn from the analysis, as explained next.

The second step of the process of factor interpretation involves reliability analysis of the results found, which is a measure of the consistency between the multiple measurements of a variable (Hair et al., 2005). Internal consistency is a common method of measuring reliability based on the rationale that individual items of a scale should measure the same construct and, therefore, be highly correlated. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. According to Hair et al. (2005), the lower limit for Cronbach's alpha is 0.070, although 0.60 is acceptable in exploratory research.

Factor 1, which contained variables that describe the Brazilian people in terms of quality of life, education, work and technical skills, had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.749, which is considered to be satisfactory. Therefore, Factor 1 was termed "Face of the Brazilian People".

Factor 2 had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.707, thus ensuring its reliability. This factor, consisting of variables related to evaluations of Brazilian products in terms of model variety, durability, and price, was termed "General Image of the Brazilian products".

Factor 3 had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.728, showing good reliability. This factor consisted of variables related to access to Brazilian products (if they are easily found), differentiation (if they are highly technological and prestigious) and communication (if they are heavily advertised internationally). In addition, Factor 3 also includes the variable "Brazil is well known for producing mainly industrial products" and "Brazilian products are highly technological". Therefore, Factor 3 was termed "Communication, Distribution and Differentiation of Brazilian Products".

Factor 4 also had a satisfactory Cronbach's alpha of 0.720. This factor consisted of variables related to the cultural, economic and political similarities perceived by the respondents between their countries and Brazil. Therefore, this factor was termed "Perceived Similarity".

Factor 5 was termed "Internationalisation of Brazil" as it consisted of variables such as "Brazil plays a significant international role" and "Brazilian products are sold in several countries". Cronbach's alpha showed internal consistency of 0.507, indicating that this factor was not acceptable. In fact, according to Cortina (1993), the value of Cronbach's alpha decreases as the number of variables in a factor decreases, as its calculation is directly proportional to this number (N). Since Factor 5 only has two variables and a low Cronbach's alpha, it was decided to drop it from the analysis.

Factor 6, termed "Beliefs about Brazilian Arts and Sympathy for Brazil", consisted of variables such as "Brazil is friendly and internationally admired" and "Brazilian people are creative and artistically gifted". This might be an indication that Brazilian arts are admired in external markets. The reliability coefficient for this factor was 0.697, which is very close to the acceptable level. Finally, factor 7 was termed "Negative Aspects of Brazilian Products". Because its reliability coefficient was 0.429, this factor was unacceptable for the analysis.

In their study, Parameswaran and Pisharodi (1992) found only two dimensions (factors) related to variables aimed at measuring country image through the method of structural equations analysis: "People Facet" and "Perceived Similarity". In the present study, one additional reliable factor was found that related to Brazilian image, namely, "Beliefs about Arts and Sympathy for Brazil".

Parameswaran and Pisharodi (2002) found three factors resulting from variables used to measure product image. The first factor involves the image of the product itself (e.g., price, durability, variety), the second factor involves the distribution and marketing of the product (e.g., heavily advertised, easily found), and the third factor involves negative aspects of the product (e.g., imitations, lack of attractiveness, constant repairs). Similar factors were found in the current study. Overall, there was a certain similarity between the five image dimensions for Brazil found here and those observed by Parameswaran and Pisharodi (2002).

New variables were created from the factors composition (mean answer values of related questions). To identify which dimension was better assessed by the respondents, the factor composition was calculated to rank the factors obtained. To be considered well evaluated, the dimensions that compose Brazil's image must obtain average scores below 4 (i.e., closer to "totally agree"). Negative assessments are represented by average scores above 4 (i.e., closer to "strongly disagree"). Average scores close to 4 are considered to be neutral assessments. The scores are presented in Table 3, and the analysis is complemented by the coefficients of variation (CV) of each variable.

Table 3: Mean scores of Brazil’s image dimensions

Dimensions	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Coefficient of variation
Beliefs about Brazilian arts and sympathy for Brazil	380	2.5724	1.06934	0.416
Face of the Brazilian people	380	4.0039	0.87358	0.218
General image of Brazilian products	380	4.1399	0.79914	0.193
Communication, distribution and differentiation of Brazilian products	380	4.6100	0.89616	0.194
Perceived similarity	380	5.1105	1.19700	0.234
Average of Brazil image score	380	4.0873		

As shown in Table 3, the highest evaluated dimension is “Beliefs about arts and sympathy for Brazil” (CV above 40%, i.e., high dispersion). The second highest evaluated dimension is “Face of the Brazilian people”, received a neutral evaluation considered with an average dispersion of results between 10% and 30%. Therefore, among the respondents, Brazil is above all considered to be a friendly, creative and artistic country. Such elements reflect the traditional stereotypes of the country as related to hospitality, festivals and arts, with its polite, hard-working, skilled people and its good quality of life. However, the two dimensions that are well evaluated by the sample have high coefficients of variation, indicating a high spread of results among the respondents. This result indicates that future research should be conducted to confirm the results and identify the reasons for the variability of responses.

The dimension “General image of Brazilian products” has received a neutral evaluation, i.e., scores very close to four. The respondents did not assess Brazil’s economy, culture and politics as being similar to those of their countries, and these aspects are represented by the dimension “perceived similarity”. This finding is understandable, considering that the survey was conducted in European and non-Latin American countries. Finally, the image dimension of Brazil that received the lowest scores, with average scores close to five, was that related to aspects of communication, distribution and differentiation of Brazilian products. In general, when all dimensions are considered altogether, the image of Brazil can be classified as a neutral one, with average score value close to 4.

As shown in the literature review, it is believed that demographic, environmental and cultural factors may facilitate or inhibit the confidence in a country of origin (Pisharodi & Parameswaran, 2002). Some of these factors are discussed herein to verify whether the assessment of the image dimensions of Brazil differs according to age, gender, knowledge about Brazil and the respondent’s country of residence. It should be noted that t-tests to check the statistical significance of differences was not employed, as explained in the methodology section, since a convenience sample was used in this research. Results thus cannot be generalized to the whole population.

To compare the answers between different age groups, the sample was divided according to age: respondents aged 18 to 24 years old and respondents older than 24 years old. Respondents older than 24 years old were mainly graduate students and staff from the universities and represented 40% of the sample. As observed in Table 4, both younger and older respondents assessed the dimension “Beliefs about Brazilian arts and sympathy for Brazil” as being the most positive and the dimension “Communication, distribution and differentiation of Brazilian products” as being the most negative, while the dimension “General image of the Brazilian products” was neutrally evaluated. Thus, no age differences were found in this research, considering the rank ordering of Brazil’s image dimensions. However, when it comes to the average evaluation of Brazil image, it can be seen that younger respondents have a slightly worse evaluation of Brazil than older ones do. This is a different result from other ones comparing age groups that have reported more positive results for younger consumers (Good & Huddleston, 1995).

Table 4: Mean scores of Brazil's image dimensions, according to age groups

Aged 18 to 24 years	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Coefficient of variation
Beliefs about Brazilian arts and sympathy for Brazil	231	2.5411	1.04254	0.410
Face of the Brazilian people	231	4.0465	0.84427	0.209
General image of Brazilian products	231	4.1775	0.81353	0.195
Communication, distribution and differentiation of Brazilian products	231	4.6221	0.89129	0.193
Perceived similarity	231	5.1609	1.17532	0.228
Average of Brazil image score (aged 18 to 24 years)	231	4.1096		
Older than 24 years				
Beliefs about Brazilian arts and sympathy for Brazil	149	2.6208	1.11144	0.424
Face of the Brazilian people	149	3.9379	0.91614	0.233
General image of Brazilian products	149	4.0817	0.77540	0.190
Communication, distribution and differentiation of Brazilian products	149	4.5913	0.90635	0.197
Perceived similarity	149	5.0324	1.22978	0.244
Average of Brazil image score (older than 24 years)	149	4.0528		

When comparing the evaluations performed by men and women, it can be seen that no difference in the rank ordering of image dimensions were detected, as shown in Table 5. Nonetheless, men have a slightly better general image of Brazil than women do, as it can be seen from the average score of Brazil image. In the literature review, it was seen that, although there is a consensus that consumer gender influences evaluations of a country's image, results are conflicting. Nonetheless, the results of this research are more in accordance with Balabanis, Mueller and Melewar's (2002), who have also reported that women have a worse image of foreign products. Wall, Heslop and Hofstra (1988) have also observed gender differences in evaluations of foreign products. The authors found that men rely on technological development and political orientation to form their opinions about the quality of products made in another country, whereas women use different criteria, such as geographical proximity and product specificity (e.g., clothes, shoes), to rank the countries.

It was also found here that older individuals (over 24 years of age) and males rated Brazil's economy, politics and culture as being more similar to their own countries than did younger and female subjects, having a better general image of Brazil. Results are in accordance with Han's (1989), for whom the country evaluation can differ depending on how consumers perceive similarities (or lack of) between their own country and others in terms of culture, economy and political systems.

Table 5: Mean scores of Brazil's image dimensions, according to gender

Male	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Coefficient of variation
Beliefs about Brazilian arts and sympathy for Brazil	188	2.5146	1.11988	0.445
Face of the Brazilian people	188	4.0492	0.89876	0.222
General image of Brazilian products	188	4.0709	0.77673	0.191
Communication, distribution and differentiation of Brazilian products	188	4.5915	0.87333	0.190
Perceived similarity	188	5.0718	0.19855	0.236
Average of Brazil image score (male)	188	4.0596		
Female				
Beliefs about Brazilian arts and sympathy for Brazil	192	2.6289	0.01719	0.387
Face of the Brazilian people	192	3.9596	0.84820	0.214
General image of Brazilian products	192	4.2075	0.81687	0.194
Communication, distribution and differentiation of Brazilian products	192	4.6281	0.91989	0.199
Perceived similarity	192	5.1484	1.19741	0.233
Average of Brazil image score (female)	192	4.1145		

Table 6 shows the mean values for each dimension and the coefficients of variation according to the level of knowledge respondents have about Brazil. Respondents with a high level of knowledge about Brazil assessed all of the dimensions more positively compared to respondents with a lack of knowledge about Brazil, as well as the general image of Brazil (represented by the mean score lower than 4). The high-knowledge respondents also regarded Brazil's culture, economy, and political systems as being more similar to those of their own countries than did the low-knowledge respondents. However, there is a high variability in the results of the two high rated dimensions, which also occurred in the previous comparative analysis.

Respondents with greater knowledge about Brazil neutrally evaluated the dimension "Communication, distribution and differentiation of Brazilian products", i.e., they provided a more positive assessment of this dimension than individuals with less knowledge. Those who had little knowledge about Brazil negatively evaluated the "Overall image of Brazilian products" and the "Communication, distribution and differentiation of Brazilian products" dimensions, the latter being the most poorly evaluated dimension.

The dimension "Perceived similarity" received the worst average score among the group of respondents with little knowledge about Brazil, when compared to all other groups. These results may be indicative of the need to invest in improving aspects related to tourism in and communications about Brazil and its products to reduce the negative stereotypes, since people that show good levels of knowledge tend to have a better evaluation of Brazil and Brazilian products.

Table 6: Mean scores of Brazil's image dimensions, according to level of knowledge

Good knowledge about Brazil	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Coefficient of variation
Beliefs about Brazilian arts and sympathy for Brazil	144	2.4479	1.09188	0.446
Face of the Brazilian people	144	3.8701	0.96054	0.248
General image of Brazilian products	144	3.9483	0.85932	0.218
Communication, distribution and differentiation of Brazilian products	144	4.3730	0.98001	0.224
Perceived similarity	144	4.6551	1.37616	0.296
Average of Brazil image score (good knowledge)	144	3.8589		
Poor knowledge about Brazil				
Beliefs about Brazilian arts and sympathy for Brazil	236	2.6483	1.05045	0.397
Face of the Brazilian people	236	4.0856	0.80725	0.198
General image of Brazilian products	236	4.2568	0.73782	0.173
Communication, distribution and differentiation of Brazilian products	236	4.7546	0.80956	0.170
Perceived similarity	236	5.3884	0.97660	0.181
Average of Brazil image score (poor knowledge)	236	4.2267		

Table 7 presents the mean scores for each country that participated in the study. Based on these results, we conclude that French respondents positively assessed the dimensions "Beliefs about Brazilian arts and sympathy for Brazil" and "Face of the Brazilian people", whereas the dimension "Communication, distribution and differentiation of Brazilian products" received the most negative evaluation. French respondents gave the best overall evaluation of Brazil's image, as it can be seen from the average image score.

Among the participants from England, the most positively evaluated dimensions were also "Beliefs about Brazilian arts and sympathy for Brazil" and "Face of the Brazilian people". Considering the mean scores obtained from both the French and English respondents, there is little perceived similarity between Brazil's culture, economy and political systems and those of France and England. The degree of perceived similarity was even lower among the Irish and German respondents.

Similarly to the other groups of respondents, Irish respondents positively evaluated the dimensions "Beliefs about Brazilian arts and sympathy for Brazil" and "Face of the Brazilian people" and negatively evaluated the dimension "Communication, distribution and differentiation of Brazilian products". The assessment of the dimension "General image of Brazilian products" can be considered neutral. It can be said that respondents from England and from Ireland had very similar overall ratings of Brazil (as shown in the average image score).

Among the German respondents, the most positively evaluated dimensions was "Beliefs about Brazilian arts and sympathy for Brazil", whereas the worst evaluation was given to the dimension "Communication,

distribution and differentiation of Brazilian products”. Because the dimensions “Face of the Brazilian people” and “General image of Brazilian products” had mean scores close to 4, they were regarded as being neutrally evaluated by the German respondents. Furthermore, a lower dispersion of results was observed in the German sample and they gave the worst overall ratings of Brazil image, when compared to respondents from the other countries.

Table 7: Mean scores of Brazil’s image dimensions, according to country of residence

France	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Coefficient of variation
Beliefs about Brazilian arts and sympathy for Brazil	40	2.2625	0.76784	0.339
Face of the Brazilian people	40	3.8469	0.86718	0.225
General image of Brazilian products	40	4.1750	0.71915	0.172
Communication, distribution and differentiation of Brazilian products	40	4.5450	1.02180	0.225
Perceived similarity	40	5.0542	1.12621	0.223
Average of Brazil image score (France)	40	3.9767		
England				
Beliefs about Brazilian arts and sympathy for Brazil	115	2.9696	1.16093	0.391
Face of the Brazilian people	115	3.9967	0.79918	0.200
General image of Brazilian products	115	4.0957	0.90404	0.221
Communication, distribution and differentiation of Brazilian products	115	4.4374	0.95854	0.216
Perceived similarity	115	4.9522	1.38074	0.279
Average of Brazil image score (England)	115	4.0903		
Ireland				
Beliefs about Brazilian arts and sympathy for Brazil	114	2.5965	1.14998	0.443
Face of the Brazilian people	114	3.9200	0.96239	0.246
General image of Brazilian products	114	4.1418	0.80718	0.195
Communication, distribution and differentiation of Brazilian products	114	4.5877	0.87342	0.190
Perceived similarity	114	5.2295	1.20152	0.230
Average of Brazil image score (Ireland)	114	4.0951		
Germany				
Beliefs about Brazilian arts and sympathy for Brazil	111	2.2477	0.81777	0.364
Face of the Brazilian people	111	4.1543	0.84274	0.203
General image of Brazilian products	111	4.1712	0.70513	0.169
Communication, distribution and differentiation of Brazilian products	111	4.8351	0.75939	0.157
Perceived similarity	111	5.1727	0.99110	0.192
Average of Brazil image score (Germany)	111	4.1162		

Based on the results obtained in the present research, one can conclude that the higher the perceived similarity between Brazil and the country of the respondents, the more positive was their evaluation of other dimensions related to Brazil’s image. According to Han (1989), the country of origin effect can differ from country to country as cultural, economic and political similarities may or may not be perceived by the foreign consumer. This effect may be greater for a product whose country of origin, in the consumer’s opinion, has social, cultural and economic systems different from his or her own (Han, 1989).

6 CONCLUSIONS

This paper has shown that the consumers' perceptions can change based on their socio-demographic or cultural characteristics, by checking for differences on Brazil image according to some consumers' characteristics. Using a quantitative survey, this study concluded that beliefs about countries may differ according to the degree of perceived similarity with a given country and to certain demographic issues, such as country of residence, knowledge about Brazil, gender and age. Respondents that had better evaluations on Brazil's image were: young, men, with a high level of knowledge about Brazil and from France. With these results, it can be said that two important gaps in the literature on country image were addressed: discrepant results on the influence of socio-demographic characteristics on the image of a country and few studies on the image of Brazil.

It was also concluded that aspects related to communication, distribution and differentiation of Brazilian products were those that received the worst evaluation by consumers participating in the survey, which indicates the need for greater investments from both the Brazilian government and the private sector in communicating and promoting Brazilian products abroad. In these communication campaigns, it seems important to emphasise issues related to the arts, festivities and friendliness of the Brazilian people, which were dimensions that were rated positively by respondents from all of the countries where the survey was conducted.

Considering other practical implications of the results, Brazilian public managers could launch campaigns aimed to minimise the negative image of the country overseas, thus increasing the likelihood that the products will be consumed worldwide with higher aggregate value. Projects should be also implemented to improve airport, port and road infrastructures for export logistics, in addition to offering higher fiscal incentives to exporters.

Regarding the methodological limitations of this research, we highlight the defined target population for this study, which does not cover other important markets with which Brazil maintains trade relations, such as other European and Asian countries, the United States, or even other European consumer segments, such as professionals and affluent consumers. Moreover, the interviewees were most likely more educated than the general population; thus, the assessments of the country and product choices in general could have been based on aspects other than those made by less educated individuals. For example, choices and evaluations made by more educated individuals may be more rational and less based on stereotypes. Therefore, the fact that we have used a sample of undergraduate students, post graduate students and faculty members can be considered a limitation of this research, since they may not represent the opinions of all European consumers or even of consumers from the countries analysed.

Furthermore, it is stressed that the questionnaire did not cover questions related to respondents' willingness to pay a premium price for Brazilian products, or even their intention to buy and to recommend Brazilian products, what could have allowed for different analysis (such as the relation between a country's image and the willingness to pay a premium price).

Future studies could apply different scales to evaluate Brazil's image in other countries, using samples of individuals with various educational levels to deepen the discussions and conclusions presented here. Additionally, future research may help to identify the reasons for the high variability in some of the results.

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