

What associations do country-of-origin markers evoke?

*A research on the difference between associations with a country in general and with a country
in a product context*

Wat voor associaties worden opgeroepen door het benadrukken van een land van herkomst?

*Een onderzoek naar het verschil tussen algemene associaties met een land en associaties met een land in product-
context*

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Abstract

Mentioning a country-of-origin (COO) influences consumer's purchase decisions. This so-called COO effect is caused by personal country images in combination with product specific factors. Numerous empirical studies have studied the effects of COO. But the associations that cause this effect are still relatively unknown. This research aimed to identify the associations Dutch people have with France, Germany and Italy and compares these associations to associations about the same countries made in product context. 120 subjects filled in a questionnaire in which they got the task to think like a marketer and come up with ideas that would emphasize a COO for an advertisement on the Dutch market. They were also asked to write down general associations for France, Germany and Italy. The answers given were coded into categories. In both product context as in non-product context, most associations were given in the categories 'Characteristics' and 'food'. But, the associations that were evoked by questions in a product context were more positive, more product-related and had less to do with heritage or history than the associations subjects had with the countries in non-product context. The findings from this study suggest that COO markers evoke associations that are influenced by product specific factors, but that are still similar to the associations evoked by a country in general.

Keywords: COO effect, country-of-origin, COO markers, associations, product context

A product package saying 'English tea', a product with the label 'made in Taiwan', an Italian flag on a pizza box or a French voiceover in a perfume commercial... Many companies opt for a strategy in which they emphasize the origin of the product or brand in their marketing campaigns (De Pelsmacker, Geuens, & Van Den Bergh, 2013). Numerous empirical studies have demonstrated that mentioning the country-of-origin (COO) by using COO markers, like the ones mentioned above, influences consumer's purchase decisions and product evaluations (Herz & Diamantopoulos, 2013; Bilkey & Nes, 1982). This so-called 'COO effect' is not only dependent on personal country images (Gurhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 2000), but also on product specific factors (Abraham & Patro, 2014). Although many answers have been found on the effects of COO, very little have been found on personal country images and the effects of product specific factors. It is still relatively unknown by what associations a personal country images are formed,

and whether these associations are different when a product is brought to mind. This research aims to identify the associations Dutch people have with France, Germany and Italy and compares these associations to associations about the same countries made in a product context.

COO effect

De Pelsmacker et al. (2013) explain the COO effect as the spontaneously activated stereotypes a consumer has when noticing a reference to the country in which a product is produced. These stereotypes can have a rational and emotional influence on how the product is evaluated, even when it is not the consumer's intention to use this information. This information is a collection of associations a consumer has with a foreign country, including perceptions of expertise within a certain product category. This means not all products from a country enjoy an equal COO image, but the image depends on the specific product category of the product (Abraham & Patro, 2014). In the best scenario, a COO acts as a guarantee of quality and as a sign that the risk of buying something that does not meet the consumer's expectations is reduced (Adina, Gabriela, & Roxana-Denisa, 2015). The COO effect can make consumers feel affinity with the product which can result in an advantage for the brand over competitors. Herz and Diamantopoulos (2013) state that using COO markers has also proved to be a successful strategy to positively affect a consumers' brand origin recognition accuracy and, that when it leads to emotional country-specific associations, a COO could also lead to brand ownership.

But the COO effect isn't always in favour of the product. When the COO evokes negative associations in consumers' minds it can also have a negative influence on the buying process (Adina et al., 2015). For example, a consumer can refrain to buy a product from a country with an objectionable regime (Klein, Ettenson & Morris, 1998). This could affect the brand's position and lead to product avoidance (Adina et al., 2015).

COO markers are most likely to have a positive effect on consumers when they are used for products that are generally known for their COO, like watches from Switzerland and chocolates from Belgium (De Pelsmacker et al., 2013). When the origin of the product or brand is unclear and the product is linked to an incorrect COO, it can still have a strong effect on the consumer's brand attitude (Magnusson, Westjohn, and Zdravkovic, 2011). In order to have a positive COO effect, a match between the product and the COO is needed (Adina et al., 2015; Hornikx & Van Meurs, 2017).

This research aims to find associations evoked by the COO effect. To actually evoke this effect, positive or negative, this research consisted of an experiment using congruent products as well as abstract products (“a product”).

COO markers

There is not one single way to evoke a COO effect. Aichner (2014) divided COO markers in eight strategies: ‘Made in...’; Quality and origin labels; COO embedded in the company name; Typical COO words embedded in the company name; Use of the COO language; Use of famous or stereotypical people from the COO; Use of COO flags and symbols; and Use of typical landscapes or famous buildings from the COO. These strategies can either be indirect COO markers or direct COO marker (e.g. ‘Made in...’) (Hornikx & Van Meurs, 2017). An indirect COO maker is a marker that does not explicitly mentions the COO, but only refers to it indirectly. An example of an indirect COO marker is the use of the COO language in an advertisement. An indirect does explicitly tells the consumer where the product is from. An example of a direct COO marker is: ‘Made in...’.

To have the ability to draw conclusions about associations evoked by all types of COO markers, this research tried to include direct COO markers (“An Italian company (...)”) as well as indirect markers (“(...) using a French slogan”).

Associations

COO markers evoke associations that lead to a certain perception of the product. Herz and Diamantopoulos (2013) explain this phenomenon by linking the functioning of COO to the Dual Coding Theory. The Dual Coding Theory states that people memorise information by creating networks of concepts that are linked by associations (Anderson 1983; Krishnan, 1996). This idea is in line with the conclusion of Herz and Diamantopoulos (2013) that a consumer links a brand to a particular country because specific associations are created. Hornikx, Van Meurs, and Starren (2007) did a research on multilingual advertisements and found that this is also true for the indirect COO marker ‘language’. Literature on foreign language use in advertisements shows that people do not necessarily need to understand the foreign language to get a COO effect. They just need to recognise the language and associations will be evoked. The primary

function of using the foreign language is transferring the symbolic significance (Piller 2003). Hornikx et al. (2007) point out that different languages evoke particular associations, like 'elegant' as an association with the French language, and 'reliable' as an association with the German language. They conclude that those associations that were evoked by the indirect COO marker 'language' were similar to associations evoked by direct markers. This last conclusion forms the basis for this current study to merge direct and indirect COO markers into 'product-context'.

Relevance of the COO effect

There is a debate going on about whether the COO effect is still relevant. When a product had a label 'Made in...', it used to mean that all resources, technologies and ideas came from that particular country. Nowadays, globalisation and technological developments make it harder to tell where a product is from. There can be differences in country of manufacturing, country of design, country of brand, and so on (Han & Terpstra, 1988). Although Abraham & Patro (2014) say the world has shrunk into a networked village, they also say there still is a direct relationship between COO and product quality levels and perceptions and that people are willing to pay more for a product with a 'good' COO (Steenkamp, & Van Trijp, 1989). Most often a COO (country-of-origin) now means the country from which a product is exported (Abraham & Patro, 2014). Thus, creating the COO-effect is an ever-changing process in which recent developments should be taken into account. However, little research has been done on the actual associations the COO-effect evokes. In order to be able to adapt to developments, it is relevant to know what the associations are evoked by COO markers and whether the associations are still COO-related. The current study focussed on this issue by testing whether consumers still come up with associations related to the COO or just associations that are product-related.

More research needed

Literature has also shown that COO is still relevant as consumers continue to use these cues in product differentiation (Abraham & Patro, 2014). The number of companies that is operating internationally is growing rapidly. Numerous products are being sold outside of the production country. This globalisation forces marketers to make strategic decisions on

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international communications and marketing strategies (De Pelsmacker, Geuens, & Van Den Bergh, 2013). Abraham and Patro (2014) say that the world has become a ‘networked-village’ which forces companies to evolve their implication of COO accordingly. In order to do so, better understanding of the COO effect is necessary. Elliot & Cameron (1994) say that COO biases change over time. This makes updated research on associations that form the COO effect necessary for marketers to make these strategic decisions.

Also, there are many product-specific factors that influence the COO effect, for example, the quality of the product (Abraham & Patro, 2014). As product characteristics It is likely that a difference exists between associations with a country in general and associations with the same country when a product is mentioned. The differences between those two types of associations have not been researched before.

Aim of study

This research focusses on the associations that result in the COO effect. It is known that COO influences product image and vice versa (Walker & Dubitsky, 1994). Because the COO effect is continuously changing, this study aims to give an overview of the associations Dutch people have with France, Germany and Italy nowadays in a product context and compares these associations to the general associations people have about the same countries. This study will give insights on how the COO effect is formed in consumers’ minds.

This leads to the following research question and sub-questions:

RQ: What associations do country-of-origin markers evoke?

SQ1: To what extent is there a difference between associations with a country in general and associations with a country in a product context?

Method

An experiment was conducted to find out what the differences are in associations evoked by COO markers in a product context and in a non-product context.

Materials

This experiment tested the influence of the independent variable ‘product context’ on associations about France, Germany and Italy. As can be seen in Table 2 and 3, the difference in associations was measured by using six different versions of a questionnaire. The questions were arranged in several ways, to prevent order effects.

As explained in the introduction, the ‘COO markers in product context’ can include so-called ‘direct’ COO markers and ‘indirect’ COO markers. The direct COO marker in this experiment was a question in which the country of origin (COO) was explicitly mentioned (e.g. ‘A German/Italian/French company...’). The indirect COO marker in this experiment was ‘language’. The indirect COO marker was applied in two ways.

The first way in which the indirect COO marker was formed was by using a slogan in the language corresponding to the COO. For Germany this slogan was “*Maximaler Genuss*”, for Italy this slogan was “*Goditi al massimo*” and for France the slogan “*Profites au maximum*” was used. The translation of the slogan “*Enjoy to the max*” was chosen based on the expectation that its words would not directly influence the participant’s associations. Another reason to pick this slogan was the fact that this slogan would fit all products. The slogans were reviewed and adjusted by native speakers to make them sound more natural.

The second way in which the indirect COO marker was formed, was by only mentioning the language. This implicit way of using language as a COO marker was added in order to limit the amount associations purely evoked by the content of the slogan. This COO marker was called the ‘abstract slogan’. In other words, the language was named, but not used in a slogan. An example of a section of the questionnaire containing an abstract slogan is: “In their marketing campaign they will use a *German slogan*.”

To elicit associations in product context, the COO markers mentioned above were combined with a product. As the COO-effect is only present when there is a match between the product and the COO (Hornikx & Van Meurs, 2017), only stereotypical products were used in

the questions that specifically mention a product. For Germany this meant ‘beer’, for Italy this product was ‘pasta’ and for France this was ‘wine’ (Usunier & Cestre, 2007).

A product or product category in which a country has been found to excel for many years evokes a positive COO effect. But this does not mean that this positive COO image is projected on all other products by consumers (Abraham & Patro, 2014). Knowing this, and in order to limit the chance of only evoking association that purely reflect the given product, there were also questions using an abstract product. This means no product was explicitly mentioned in the question. An example of a direct COO marker with an abstract product in the questionnaire was: “A *German* company wants to introduce *a product* on the Dutch market”. An overview of the questions that were asked to evoke associations in product context can be seen in Table 1.

The associations evoked by ‘COO in non-product context’ were tested by asking ‘What comes to mind when you think of *Germany/Italy/France*’. The experiment focussed on Germany, Italy and France as COO because, according to Usunier and Cestre (2007), those countries had a very clear match with a product, which enlarges the chances of evoking the COO effect.

All six versions of the questionnaire were pre-tested two times. A group of 18 subjects (three per version), filled in the questionnaire. After the first pre-test it became clear that some questions were multi interpretable. After the formulation was adjusted, a second group of 6x 2 people pre-tested the questionnaire and now no problems arose. No adjustments were made after the positive results from the last pre-test.

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Table 1. Indirect and direct questions in abstract and specific questionnaires

	Indirect question	Direct question
Abstract questionnaire	<p>“Imagine you work for a publicity agency. You design an advertisement for a French/German/Italian company that wants to introduce a new product on the Dutch market. In the Dutch advertisement you want to use the following:</p> <p><i>“Profiter au maximum” / “Maximaler Genuss” / “Divertiti al massimo”</i></p> <p>What else would you emphasise in the Dutch-language advertisement? For example, what words would you use? <i>Write down as much as possible”</i></p>	<p>“Imagine you work for a publicity agency. You design an advertisement for a French/German/Italian company that wants to introduce a new product on the Dutch market. In the advertisement you want to emphasise the company’s French/German/Italian origin.</p> <p>How would you market this French/German/Italian product? For example, what words would you use? <i>Write down as much as possible”</i></p>
Specific questionnaire	<p>“Imagine you work for a publicity agency. You design an advertisement for a French/German/Italian company that wants to introduce a new wine/beer/pasta on the Dutch market. In the Dutch advertisement you want to use the following slogan:</p> <p><i>“Profiter au maximum” / “Maximaler Genuss” / “Divertiti al massimo”</i></p> <p>What else would you emphasise in the Dutch-language advertisement? For example, what words would you use? <i>Write down as much as possible”</i></p>	<p>“Imagine you work for a publicity agency. You design an advertisement for a French/German/Italian company that wants to introduce a new wine/beer/pasta on the Dutch market. In the advertisement you want to emphasise the company’s French/German/Italian origin.</p> <p>How would you market this product? For example, what words would you use? <i>Write down as much as possible”</i></p>

Subjects

Abraham and Patro (2014) drew conclusions about the influence of demographic characteristic on the COO effect. They found that older people tend to appreciate foreign products more than young people, and so do women compared to men, and people who are more educated in comparison to lower educated people. With this in mind, this experiment collected a diverse group of subjects. In total 216 people took part in the experiment. Six participants were excluded from the experiment because they did not meet the selection criteria of having the Dutch nationality, having Dutch as their mother tongue, and being over the age of 18. This means the final dataset contained data from 210. The age of the subjects ranged from 18 to 75 years ($M = 40$, $SD = 14.18$), and most of the subjects were women (60%). A small part of the group had only had primary education (1.0%), a larger group of 44.3% had finished secondary education (VMBO, HAVO, VWO) and the largest group of 54.8% had finished tertiary education (MBO, HBO, University). 115 of the subjects were currently students (54.8%) and 95 (45.2%) were not.

All subjects were asked to rate how familiar they were with France, Germany and Italy on a 7-point Likert scale with 1 meaning unfamiliar and 7 meaning familiar. The subjects were most familiar with Germany ($M = 4.98$, $SD = 1.44$), France came second ($M = 4.76$, $SD = 1.46$) and the subjects were least familiar with Italy ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 1.63$).

As can be seen in Table 2 and 3, there were six versions of the questionnaire, divided into two types: Abstract questionnaires (which did not explicitly mention a product) and specific questionnaires (which mentioned *pasta/beer/wine*). Chi-square tests showed no significant differences between the group of subjects that filled in the abstract versions of the questionnaire and the group that filled in the specific version of the questionnaire in terms of gender ($\chi^2(2) = .97$, $p = .616$), or educational level ($\chi^2(2) = 2.27$, $p = .321$). A one-way analysis also showed no significant difference in age between the two groups ($F(1,208) = 2.56$, $p = .111$). No significant differences were found in the number of students between those two groups of subjects ($\chi^2(1) = .013$, $p = .911$).

The questionnaires were filled in online as well as hardcopy. A chi-square test showed no significant differences in gender between the group online and the hardcopy group ($\chi^2(2) = 4.36$, $p = .113$). However, another chi-square did show a significant difference in educational level ($\chi^2(2) = 21.41$, $p < .001$). In the online group most subjects (62.4%) had finished a tertiary education, while in the hardcopy group most subjects (63.4%) had 'only' finished

secondary education. A one-way analysis showed another significant difference in age between the online and hardcopy group ($F(1,208) = 4.013, p = .046$) which indicates that subject in the online group were older ($M = 31.72, SD = 14.70$) than the hardcopy group ($M = 27.81, SD = 13.31$).

Design

The design was 2 (COO: direct COO marker + indirect COO marker) x 3 (Country: Germany + Italy + France) x 2 (Product: mentioned + abstract). The experiment had a within-subjects design as well as a between-subjects design. The within-subject variables were direct COO marker (“A *French/German/Italian* company”), indirect COO marker (“*Profites au maximum*” / “*Maximaler Genuss*” / “*Divertiti al massimo*”) and explicit COO (“*What comes to mind when you think of Italy?*”). This means all participants received one question with a direct COO marker, one with an indirect COO marker and one question about a country in general.

The between-subjects variable was ‘abstractness’ of the questionnaire. This variable had two versions namely, the specific questionnaires (the ones that mentioned *pasta/beer/wine*) and the abstract questionnaires (the ones that didn’t explicitly mention a product). Half of the participants (49%) received a specific questionnaire and half (51%) received an abstract questionnaire.

Instruments

The experiment consisted of six versions of a questionnaire, three of them abstract (no explicit product was mentioned in the questions) and three of them specific (*pasta/beer/wine* was mentioned in the questions). To elicit associations with COO in product context, each questionnaire contained two questions about a product campaign, one with a direct COO (“*An Italian company*”) and one with an indirect COO (“*A German slogan*”). Table 2 and 3 present these questions, divided by type of questionnaire (specific/abstract).

In order to get associations with countries in general each questionnaire also contained one question about France, Germany or Italy without a COO marker (“*What comes to mind when you think of France/Germany/Italy?*”). Each version of the questionnaire had one question about France, one about Germany, and one about Italy.

To rule out possible order effects, the questions had different positions in every version of the questionnaire. To overcome possible issues that can occur when people are asked to respond in their non-native language (De Langhe, Puntoni, Fernandes, & Van Osselaer, 2011), all questionnaires were in Dutch. Table 1 shows an overview of all versions of the questionnaire.

The familiarity of the subjects with France, Germany and Italy was tested with a 7-point Likert scale (1 = unfamiliar, 7 = familiar). Every subject answered this question for all three countries. An example of a specific and an abstract questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

Table 2. Overview structure specific questionnaire versions A-C

	Questionnaire A (specific)	Questionnaire B (specific)	Questionnaire C (specific)
Question 1	Indirect – French (Product mentioned + Slogan)	Direct - France (Product mentioned + COO)	Indirect – German (Product mentioned + Slogan)
Question 2	Direct – Germany (Product mentioned + COO)	Indirect - Italy (Product mentioned + Slogan)	Direct – Italy (Product mentioned + COO)
Question 3	General associations with Italy	General associations with Germany	General associations with France
Question 4	Familiarity (France, Germany, Italy)	Familiarity (France, Germany, Italy)	Familiarity (France, Germany, Italy)
Question 5	Demographics	Demographics	Demographics

Table 3. Overview structure abstract questionnaire versions D-F

	Questionnaire D (abstract)	Questionnaire E (abstract)	Questionnaire F (abstract)
Question 1	Direct – Germany (Product not mentioned + COO)	Indirect - Italy (Product not mentioned + Slogan)	Direct – Italy (Product not mentioned + COO)
Question 2	Indirect – French (Product not mentioned + Slogan)	Direct - France (Product not mentioned + COO)	Indirect – German (Product not mentioned + Slogan)
Question 3	General associations with Italy	General associations with Germany	General associations with France
Question 4	Familiarity (France, Germany, Italy)	Familiarity (France, Germany, Italy)	Familiarity (France, Germany, Italy)
Question 5	Demographics	Demographics	Demographics

Procedure - participants

The selection of subjects was made based on their nationality (Dutch), mother tongue (Dutch) and age (over 18 years). The research group consisted of seven members. Six members found a group of at least thirty subjects with diverse characteristics for one version of questionnaire. The seventh member of the research group collected at least five extra subjects for each version of the questionnaire. Subjects only filled in one version of the questionnaire. 114 subjects (54.3%) did this online, the other participants (45.7%) did this hardcopy. All participants were asked to fill in a questionnaire as a part of a thesis research for a pre-master program in the faculty of arts and the questionnaire started with a small introduction. In the introduction the subjects were told to answer in Dutch, to write down anything that came to mind and to give as many answers as possible. The participants that filled in the online questionnaire were individually recruited through WhatsApp, Facebook messenger and e-mail. The participants that filled in the pen-and-paper questionnaire were recruited face-to-face in a variety of places (among others in the university cafeteria). The participants did not receive any reward for taking part in the experiment. If requested, the aim of the experiment was explained after participation. On average, the experiment took about five minutes.

Procedure – Coding

Every association was coded by two coders. A literal copy of every association written down by the subject was put in the first column. The coders put adjusted associations in the next column. This meant they removed spelling mistakes and, if applicable, shorten or translate the associations. For example, ‘beir’ would become ‘bier’, ‘Weinig mensen die Engels spreken’ was shortened to ‘Geen Engels’ and ‘Bratwurst’ was translated to ‘braadworst’.

In the second column the language of the associations was coded. The options were France, German, Italian, Dutch, English or a combination of languages. When a word was a loanword like the French word ‘croissant’ or the Italian word ‘pizza’ it was coded as the original language.

The next step was coding all associations in broader subcategories. For example, ‘speciaalbier’ (specialty beer), ‘brouwen’ (to brew) and ‘biersoort’ (type of beer) were placed

into the subcategory 'bier' (beer). The subcategories were based on frequently seen associations in the data. A list of all subcategories can be found in Appendix B.

After all the associations were placed into subcategories, they were coded into more general categories. Hornikx et al. (2007) also did not concentrate on individual associations but rather on broader categories. The categories that were used for this study were partially based on their coding scheme and were furthermore emerged from the data. The categories that were used were: (1) food, (2) drinks, (3) persons, (4) sports, (5) geography, (6) ambiance, (7) culture-specific, (8) characteristics, (9) nature, (10) feeling, (11) origin. Examples of subcategories within the categories are 'pizza' and 'olives' within the category 'Food', 'Rome' and 'climate' in the category 'Geography' and 'Oktoberfest' and 'Burgundian' in the category 'Culture-specific'.

The associations were also coded on product-relatedness, COO-relatedness and on valence (positive, negative or neutral). An association was considered product-related when it was closely associated with goods in products. This definition was partially based on the definition of Lenfle and Midler's (2009). For COO-relatedness the definition of Rashid & Barnes (2018) was used whom consider COO-relatedness as something that creates emotional values associated with heritage and history. Lord & Yoke (2015) describe 'valence' as how positively or negatively an evoked association is viewed. 'Neutral' was added to the coding options based on the experimental study on associations with multilingual advertising of Hornikx, Van Meurs and Starren (2007).

The interrater reliability was calculated using the Cohen's Kappa and was considered 'moderate' for the variable "category" ($\kappa = .599, p < .001$), 'substantial' for 'product-related' ($\kappa = .786, p < .001$) and 'COO related' $\kappa = .787, p < .001$, and 'perfect' for 'Sentiment' ($\kappa = .843, p < .001$) ("Cohen's Kappa Statistic", 2014).

Statistical treatment

The data was analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics, version 24. Cohen's Kappa was used to test the interrater reliability. Several chi-square tests and one-way ANOVA tests were used to compare the subjects' characteristics and to compare the associations evoked in product contexts with the associations evoked in non-product context.

Results

This study was set up to provide insights into the differences in associations with countries in general (non-product related) and associations with the same countries in product contexts. In total, the subjects wrote down 2978 associations of which 1131 were unique associations. On average, every subject gave 14.2 associations, distributed over three questions: two in product context and one about a country in general. Within the non-product context 1350 associations were written down. Generally, subjects wrote down 6.4 associations for the question: “What comes to mind when you think of *France/Germany/Italy*?” Within the product context 1628 associations were written down, divided over two questions. This means 3.9 associations per question in product context. The answers given within those two contexts were compared on four things: categories, valence, product-relatedness, and COO-relatedness.

Categories

The associations with the countries in general (non-product contexts) were mostly about ‘Characteristics’ (28.2%), ‘Food’ (21.1%), ‘Geography’ (17.6%) and ‘Drinks’ (8.3%). The associations with the countries in product-contexts were mostly about ‘Characteristics’ (42.8%), ‘Food’ (13.0%), ‘Culture-specific’ (11.4%) and ‘Drinks’ (7.9%).

As Table 4 displays, a Chi-square showed that the distribution of associations among the categories differed significantly from each other on all categories except from ‘Drinks’ ($\chi^2(10) = 318.95, p < .001$). Although there is this difference in distribution, three out of four most often occurring categories are the same.

However, there were some differences in the content of the categories between the two contexts. Within the non-product contexts ‘Characteristics’ contained mostly places of interest like the ‘Eiffel tower’ and ‘Tower of Pisa’, but also associations about ‘language’. Within the product contexts ‘Characteristics’ was also the most frequently mentioned category but in this context the subjects wrote down associations like ‘Taste’ and ‘quality’.

The category ‘Food’ contained associations with ‘bread’ most frequently within the non-product contexts. This can be explained by the fact that many subjects wrote down ‘croissant’ or ‘baguette’ when a question was about France in general. All kinds of dishes were mentioned frequently as well and especially ‘Pasta’ and ‘Pizza’ were written down many times (pasta 73

times and pizza 62 times). The content of the ‘Food’ category within the product contexts was similar to the non-product contexts. However, the foods were often combined with adjectives (e.g. ‘tasty sausage’).

The category ‘Drinks’ had no significant difference in frequency, neither did it differ in content as for both contexts ‘Wine’ and ‘Beer’ were mentioned most.

Table 4: Comparison categories between association in non-product and product contexts

	Non-product context		Product context	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Food	285 _a	21.1%	212 _b	13.0%
Drinks	112 _a	8.3%	129 _a	7.9%
Persons	32 _a	2.4%	6 _b	0.4%
Sport	40 _a	3.0%	14 _b	0.9%
Geography	237 _a	17.6%	133 _b	8.2%
Ambiance	19 _a	1.4%	47 _b	2.9%
Culture specific	82 _a	6.1%	185 _b	11.4%
Characteristic	381 _a	28.2%	696 _b	42.8%
Nature	97 _a	7.2%	41 _b	2.5%
Feeling	59 _a	4.4%	45 _b	2.8%
Origin	6 _a	0.4%	119 _b	7.3%
Total	1350	100%	1627	100%

Different subscript letters denote row proportions which differ significantly from each other at the .05 level

Valence

Table 5 shows the distribution of positive, negative and neutral associations for associations with a country in general (non-product context) and associations made in a product context. A Chi-square test showed a significant relation between valence of associations and context (general or in a product context) ($\chi^2(3) = 147.88, p = .006$). By far the largest number of associations was neutral, but associations with a country in general are significantly more often neutral (85.7%) than associations within product context (73.1%).

Associations evoked in a product context were significantly more positive (26.2%) than the associations with a country in general (10.4%), which were significantly more negative (3.9%) than the associations in product context (0.7%).

Table 5. Comparison valence between associations in non-product and product contexts

	Non-product context		Product context	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Positive	140 _a	10.4%	427 _b	26.2%
Negative	530 _a	3.9%	12 _b	0.7%
Neutral	11570 _a	85.7%	1189 _b	73.1%
Total	1350	100%	1628	100%

Different subscript letters denote row proportions which differ significantly from each other at the .05 level

Product-related

A Chi-square test revealed that associations evoked in a product context were significantly more product-related (65.5%) than associations with countries in general (0.5%) ($\chi^2(2) = 1353.20, p < .001$). As can be seen in Table 6, almost all associations with a country in general were not closely related to characteristics of a product.

Table 6. Comparison product-relatedness between associations in non-product and product context

	Non-product context		Product context	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Product-related	7 _a	0.5%	1066 _b	65.5%
Non-product related	1343 _a	99.5%	561 _b	34.5%
Total	1350	100%	1628	100%

Different subscript letters denote row proportions which differ significantly from each other at the .05 level

COO-related

A significant difference was found between the product and non-product contexts on COO-relatedness. A Chi-square test was used to analyse this difference ($\chi^2(2) = 73.57, p$

< .001). As Table 7 shows, associations about countries in non-product context were significantly more COO-related (48.3%) than the associations in product-context (32.9%). However, 51.7% of the general associations and 67.1% of the associations in product contexts had nothing to do with heritage or history of the country (implicitly) mentioned and were thus not COO-related.

Table 7. Comparison COO-relatedness between associations in non-product and product contexts

	Non-product context		Product context	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
COO-related	651 _a	48.3%	535 _b	32.9%
Non-product related	698 _a	51.7%	1092 _b	67.1%
Total	1350	100%	1628	100%

Different subscript letters denote row proportions which differ significantly from each other at the .05 level

Conclusion & Discussion

The aim of the present research was to examine what associations country-of-origin markers evoke and how these associations, that are evoked in a product context, differ from associations Dutch people have with a country in general. The findings from this study suggest that COO markers evoke associations that are influenced by product specific factors, but that are still similar to the associations evoked by a country in general.

Associations

The experiment shows that most associations with the countries in general as well as the associations with the countries in a product context could be placed into the category ‘Characteristics’. A similarity between the two contexts were characteristics like ‘reliable’ and ‘stylish’. These associations are in partly line with results from the study of Hornikx et al. (2007) on language as an indirect COO marker. As they found that associations like ‘elegant’ were evoked by the French language and ‘reliable’ by the German language. That type of associations were also found within the category ‘Characteristics’ in the current study. A difference within the same category between the two contexts (non-product and product) were that places of

interest like ‘The Eiffel tower’ and ‘The tower of Pisa’ that were mentioned non-product context far more often.

A similarity between the associations within product a non-product context was the ‘popularity’ of the categories ‘Food’ and ‘Drinks’. An explanation for these finding is Walker & Dubitsky’s (1994) statement that the COO effect is an ongoing process of a COO influencing the perception of a product and the perception of a product influencing the country image one has. In other words, when someone really likes a German beer, he/she might think that Germans are good at brewing beer. And when some is really convinced that Germans are good at brewing beer, he/she might like German beers better. So when consumers are often confronted with products in the food and beverages category, chances are high that they will think of food or drinks when a country is mentioned. Another possible explanation for the large number of food- and drink-related associations is the theory of Trompenaars and Woolliams (2004) that compare culture with an onion. They state that culture, like an onion, consists of layers. The outer layer is the most visible and explicit level of culture and consists of the things that people primarily associate with culture: clothes, language, food, etcetera. The ‘deeper’ layers consist of norms and values, and basic assumptions. France, Germany and Italy are all popular holiday destinations for Dutch families. As a holiday is often just for a small period of time, it is hard to get to know ‘deeper’ layers of a culture. Thus, it is likely that many Dutch people were only confronted with the outer layer of these cultures. As food and drinks are a very visual part of the outer layer, it will probably form a prominent part of their country images.

Valence

Another interesting finding was that the valence of most associations was neutral. However, associations evoked in a product context were significantly more positive than the associations evoked by countries in general. There are two facts that could explain this finding. First of all, previous research has shown that when there is a match between a COO and a product, a positive COO effect is likely to occur (Adina et al., 2015; Hornikx & Van Meurs, 2017). As half of our questions that asked for associations in a product context consisted a stereotypical product, it is not surprising that subjects wrote down positive associations. This is in line with De Pelsmacker et al. (2013) who state that COO markers evoke positive associations when products are used that are known for their COO. A second explanation of these findings is

the instrument that was used to evoke the associations in product context. In the questionnaire, the subject was asked to imagine oneself in the role of a marketer. This makes it logical to write down positive associations, as no marketer would say negative things about the product he/she is trying to sell.

Product-relatedness

The current study also found that mentioning ‘a product’ or ‘*wine/beer/pasta*’ leads to more product-related associations than not mentioning a product (“What comes to mind when you think of *France/Germany/Italy*?”). Within this product context, 65.5% of all associations were product-related, meaning they said something about the characteristics of the product. Abraham and Patro (2014) already pointed out that product-specific factors are of influence on the COO effect. The results of the current study could suggest that product specific-factors may be of more importance for the COO effect than is generally thought as only 34.5% of the associations in product context was not product-related. It may be that product factors are decisive and COO is just a detail. Although previous research has shown that consumers are willing to pay extra for a product with a ‘good’ COO (Abraham & Patro, 2014), further research into to what extent a ‘good’ COO outweighs positive product factors is needed. The fact that only 0.5% of the associations written down about the countries in general had something to do with a product characteristic can be easily explained as no product was mentioned in the general questions about the countries. Among these 0.5% that were product-related, the associations ‘low price’ and ‘origin of product’ were written down, which could also be seen as characteristics of a country in general. This means it can be concluded that product-related associations can merely be evoked by COO in product contexts.

Number of associations

The results of the current study also show that apparently more associations are evoked with a country in general ($M = 6.4$) than within a product context ($M = 3.9$). This difference could be due to the way a COO effect occurs. According to Gurhan-Canli and Maheswaran, (2000), the COO effect is dependent on one’s personal country image. As this country image is formed by a person’s impressions, ideas, experience and beliefs about that country (Kleppe, Iversen, &

Stensaker, 2002), the subject in this experiment could write down any associations they had. While it is possible that with the questions about the countries in product context, the subjects were somehow 'framed' by the product and wrote down fewer associations.

Limitations & suggestion for further research

Although Aichner (2013) named eight ways of marking a COO, this experiment consisted only of two types of COO markers. A direct one, in which the COO was explicitly mentioned, and an indirect one, in which the language of the COO was mentioned or used. The way the COO was mentioned in this experiment could have had an influence on the associations that were evoked. Additional research on the associations evoked by different types of COO-markers, could fill this knowledge gap.

Another limitation of this study is the fact that subjects were instructed at the beginning of the questionnaire to answer in Dutch. This instruction was added in order to make the questionnaire clearer, as the pre-test showed that some subject thought they had to answer in a language they did not know. Although some participants overlooked this instruction and answered (partly) in another language, this could have somehow influenced the subjects (De Langhe, Puntoni, Fernandes, & Van Osselaer, 2011). It is recommended for further research not to limit subjects in their language choice in order to see if other (types) of associations are given.

Another thing to take into consideration in further research is whether or not to use 'abstract' questionnaires. In the abstract questionnaires no products were mentioned (only 'a new product' and no slogans were given (only 'a *French/German/Italian* slogan'). This prevented the subjects from being influenced by a product or by the content of the slogan, which forced the subjects to think about the COO instead of the product or language. But, as informal responses from subjects revealed, abstract questions also made the questionnaire vague and harder to understand.

Also, in future studies, it might be useful to use a different type of question to evoke associations in product contexts in which subjects do not need to place themselves in someone else's shoes. In this experiment subjects were asked to think like marketers. It might be possible that subject wrote down different, and more positive, associations than they would have written down when they were asked to only think for themselves.

Relevance

Due to globalisation and technological developments it is harder to tell what the product's COO is (Han & Terpstra, 1988). The current study showed that when people are asked to write things down about 'a French wine' not only associations related to the wine were written down, but also not product-related associations that had something to do with France. From this, it can be concluded that mentioning a COO still evokes certain COO-related associations. This may mean that although it is harder to tell a product's 'real' COO, the COO that is mentioned is still a relevant cue for consumers, whether this is the country from which a product is exported (Abraham & Patro, 2014), or the country of manufacturing (Han & Terpstra, 1988).

Practical implications

The current study showed differences in associations evoked by countries in general and by countries in product context. Overall it can be concluded that COO markers still have an effect on the associations of consumers in terms of valence, product-relatedness and COO-relatedness. However, the COO effect is still dependent on product specific factors like 'product category' and 'quality'. This means that effectiveness of the COO effect is dependent on the type of product. This study suggests that food and drinks are product categories which are easily linked to countries of origin by consumers. This means that marketers who want to market a product in the food or beverage category emphasising the COO of the product in advertisement can still be an effective strategy.

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Appendix A – Specific and abstract questionnaire

Questionnaire version A

Beste deelnemer,

Bedankt dat je de tijd neemt om deel te nemen aan dit onderzoek.

Deze enquête bestaat uit vier elementen, het laatste element bevat een aantal algemene vragen. Het invullen van de enquête duurt ongeveer 5 minuten.

1. Een bedrijf wil een nieuwe wijn op de Nederlandse markt introduceren. In hun reclame-uitingen gebruiken ze de volgende slogan:

“Profites au maximum”

Welke woorden raad jij het bedrijf verder aan om te gebruiken in hun reclame-uitingen?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

2. Een Duits bedrijf wil een nieuw soort bier op de Nederlandse markt introduceren. Ze willen hun Duitse herkomst benadrukken in hun reclame-uitingen. Welke woorden raad jij het bedrijf aan om te gebruiken in hun reclame-uitingen?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

3. Wat komt er in je op als je aan Italië denkt?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

4. Algemene vragen

Geslacht: _____

Leeftijd: _____

Nationaliteit: _____

Hoogst afgeronde opleiding: Geen

VMBO

HAVO

VWO

MBO

HBO

WO

Anders, namelijk: _____

Eventuele opmerkingen: _____

Bedankt voor je deelname,

Katrien, Kaylie, Lisa, Liz, Marit en Tessa

What associations do country-of-origin markers evoke?

A research on the difference between associations with a country in general and associations with a country in a product context

Questionnaire version D

Beste deelnemer,

Bedankt dat je de tijd neemt om deel te nemen aan dit onderzoek.

Deze enquête bestaat uit vier elementen, het laatste element bevat een aantal algemene vragen. Het invullen van de enquête duurt ongeveer 5 minuten.

-
- 1.** Een bedrijf wil een nieuw product op de Nederlandse markt introduceren. Ze willen hun Duitse herkomst benadrukken in hun reclame-uitingen. Welke woorden raad jij het bedrijf aan om te gebruiken in hun reclame-uitingen?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

- 2.** Een bedrijf wil een nieuw product op de Nederlandse markt introduceren. In hun reclame-uitingen gebruiken ze een Franse slogan. Welke woorden raad jij het bedrijf verder aan om te gebruiken in hun reclame-uitingen?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

- 3.** Wat komt er in je op als je aan Italië denkt?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

- 4.** Algemene vragen

Geslacht: _____

Leeftijd: _____

Nationaliteit: _____

Hoogst afgeronde opleiding: Geen

VMBO

HAVO

VWO

MBO

HBO

WO

Anders, namelijk: _____

Eventuele opmerkingen: _____

Bedankt voor je deelname,

Katrien, Kaylie, Lisa, Liz, Marit en Tessa

Appendix B - Subcategories

Table 1. Overview subcategories

Subcategories			
Architectuur	Genot	Kunst	Product
Auto	Geschiedenis	Kwaliteit	Religie
Bereiding	Gevoel	Landschap	Schnitzel
Bezienswaardigheid	Gezelligheid	Leefstijl	Scooter
Bier	Gezelschap	Liefde	Sfeer
Bloemen	Herkomst	Muziek	Smaak
Borrel	Houding	Nationaliteit	Sport
Brood	IJs	Natuur	Stad
Buurland	Infrastructuur	Olijf	Streek
Criminaliteit	Ingrediënten	Pasta	Supermarkt
Cultuur	Internationaal	Persoon	Taal
Drinken	Kaart	Pizza	Uiterlijk
Druiven	Kaas	Politiek	Uitspraak
Economie	Karakter	Prestaties	Vakantie
Eigenschap	Kenmerk	Product	Vlag
Eiland	Klederdracht	Religie	Voetbal
Eten	Kleur	Schnitzel	Vorm
Familie	Klimaat	Scooter	Wielrennen
Feesten	Koffie	Sfeer	Wijn
Fictie	Kruiden	Prestaties	Wintersport

What associations do country-of-origin markers evoke?

A research on the difference between associations with a country in general and associations with a country in a product context

Appendix C. Statement of own work

Student name: _____

Student number: _____

PLAGIARISM is the presentation by a student of an assignment or piece of work which has in fact been copied in whole or in part from another student's work, or from any other source (e.g. published books or periodicals or material from Internet sites), without due acknowledgement in the text.

DECLARATION:

a. I hereby declare that I am familiar with the faculty manual

(<http://www.ru.nl/stip/english/rules-regulations/fraud-plagiarism/>) and with Article 16

“Fraud and plagiarism” in the Education and Examination Regulations for the Bachelor's program of Communication and Information Studies.

b. I also declare that I have only submitted text written in my own words

c. I certify that this thesis is my own work and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation, whether they be books, articles, reports, lecture notes, and any other kind of document, electronic or personal communication.

Signature: _____

Place and date: _____