

# Associations Evoked by Using Direct and Indirect Country-of-Origin Markers

Associaties opgeroepen met behulp van direct- en indirect herkomstmarkeringen

Bachelor Thesis

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## **Abstract**

Country-of-Origin markers evoke associations in consumers' mind. Although some researchers have been conducted regarding associations and multilingual advertising, no research has been done with regard to the associations evoked by direct and indirect Country-of-Origin markers. An experimental study was used including 210 Dutch participants who were asked to write down their associations with questions containing a direct- and indirect Country-of-Origin marker. These questions were referred to Germany, France, and Italy. This study investigated which associations were evoked, the valence of these associations, and the Country-of-Origin relatedness of the associations. Results showed that most associations evoked were of a neutral valence, not Country-of-Origin related, and represented mostly characteristics. In conclusion, direct and indirect Country-of-Origin markers evoke the same type of associations and thus the markers do not show different outcomes from each other. That is, neutral associations that are not Country-of-Origin related. Additionally, both markers evoke mostly associations related to characteristics which includes associations such as qualities, features, and flags.

**Keywords:** Country-of-Origin effect, associations, specific, abstract, markers, direct Country-of-Origin, indirect Country-of-Origin, Germany, France, Italy

The Country-of-Origin effect is a cue for consumers to evaluate a product by means of its place of origin. By using direct (mentioning the country) or indirect (e.g. language cue) Country-of-Origin markers associations are evoked in the minds of consumers. These associations are important for marketers since they are a determining factor of consumers' behaviour. To date, no empirical research has been done into what associations are evoked by direct and indirect Country-of-Origin markers. Additionally, new insights could provide more knowledge into the effects of associations in multilingual advertising.

## **Introduction**

The world is suggested to have become one 'global village'. However, regional and country-specific differences still remain regarding the perception consumers have of a country. This perception has an influence on the consumers' preference of a product by means of its country of origin.

### **Country-of-Origin**

The Country-of-Origin is a cue for consumers to evaluate a product's quality, reliability and so on before actually purchasing the product (Olson, 1972). The association between a product's place of origin and its effect on consumer preference is also known as the Country-of-Origin effect (Abraham & Patro, 2014).

The Country-of-Origin effect is formed as a result of beliefs and information a consumer has about a certain country. A consumer can obtain these beliefs and information through direct contact with that country e.g. vacation, the internet, television, other people's experiences and so on (Balabanis, Mueller & Melewar, 2002). Since every individual has unique experiences which form an image of a certain country, Kleppe, Iversen and Stensaker (2002) argue that a Country-of-Origin can be seen as a personal frame of reference. When a consumer's Country-of-Origin image of a particular country is positive, all products from that country are evaluated positively. This positive attitude towards a Country-of-Origin is known as a 'halo effect'. In contrast, a 'black cloud' is created when all products from a specific country are negatively evaluated due to a negative image of the Country-of-Origin (Balabanis et al., 2002). However, sharing experiences among people can lead to the creation of a common Country-of-Origin image or attitude of a specific country inside a societal group (Kleppe et al., 2002; Relph, 1976). This suggests that the personal frame of reference can be manipulated by the influence of factors such as individuals or the media. It can thus be argued that Country-of-Origin equals stereotyping. This also supports the argument of Balabanis et al. (2002), who suggest that culture and human values have a significant influence on the Country-of-Origin perception.

### **Direct and indirect Country-of-Origin markers**

There are two ways to implement Country-of-Origin markers in multilingual advertising. Firstly, the direct way which means that for example the name of a country is implemented in the communication instruments. In this context, the name of a certain country is the direct Country-of-Origin marker. Secondly, the indirect way to implement a Country-of-Origin marker is through references to that country such as a language cue in the form of e.g. a French slogan (Hertz & Diamantopoulos, 2013). In this context, the French slogan is the indirect Country-of-Origin marker. However, the cues used as direct and indirect Country-of-Origin markers have to be appropriate to the product that is advertised and its Country-of-Origin, so that the right connections between the marker and Country-of-Origin are made (Kelly-Holmes, 2000).

Kelly-Holmes (2000) argues that particular countries are permitted to produce specific products, also known as the 'cultural competence hierarchy'. The cultural competence

hierarchy between countries and products made by consumers are based on their perceptions of certain countries. For example, most Europeans see Germany as a country which excels in technological development and products. Thus, a European consumer would more likely choose a German washing machine over a Japanese washing machine, due to the consumers' perceptions of Germany.

### **Specificness and abstractness Country-of-Origins markers**

Additionally, the level of specificness or abstractness of Country-of-Origin markers influences a consumers' ability to create an image of the Country-of-Origin. Abstractness refers to something that is "thought of apart from any particular instances or material objects" (Mittal, 1999, p 100). The opposite of this is specific, which is related to one particular thing or type of thing (Macmillan Dictionary, 2018).

When a Country-of-Origin marker is presented in an abstract manner, no concrete words are used. Therefore, it might be more difficult for consumers to create an image of the Country-of-Origin. Concrete words are used when a Country-of-Origin marker is presented in a specific manner. With the help of concrete words, a consumer can create a better image in their mind with regard to the Country-of-Origin (Mittal, 1999). Burns, Biswas, and Roach (1991) found that using concrete words in advertisements, thus specific mentioning, resulted in more positive attitudes towards the advertisement. Additionally, according to Burns et al. (1991) specifically mentioned elements work better than abstractly mentioned elements.

### **Associations**

The outcome of using Country-of-Origin markers are the associations evoked in the consumers' mind. When a consumer is faced with a Country-of-Origin (e.g. Germany), particular associations are created based on the consumer's attitude towards Germany. As Hertz and Diamantopoulos (2013) suggest, this matches the associative network theory. This theory argues that information in an individual's memory is stored into networks which contain concepts that are linked by associations (Anderson, 1983; Bettman, 1979; Krishnan, 1996). In the case of the Country-of-Origin effect, this means that if two items (e.g. a country's name and a brand's image) are linked in a consumer's memory, particular associations between the two items are created.

To better control the positioning of a product, it is crucial for marketers to determine which associations consumers relate to certain Country-of-Origins. This right association evokes the desired consumer behaviour such as purchasing the product. Thus, it is important to gain insights into which associations consumers connect with certain Country-of-Origins.

Previous research has been done into the role of associations in multilingual advertising. The study of Hornikx, Van Meurs & Starren (2007) consisted of an experiment in which Dutch participants were asked to write down associations evoked by two advertisements of a product. The advertisements only differed in the language displayed, i.e. French, German or Spanish. Their study used visual advertisements to evoke associations in their participants' minds. Results showed that different languages evoke partly different associations in the minds of the participants. This study has a limitation in that visual images had been used and might have framed the participants and send them into a certain direction.

To date, it has never been empirically studied what associations are evoked by direct and indirect Country-of-Origin markers. Additionally, the role of associations in relation to the Country-of-Origin effect has been under researched (Hornikx & Van Meurs, 2017). Finally, more insights could provide more knowledge regarding the effect of associations on multilingual advertising (Hornikx et al., 2007).

This study aims to fill the knowledge gap regarding associations evoked by both direct and indirect Country-of-Origin markers. To prevent participants from framing, non-visual cues are implemented into this study. This study will therefore address the following research question:

*What associations do direct and indirect Country-of-Origin markers evoke?*

Sub-questions:

1. What are the differences in categories of associations evoked by direct and indirect Country-of-Origin markers and in general associations question?
2. What are the differences in categories of associations evoked by specific and abstract Country-of-Origin markers?
3. What are the differences in categories of associations evoked by different Country-of-Origins (i.e. France, Germany, Italy)?

## Methodology

### Materials

This study included one independent variable, namely the Country-of-Origin marker. The variable consisted of two levels, i.e. direct Country-of-Origin marker and indirect Country-of-Origin marker. In this study, a direct Country-of-Origin marker was mentioned in the form of an origin cue, by mentioning the name of the Country-of-Origins. An indirect Country-of-Origin marker was mentioned in the form of a language cue, i.e. slogan in the language of the Country-of-Origins.

Based on strong Country-of-Origin matches three products and their respective Country-of-Origins were selected to be included in this study. These strong matches found by Usunier and Cestre (2007) apply to the following products and countries: Germany and beer (.75), France and wine (.84), and Italy and pasta (.78).

This study focused on which associations were evoked by the use of a direct Country-of-Origin marker and which associations were evoked by using an indirect Country-of-Origin marker. Additionally, participants' general associations with Germany, France, and Italy were researched. The stimulus material for this study used written means in the form of role-play contexts to prompt the participants.

A pre-test was conducted to assess the clarity of the questionnaire and suitability to the participants. A total of 18 participants were approached for the first pre-test. These participants were students at Radboud University. This pre-test showed some difficulties regarding the wording of the questions. Participants did not understand what was asked from them. Therefore, changes were made to the questionnaire and a role-play context was implemented into the questions. Afterwards, another pre-test was conducted with 12 different students of Radboud University. This pre-test provided desired answers, and therefore this sample of 12 questionnaires was added to the main research.

### Participants

A total of 210 Dutch participants, who were on average 29.93 ( $SD=14.18$ ) years; 60% female, 54.8% of the participants were still students, took part in this study. Most participants completed the 'pre-university education' level, namely 32.4%. A repeated measures analysis for familiarity with Germany, France, and Italy showed a significant main effect of familiarity ( $F(1, 2977) = 296.54, p > .001$ ). The familiarity of Italy ( $M = 4.26, SD = 1.58$ ) was lower than for Germany ( $p = 1.50$ , Bonferroni-correction;  $M = 4.95, SD = 1.42$ ) and for France ( $p < .001$ ,

Bonferroni-correction;  $M = 4.86$ ,  $SD = 1.39$ ). There was a significant difference between Germany and France ( $p < .001$ , Bonferroni-correction).

Two types of the questionnaire were distributed, namely an abstract and a specific questionnaire which differed in their way of mentioning the Country-of-Origin markers. There was no difference found in the distribution of participants' gender between the two types of questionnaires ( $\chi^2 (2) = 1.25$ ,  $p = .535$ ), or the participants' age ( $F (1, 208) < 1$ ). Additionally, there was no difference found in the participants' educational level across versions ( $\chi^2 (6) = 6.832$ ,  $p = .337$ ), or the number of students taking part in the questionnaire ( $\chi^2 (1) = 1.28$ ,  $p = .258$ ).

A total of 54.3% of participants filled in the questionnaire online. The remaining 45.7% filled in the questionnaire on paper. Of all participants, there was no difference found in the distribution of gender ( $\chi^2 (2) = 4.362$ ,  $p = .113$ ) and the participants' age ( $F (1, 208) = 4.013$ ,  $p = .046$ ). There was a significant difference found in the distribution of the educational level of the participants ( $\chi^2 (6) = 58.922$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Additionally, the number of participants that was a student at the time of filling in the questionnaire significantly differed between the paper questionnaire and the online questionnaire ( $\chi^2 (1) = 11.965$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This means that the paper questionnaire was filled in more often by students than the questionnaire online. However, the online questionnaire was filled in more often by participants' who obtained a higher educational level than the participants' filling in the questionnaire online.

### **Design**

This study consisted of a 2x3x2 within-subject and between-subject design. The within-factors of this study were the Country-of-Origin variable (i.e. direct and indirect Country-of-Origin markers) and the three countries that were included in the questionnaire, i.e. Germany, France, and Italy. Finally, the between-factor of this study were the abstract and specific questionnaires used to mention the direct and indirect Country-of-Origin markers in an abstract or specific manner. Participants were exposed to either one.

### **Instruments**

Associations with Germany, France, and Italy were elicited using a questionnaire consisting of the following five parts: question containing the literal mentioning of Germany, France, or Italy matched with their respective products i.e. beer, wine, or pasta (direct Country-of-Origin marker) and a question containing a slogan in German, French, or Italian (indirect Country-of-Origin marker). Followed by a question to yield participants' general associations with Germany, France, or Italy. To measure participants' familiarity regarding Germany,

France, and Italy three 7-point Likert scales were a part of the questionnaire. The final part consisted of some general questions about the participants regarding their age, gender, educational level, and whether they were a student or not.

The questions containing the direct and indirect Country-of-Origin markers were presented in a role-play context. The participant was seen as an employee of an advertising agency and was asked what they would do in the given situation. The associations evoked by the direct and indirect Country-of-Origin markers were viewed as the dependent variables in this study. The dependent variables were tested at a nominal measurement level. For the direct Country-of-Origin marker, the role-play contexts contained products that appropriately fit Germany, France, or Italy. For example:

*Imagine working for an advertising agency. You are creating an advertisement for an Italian company that wants to introduce a new pasta on the Dutch market. In the advertisement you want to emphasize the Italian origin of the company. How would you recommend this Italian pasta? Which words would you use? Write down as much as possible.*

For the indirect Country-of-Origin marker, the slogan ‘Enjoy to the max’ was used. This slogan was chosen due to its neutral valence and because it could be linked to all products used in this study. The slogan was translated into the three languages used: ‘Maximaler Genuss’ (German), ‘Profitez au maximum’ (French), and ‘Goditi al Massimo’ (Italian). For example:

*Imagine working for an advertising agency. You are creating an advertisement for a company that wants to introduce a new wine to the Dutch market. In the Dutch advertisement you want to use the following slogan:*

*"Profitez au maximum"*

*What else would you emphasize in the Dutch advertisement? Which words would you use? Write down as much as possible.*

To measure the level of abstractness of the Country-of-Origin markers, two types of questionnaires were created, namely the specific and the abstract. Additionally, the abstract questionnaire was also added to avoid framing or sending the participant in a certain direction, regarding associations and the mentioned products. The specific questionnaire contained the



direct mentioning or usage of the matched products, countries, and their languages. For example:

*Imagine working for an advertising agency. You are creating an advertisement for a German company that wants to introduce a new beer to the Dutch market. In the advertisement you want to emphasize the German origin of the company. How would you promote this German beer? Which words would you use? Write down as much as possible.*

The abstract questionnaire did not contain the mentioning or usage of specific products. For example:

*Imagine working for an advertising agency. You are creating an advertisement for a German company that wants to introduce a new product on the Dutch market. In the advertisement you want to emphasize the German origin of the company. How would you promote this German product? Which words would you use? Write down as much as possible.*

Additionally, the order of the parts in the questionnaires had been changed to prevent carry-over effects. This meant that both the abstract and specific questionnaires had three versions so that Germany, France, and Italy were mentioned in one questionnaire, and thus participants were exposed to all three Country-of-Origins. This put the total number of different versions of the questionnaires at six.

To prevent possible problems arising from filling in a questionnaire in the participants' non-native language, the questionnaire was in Dutch (De Langhe, Puntoni, Fernandes, and Van Osselaer, 2011).

### **Procedure**

The questionnaire was distributed via paper and online. All participants were approached in a face-to-face or online setting, in the Dutch language, and volunteered in taking part in the questionnaire. Before filling in the questionnaire, participants had to sign a declaration of consent. By signing this, individuals agreed with taking part as a participant in this study. The introduction and instructions to the questionnaire can be found in the appendix. After participants agreed on filling in the questionnaire, participants randomly received one of

the six questionnaire versions. All versions were the same in length and the estimated time to complete the questionnaire.

### **Coding**

The responses of participants in the form of associations were coded using a coding system created by the researchers of this study. The coders consisted of four people who were also researchers of this study. The whole study consisted of 2977 associations. Each coder coded approximately 750 associations as coder 1 and approximately 750 associations as coder 2. Therefore, there was an overlap in coding and the inter-coder reliability could be measured.

The coding system contained the following variables: type of distribution (1 = hardcopy; 2 = online), questionnaire version (1 to 6), respondent number, gender (1 = female; 2 = male; 3 = neutral), age, education level (0 = other; 1 = none; 2 = preparatory secondary vocational education; 3 = higher general secondary education; 4 = pre-university education; 5 = intermediate vocational education; 6 = higher vocational education; 7 = 'university), student (1 = yes; 2 = no), familiarity to France (7-point Likert scale), familiarity to Germany (7-point Likert scale), familiarity to Italy (7-point Likert scale), Country (1 = France; 2 = Germany; 3 = Italy), questionnaire type (1 = specific; 2 = abstract), type of question (1 = general associations; 2 = direct Country-of-Origin marker; 3 = indirect Country-of-Origin marker), association, language (1 = French; 2 = German; 3 = Italian; 4 = Dutch; 5 = English; 6 = combination), adjusted association (spelling errors removed), subcategory (i.e. beer, city, car, football), and category.

The categories used in this study were partially based on Hornikx, Van Meurs and Starren (2007). Additionally, some categories emerged from the data. The following categories and their codes were used: 1 = food (i.e. baguette, cheese, sausages), 2 = drinks (i.e. wine, beer, coffee), 3 = persons (i.e. Napoleon, Angela Merkel, Mussolini), 4 = sports (i.e. cycle racing, football, winter sports), , 5 = geography (i.e. cities, regions, climate), 6 = atmosphere (i.e. cosiness, company, vacation), 7 = culture-specific (i.e. Tourist attractions, music, lifestyle), 8 = characteristics (i.e. sayings, language, quality), 9 = nature (i.e. scenery, weather, flowers), 10 = feeling (i.e. love, passion, arrogance), and 11 = origin (i.e. heritage).

Coders would also code if the association was product related (1 = yes; 2 = no). Partially based on the definition of Lenfle and Midler's (2009) study the following definition of product relatedness was used for this study: associations that are closely associated with goods in products. Associations such as wine year, price, and brewing were coded as product related associations.

Additionally, the Country-of-Origin relatedness of the association was coded (1 = yes; 2 = no) using the following definition: emotional values associated with heritage and history (Rashid & Barnes, 2018). Associations such as Paris, German flag, and Leonardo da Vinci were coded as Country-of-Origin related associations.

Finally, the sentiment of the association (1 = positive; 2 = negative; 3 = neutral) was coded based on how positively or negatively the associations were viewed (Lu, Lord & Yoke, 2015). Associations such as delicious, great taste, and good quality were coded as 1, associations such as Hitler, lack of humour, and war were coded as negative. Finally, associations such as fresh, soft, and Berlin were coded as neutral.

To ensure intercoder-reliability, every coder coded one of their colleagues coding work so that every association had been coded twice. The intercoder-reliability of the category variable was considered fair  $\kappa = .599, p < .001$ . The intercoder-reliability of the product related variable was considered as satisfactory:  $\kappa = .786, p < .001$ . Additionally, the intercoder-reliability of the Country-of-Origin related variable was satisfactory:  $\kappa = .787, p < .001$ , and of the sentiment variable good:  $\kappa = .843, p < .001$ .

### **Statistical treatment**

The general questions regarding participants have been measured by using descriptives and frequencies. Additionally, descriptives and frequencies were used to find out which associations categories had been evoked the most. To answer the questions regarding different associations evoked by the direct Country-of-Origin marker and the indirect Country-of-Origin markers a Chi-square test was conducted regarding the valence and Country-of-Origin relatedness of associations. This test had also been conducted to find out which differences in categories were seen between the abstract and specific questionnaire, and between the different Country-of-Origins (i.e. Germany, France, and Italy).

## Results

The study contained 2977 associations provided by 210 participants. One participant did not provide the questionnaire with associations. Therefore, this participant and its absent associations were seen as missing data and have not been taken into account during statistical analyses.

### **What are the differences in categories of associations evoked by direct and indirect Country-of-Origin markers and in general associations question?**

This study consists of 864 associations evoked by the direct Country-of-Origin marker, 764 associations evoked by the indirect Country-of-Origin marker, and 1350 associations yielded from the general associations question. Table 1 shows the top three association categories evoked by the direct Country-of-Origin marker, the indirect Country-of-Origin marker, and the general associations question.

A remarkable observation is that the questions including the Country-of-Origin markers both primarily evoked the same categories. However, the order is arranged differently. A noticeable similarity can be found in the most evoked association category evoked by both Country-of-Origin markers and general associations question, namely characteristic. This category contains associations such as quality, language, history, appearance, and tourist attractions. Another similarity is that the category food is present in every top three. This category consists of associations related to bread, sausages, pasta, pizza, and taste. Finally, both Country-of-Origin markers do evoke a good amount of culture-specific associations such as traditional clothing, sayings (e.g. Mamma Mia, Ciao Bella), celebrations, and lifestyle.

Table 1. Frequencies of the most evoked associations assigned to categories evoked by the direct Country-of-Origin marker, indirect Country-of-Origin marker, and general associations questions

		Direct Country-of-Origin marker		Indirect Country-of-Origin marker			General associations		
		N	%		N	%	N	%	
1	Characteristic	331	38.8%	Characteristic	365	47.8%	Characteristic	381	28.2%
2	Culture-specific	113	13.1%	Food	113	14.8%	Food	285	21.1%
3	Food	99	11.5%	Culture-specific	72	9.4%	Geography	237	17.6%

A Chi-square test showed a significant relation between the Country-of-Origin marker (i.e. direct or indirect) or general associations question and the valence of the associations ( $\chi^2(6) = 162.13, p < .001$ ). The most positive associations were evoked by the indirect Country-of-Origin marker (29.8%) compared to the direct Country-of-Origin marker (23.0%), and the general associations question (10.4%). A notable amount of associations evoked by the general associations question was given a negative valence (3.9%) compared to the indirect Country-of-Origin marker (0.9%), and the direct Country-of-Origin marker (0.6%). Finally, most associations were given a neutral valence. Relatively more neutral associations were evoked by the general associations question (85.7%) compared to the direct Country-of-Origin marker (76.3%), and the indirect Country-of-Origin marker (69.2%). Table 2 shows the distribution of the associations' valence evoked by the direct and indirect Country-of-Origin marker, and the general associations question.

Table 2. Distribution of the valence of associations evoked by direct and indirect Country-of-Origin markers and in general associations question

		General	Direct	Indirect	Total
Positive	Count	140a	199b	228c	567
	% within marker	10.4%	23.0%	29.8%	19.0%
Negative	Count	53a	5b	7b	65
	% within marker	3.9%	0.6%	0.9%	2.2%
Neutral	Count	1157a	659b	529c	2345
	% within marker	85.7%	76.3%	69.2%	78.7%
Total	Count	1350	863	764	2977
	% within marker	100%	100%	100%	100%

A Chi-square test showed a significant relation between the Country-of-Origin marker (i.e. direct, indirect or general) and the Country-of-Origin relatedness of the association ( $\chi^2(5) = 86.57, p < .001$ ). Most associations that were Country-of-Origin related were evoked by the general associations question (48.3%) compared to the direct Country-of-Origin marker (36.7%) and the indirect Country-of-Origin marker (28.5%). Additionally, participants gave

more non-Country-of-Origin related association to the indirect Country-of-Origin marker (71.5%) compared to the direct Country-of-Origin marker (63.2%) and the general associations question (51.7%). Table 3 shows the amount of Country-of-Origin related and non-Country-of-Origin related associations given by participants regarding the direct, and indirect marker and the general associations question.

Table 3. Distribution of the Country-of-Origin relatedness of associations evoked by direct and indirect Country-of-Origin markers and in general associations question

		General	Direct	Indirect	Total
COO related	Count	651a	317b	218c	1186
	% within marker	48.3%	36.7%	28.5%	39.8%
Not COO related	Count	698a	546b	546c	1790
	% within marker	51.7%	63.2%	71.5%	60.1%
Total	Count	1349	863	764	2976
	% within marker	100%	100%	100%	100%

### **What are the differences in categories of associations evoked by specific and abstract Country-of-Origin markers?**

The questionnaire containing mentioning the Country-of-Origin markers specifically evoked 1190 associations. In contrast, the questionnaire including the abstract mentioned Country-of-Origin markers evoked a total of 1202 associations. Table 4 shows the top three association categories evoked by specifically and abstractly mentioning the Country-of-Origin markers.

It is striking to see that the specific markers and abstract markers evoked approximately the same amount of associations. Additionally, a remarkable similarity between the two markers is the range of categories. Both specific mentioning as abstract mentioning Country-of-Origin markers evoke the same top three regarding the most association categories. These top threes include associations such as sayings, cities, tourist, attractions, taste, and language.

Table 4. Frequencies of the most evoked associations assigned to categories evoked by the abstract Country-of-Origin markers and specific Country-of-Origin markers

		Specific Country-of-Origin markers		Abstract Country-of-Origin marker	
		N	%	N	%
1	Characteristic	557	46.3%	Characteristic	504 42.4%
2	Food	157	13.1%	Food	168 14.1%
3	Culture-specific	129	10.7%	Culture-specific	128 10.8%

A Chi-square test did not show a significant relation between mentioning the Country-of-Origin markers specifically or abstractly and the Country-of-Origin relatedness of the associations ( $\chi^2(3) = 2.31, p = .315$ ). Table 6 shows the amount of Country-of-Origin related and non-Country-of-Origin related associations given by participants when mentioned in a specific or abstract manner.

Table 6. Distribution of the Country-of-Origin relatedness of associations evoked by abstract and specific Country-of-Origin Origin markers

		Specific	Abstract	Total
COO related	Count	837a	349a	1186
	% within marker	39.1%	41.8%	39.8%
Not COO related	Count	1305a	485a	1790
	% within marker	60.9%	58.2%	60.1%
Total	Count	2142	833	2976
	% within marker	100%	100%	100%

A Chi-square test showed a significant relation between mentioning the Country-of-Origin markers specifically or abstractly the valence of the associations ( $\chi^2(4) = 37.97, p < .001$ ). Most associations contained a neutral valence. Participants gave more neutral associations in the specific questionnaire (81.2%) compared to the abstract questionnaire (72.4%). Additionally, more positive associations were evoked in the abstract questionnaire (26.0%) compared to the specific questionnaire (16.3%). Finally, more negative associations were evoked in the specific questionnaire (2.4%) compared to the abstract questionnaire (1.6%). Table 5 shows the amount of positive, negative, and neutral associations given by participants when mentioned in a specific or abstract manner.

Table 5. Distribution of the valence of associations evoked by specific and abstract Country-of-Origin markers

		Specific	Abstract	Total
Positive	Count	350a	217b	567
	% within marker	16.3%	26.0%	19.0%
Negative	Count	52a	13a	65
	% within marker	2.4%	1.6%	2.2%
Neutral	Count	1741a	604b	2345
	% within marker	81.2%	72.4%	78.7%
Total	Count	2143	834	2977
	% within marker	100%	100%	100%

### **What are the differences in categories of associations evoked by different Countries-of-Origin (i.e. France, Germany, Italy)?**

This study collected 825 associations evoked by Germany, 1029 associations evoked by France, and 1124 associations evoked by Italy. These Country-of-Origins were used as both direct and indirect markers, mentioned in the abstract and specific manner, and presented in the general associations question.



Table 7 shows the top threes of associations evoked by the direct Country-of-Origin marker (both abstract and specifically mentioned) by referring to Germany and beer, France and wine, and Italy and pasta.

A remarkable observation is that all Countries-of-origin share the same category that represents the most evoked associations, namely characteristic. Additionally, Germany and France share the category drinks in their top threes. This could be related to their matched products which are both drinks, i.e. beer and wine. In addition, Italy’s top three includes the category food, which might be due to their matched product pasta.

Table 7. Frequencies of the most evoked associations assigned to categories evoked by the direct Country-of-Origin marker by mentioning Germany and beer, France and wine, and Italy and pasta

		Germany and beer		France and wine		Italy and pasta			
		N	%	N	%	N	%		
1	Characteristic	131	51.4%	Characteristic	93	35.4%	Characteristic	107	30.9%
2	Drinks	38	14.9%	Drinks	31	11.8%	Culture-specific	65	18.8%
3	Origin	24	9.4%	Geography	31	11.8%	Food	50	14.5%

Table 8 shows the top threes of associations evoked by the indirect Country-of-Origin marker (both abstract and specifically mentioned) by referring to German, French, and Italian.

Similarly, all Country-of-origins share the same category that represents the most evoked associations, namely characteristic. However, by using a language cue the category culture-specific has been evoked more for German and French than by using the names of the countries and their matched products. Associations included in the culture-specific category are tourist attractions, traditional clothing, sayings, and flags.

Table 8. Frequencies of the most evoked associations assigned to categories evoked by the indirect Country-of-Origin marker by using German, French, and Italian.

		German		French		Italian			
		N	%	N	%	N	%		
1	Characteristic	137	55.7%	Characteristic	134	47.2%	Characteristic	94	40.3%
2	Culture-specific	24	9.8%	Food	41	14.4%	Food	53	22.6%
3	Drinks	23	9.3%	Culture-specific	29	10.2%	Origin	20	8.5%

Table 9 shows the top threes of associations evoked by the general associations question by mentioning by Germany, France, and Italy.

A noticeable change is that the most evoked associations for Italy are linked to food. This is the only time a different category besides characteristic was evoked the most. This change suggests that when people randomly think of Italy they connect this with food. The category includes associations such as bread, pasta, and pizza.

Additionally, the category geography is very present in these top threes. This category mainly refers to cities, regions, and climate, which suggests that when people randomly think of Italy or France they relate this to cities of the countries.

Table 9. Frequencies of the most evoked associations assigned to categories evoked by the general associations marker by mentioning Germany, France and Italy.

		Germany		France		Italy			
		N	%	N	%	N	%		
1	Characteristic	148	45.7%	Characteristic	121	25.1%	Food	148	27.2%
2	Food	43	13.3%	Food	94	19.5%	Geography	132	24.3%
3	Drinks	30	9.3%	Geography	75	15.6%	Characteristic	112	20.6%

A Chi-square test showed a significant relation between the Country-of-Origins (i.e. France, Germany and Italy) and the valence of the associations ( $\chi^2(7) = 80.784, p < .001$ ). Most associations had a neutral valence. Participants gave more neutral associations for Italy (84.4%) compared to France (80.0%) and Germany (69.5%). Additionally, most positive associations were evoked by Germany (27.0%) compared to France (16.9%) and Italy (15.1%). However, this is remarkable since most negative associations were also evoked by Germany (3.4%) compared to France (3.1%) and Italy (0.4%). Table 8 shows the amount of positive, negative, and neutral associations given by participants regarding the Country-of-Origins.

Table 8. Distribution of the valence of associations evoked by the different Country-of-Origins

		France	Germany	Italy	Total
Positive	Count	174a	223b	170a	567
	% within marker	16.9%	27.0%	15.1%	19.0%
Negative	Count	32a	28a	5b	65
	% within marker	3.1%	3.4%	0.4%	2.2%
Neutral	Count	823a	573b	949c	2345
	% within marker	80.0%	69.5%	84.4%	78.7%
Total	Count	1029	824	1124	2977
	% within marker	100%	100%	100%	100%

A Chi-square test showed a significant relation between the Country-of-Origins (i.e. France, Germany and Italy) and the Country-of-Origin relatedness of the associations ( $\chi^2(5) = 40.76, p < .001$ ). Most Country-of-Origin related associations were evoked by Italy (46.8%) compared to France (36.8%) and Germany (34.1%). In contrast, most non Country-of-Origin related associations were evoked by Germany (65.8%) compared to France (63.2%) and Italy (53.2%). Table 9 shows the amount of Country-of-Origin related and non-Country-of-Origin related associations given by participants regarding the Country-of-Origins.

Table 9. Distribution of the Country-of-Origin relatedness of associations evoked by the different Country-of-Origin

		France	Germany	Italy	Total
COO related	Count	379a	281a	526b	1186
	% within marker	36.8%	34.1%	46.8%	39.8%
Not COO related	Count	650a	543a	597b	1790
	% within marker	63.2%	65.8%	53.2%	60.1%
Total	Count	1029	824	1123	2976
	% within marker	100%	100%	100%	100%

## Conclusion and discussion

This thesis was conducted to provide insights regarding the usage of direct and indirect Country-of-Origin markers to evoke associations and its effects. To gain knowledge about this topic, an experiment was conducted in the form of a questionnaire.

The study aimed at answering the research question as to what associations are evoked by direct and indirect Country-of-Origin markers. Participants wrote down many different associations.

A remarkable observation is the similarity of most evoked categories by the direct Country-of-Origin marker and the indirect Country-of-Origin marker. The content of the categories is exactly the same, however the arrangement is different. The similarity regards the following association categories: 'characteristics', 'food', and 'culture-specific'. This includes associations such as quality, language, pasta, bread, celebrations, and traditional clothing. In addition, the category 'characteristic' was every time, besides one occasion, evoked the most by the direct and indirect Country-of-Origin markers, in the abstract and specific manner, and by mentioning Germany, France, and Italy as Country-of-Origins. These results might be explained by the argument of Balabanis et al. (2002), who suggested that culture has a significant influence on the Country-of-Origin perception. All participants were of Dutch nationality which means that their shared culture could have had an impact on these results.

The language cues used in this study as the indirect Country-of-Origin marker (i.e. German, French, and Italian) evoked similar results. Each of these Country-of-Origins had a partially comparable top three. The most associations evoked by German, French, or Italian belonged to the following categories: 'characteristic', 'food', 'culture-specific', 'drinks', and 'origin'. In all three cases, most associations belonged to the 'characteristic' category. These findings are in line with the results of Hornikx, Van Meurs, and Starren (2007). Their study found that different languages evoke partially different associations in the minds of the participants.

This study also aimed to find differences between the associations evoked by the direct and indirect Country-of-Origin marker. The valence of the associations and the Country-of-Origin relatedness of the associations was used to measure differences among the two markers. This study found that the associations evoked by the direct Country-of-Origin marker were over three quarter of a neutral valence. The remaining quarter was divided between 23.0% of positive associations and 0.6% of negative associations. With regard to the indirect Country-of-Origin marker almost three quarter of the associations was neutral. Additionally, 29.8% had a positive

valence and 0.9% had a negative valence. The low percentage of negative associations might be explained by the questioning form, i.e. role-play context. Participants were asked to write down what they would add in an advertisement. Therefore, it is less likely that someone would write down negative associations to promote a product. These findings however, are not in line with Hornikx, Van Meurs and Starren (2007) who found that half of their associations was positive, a quarter negative, and a quarter neutral.

Additionally, the Country-of-Origin relatedness of the associations was measured to discover possible differences among direct and indirect Country-of-Origin markers. This study found that for associations evoked by the direct marker 36.7% was Country-of-Origin related, and thus 63.2% was not Country-of-Origin related. For the associations evoked by the indirect marker 28.5% was Country-of-Origin related and 71.5% was not Country-of-Origin related.

The valence of associations evoked by abstract and specific Country-of-Origin markers was used to measure possible differences. The study found that mentioning the Country-of-Origin markers in an abstract and specific manner evoked by far mostly neutral associations. In addition, abstract mentioning evoked more positive associations (26.0%) than the specific mentioning (16.3%). This result is not in line with the findings of Burns et al. (1991) who found that specific mentioning results in more positive attitudes, and thus positive perceptions.

Additionally, Burns et al. (1991) mentioned that specifically mentioning of a Country-of-Origin marker works better than mentioning a Country-of-Origin marker in an abstract manner. Looking at the results in this study the specific mentioning of the Country-of-Origin markers evoked 1190 associations and the abstract mentioning evoked 1202 associations. It can be suggested that mentioning a Country-of-Origin marker in an abstract manner works equally as good as specifically mentioning the Country-of-Origin marker since both markers evoked approximately the same amount of associations. These results are therefore not in line with Burns et al. (1991).

One limitation of this study is related to the participants that took part in the experiment. There was no equal divide in educational level and in the amount of students among participants filling in the questionnaire online and on paper.

A second limitation relating to participants is their nationality. All participants were of Dutch nationality and thus might have perceived Germany, France, and Italy through a common Country-of-Origin image due to influences of media exposure (Kleppe et al., 2002; Relph, 1976). Since people from other nationalities perceive Country-of-Origins in different ways, using participants from a different nationality and products from other Country-of-Origins might lead to different findings.

A third limitation of this study relates to the coding system. The categories used for this study were partially based on the emerged data. In addition, this means that the input from participants had a major role in the categories created as well as the interpretation of the associations by the researchers. Therefore, if a similar study is performed by using different participants and researchers from a different nationality, it is not guaranteed that the same or similar categories emerge from the data. In addition, the intercoder-reliability of the category variable was fair  $\kappa = .599$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, this could be improved by using a better coding system including more clear categories.

Another limitation relates to the role-play context which possibly had an impact on the 'characteristic' category. Many associations (i.e. price, manufacturing, unique selling point) referred to the product presented in the question and were therefore not entirely evoked by the direct and indirect Country-of-Origin markers. Additionally, the category 'characteristic' eventually became a generic term for any associations related to the product presented, physical features, country features, colours, qualities and so on. These two limitations could be the explanation as to why the category 'characteristic' scored so high for every Country-of-Origin marker and Country-of-Origins. Therefore, it could be beneficial for future research to improve this category by creating clear dividers.

A final limitation to this study is related to the Dutch language used in the questionnaire. Participant were asked to write down the first things that came to their mind and write these down in Dutch. This could have possibly limited participants if they firstly thought of foreign loan words (e.g. computer, mannequin) or other associations in a different language e.g. Ciao Bella, Pünktlichkeit. It is possible that participants did not write these associations down because they thought the answer would be wrong due to the language.

The results of this study suggest that both direct and indirect Country-of-Origin markers evoke similar kinds of associations. This means that both markers evoke neutral associations that are not necessarily Country-of-Origin related. Additionally, the direct and indirect Country-of-Origin markers mostly evoke associations related to 'characteristics'. This includes associations such as flags, qualities, colours, and personality features. Mentioning the direct and indirect Country-of-Origin markers in a specific or abstract manner does not differ in the associations evoked with regard to the valence of the associations and the Country-of-Origin relatedness. Both specific and abstract mentioning evoke neutral associations, that are not Country-of-Origin related and mostly represent 'characteristic' associations. Additionally, the Country-of-Origins used in this study, i.e. Germany, France, and Italy, evoke neutral associations that are mostly not Country-of-Origin related. In addition, all Country-of-Origins

evoke a good amount of associations related to the 'culture-specific' category. This includes associations such as traditional clothing, music, and celebrations.

Future research could replicate this study for participants from different nationalities with different Country-of-Origins and their matched products. New findings could possibly confirm the results from this study or give new insights into the topic of direct and indirect Country-of-Origin markers.



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## Appendix

### Appendix C: Specific questionnaire

- A. Stel je werkt voor een reclamebureau. Je ontwerpt een advertentie voor een bedrijf dat een nieuwe wijn op de Nederlandse markt wil introduceren. In de Nederlandse advertentie wil je de volgende slogan gebruiken:

**“Profitez au maximum”**

Wat zou jij nog meer benadrukken in de verder Nederlandstalige advertentie? Welke woorden zou je bijvoorbeeld gebruiken? *Schrijf zo veel mogelijk op.*

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

- B. Stel je werkt voor een reclamebureau. Je ontwerpt een advertentie voor een Duits bedrijf dat een nieuw bier op de Nederlandse markt wil introduceren. In de advertentie wil je de Duitse herkomst van het bedrijf benadrukken.

Hoe zou je dit Duitse bier aanprijzen? Welke woorden zou je bijvoorbeeld gebruiken? *Schrijf zo veel mogelijk op.*

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

- 5. \_\_\_\_\_
- 6. \_\_\_\_\_

**C.** Wat komt er bij je op als je aan Italië denkt? *Schrijf zo veel mogelijk antwoorden op.*

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

**D.** Hoe bekend ben je met de verschillende landen? Omcirkel wat voor jou van toepassing is.

1. Ik ben bekend met Frankrijk:                      Onbekend 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Bekend

2. Ik ben bekend met Duitsland:                      Onbekend 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Bekend

3. Ik ben bekend met Italië:                      Onbekend 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Bekend

**E.** Achtergrondvragen

Geslacht: \_\_\_\_\_

Leeftijd: \_\_\_\_\_

Nationaliteit: \_\_\_\_\_

Moedertaal: \_\_\_\_\_

Hoogst afgeronde opleiding:  Geen  
 VMBO

- HAVO
- VWO
- MBO
- HBO
- WO
- Anders, namelijk:

Ben je op dit moment  
student?

- Ja       Nee

Eventuele opmerkingen:

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Bedankt voor je deelname. Mocht je meer informatie willen hebben over (het doel van) dit onderzoek informeer bij je onderzoeker of mail naar: [c.hesen@student.ru.nl](mailto:c.hesen@student.ru.nl)

Annemarie, Katrien, Kaylie, Lisa, Liz, Marit en Tessa

#### Appendix D: Abstract questionnaire

- A. Stel je werkt voor een reclamebureau. Je ontwerpt een advertentie voor een Duits bedrijf dat een nieuw product op de Nederlandse markt wil introduceren. In de advertentie wil je de Duitse herkomst van het bedrijf benadrukken.

Hoe zou je dit Duitse product aanprijzen? Welke woorden zou je bijvoorbeeld gebruiken?  
*Schrijf zo veel mogelijk op.*

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

- B. Stel je werkt voor een reclamebureau. Je ontwerpt een advertentie voor een Frans bedrijf dat een nieuw product op de Nederlandse markt wil introduceren. In de Nederlandse advertentie wil je een Franse slogan gebruiken.

Wat zou jij nog meer benadrukken in de verder Nederlandstalige advertentie? Welke woorden zou je bijvoorbeeld gebruiken? *Schrijf zo veel mogelijk op.*

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

C. Wat komt er bij je op als je aan Italië denkt? *Schrijf zo veel mogelijk antwoorden op.*

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

D. Hoe bekend ben je met de verschillende landen? Omcirkel wat voor jou van toepassing is.

1. Ik ben bekend met Frankrijk:                          Onbekend 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Bekend

2. Ik ben bekend met Duitsland:                          Onbekend 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Bekend

3. Ik ben bekend met Italië:                          Onbekend 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Bekend

E. Achtergrondvragen

Geslacht: \_\_\_\_\_

Leeftijd: \_\_\_\_\_

Nationaliteit: \_\_\_\_\_

Moedertaal: \_\_\_\_\_

Hoogst afgeronde opleiding:  Geen

VMBO



- HAVO
- VWO
- MBO
- HBO
- WO
- Anders, namelijk:

Ben je op dit moment  
student?

- Ja       Nee

Eventuele opmerkingen:

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Bedankt voor je deelname. Mocht je meer informatie willen hebben over (het doel van) dit onderzoek informeer bij je onderzoeker of mail naar: [c.hesen@student.ru.nl](mailto:c.hesen@student.ru.nl)

Annemarie, Katrien, Kaylie, Lisa, Liz, Marit en Tessa

## Appendix E: Instructions to the questionnaire

‘Beste deelnemer,

*Bedankt dat je de tijd neemt om deel te nemen aan dit onderzoek. Het invullen van de vragenlijst duurt ongeveer 5 minuten.*

*Deze vragenlijst bestaat uit vijf onderdelen. Het laatste onderdeel bevat een aantal achtergrondvragen.*

### ***Instructies:***

- ***Antwoord in het Nederlands***
- ***Denk niet te lang en moeilijk na over je antwoorden***
- ***Geef aan wat er het eerste bij je opkomt***
- ***Er zijn geen foute antwoorden***
- ***Geef zo veel mogelijk antwoorden***

*Met dit onderzoek hopen we meer inzicht te krijgen in de verwerking van reclame.*

*Alvast heel erg bedankt voor je deelname.*

*Met vriendelijke groet,*

*A. de Kroon, K. Heslen, K. Bron, L. Willems, L. Abzach, M. van Hoeve, T. Haak’’*