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COUNTRY-OF-ORIGIN IMAGE AND CONSUMER ATTITUDES TOWARD IMPORTED PRODUCTS: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

*TIRERA MAMADOU and ZHANG Xiao Juan

School of Management and Economics, Hubei University of Technology, Hubei, China

ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of the image of the country of origin on the attitudes of Ivorian consumers living in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, towards imported products. Using a convenience sample and based on existing literature, cross-sectional data were collected from consumers in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, through a self-administered questionnaire. The data were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) and Smart-PLS software. The study results show that the image of the country of origin significantly affects attitudes towards imported products, but indirectly through the most important factor, perceived quality. However, consumer ethnocentrism failed to significantly moderate the relationship between country-of-origin image and attitudes, suggesting that country preference has a weak influence in this context. This study highlights the strategic importance of country-of-origin image and perceived quality in purchase decisions. This study also discusses its theoretical and practical implications, limitations of the study, and future research directions.

INTRODUCTION

As a result of globalization, local markets have become increasingly open to foreign goods. For some commodities, the country of origin has become a significant factor in shaping consumer attitudes (Romeo & Heslop, 1992; Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002). Country-of-origin image refers to a set of perceptions, beliefs, and stereotypes that consumers associate with a particular country/region, affecting their perception of products from that country (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). Several empirical studies have shown that this image affects consumers' perceptions of product quality, trust, and overall attitudes toward the product (Ahmed & d'Astous, 2008; Magnusson, Westjohn, and Zdravkovic, 2011). For example, a product labeled "Made in Germany" or "Made in Japan" may immediately evoke connotations of reliability, innovation, or safety. Conversely, products from countries perceived as less developed or unstable may suffer from negative prejudice, regardless of their actual quality (Han, 1989; Maheswaran, 1994). However, most studies in this area have been conducted in developed countries or emerging Asian economies. Little research has explored the influence of country-of-origin image in African markets, particularly in French-speaking Africa (Nwankwo, Hamelin, & Khaled, 2008). In Côte d'Ivoire, where consumption of imported products continues to grow, particularly in the food and consumer goods sectors, it is relevant to examine the psychological determinants of consumer attitudes toward these products.

Can the perception of origin influence purchasing in an Ivorian context? Does the image of a developed country (e.g., France, United States) promote product acceptability? Conversely, can an origin perceived as "risky" hinder the purchasing decision, even if the product is high quality? This study analyzes the effect of country-of-origin image on Ivorian consumers' attitudes toward imported products. It pursues a dual objective: (1) to enrich the literature on the Country-of-Origin Effect by applying it to a still little-explored African context, and (2) to provide companies with appropriate marketing levers to strengthen the acceptability of their products in emerging markets. The paper is structured as follows: The next section discusses the literature on country-of-origin images and their effects in detail. The conceptual framework and hypotheses are then formulated. The methodology adopted for the empirical study in Côte d'Ivoire is then detailed, followed by a presentation and discussion of the results. The article concludes with managerial implications, research limitations, and future avenues.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Overview: The Howard-Sheth model of consumer behaviour considers that the consumer decision-making process consists primarily of four parts: input factors, cognition and learning, and outcomes. After receiving marketing stimuli or other information, the consumer processes information, forms impressions about the product and ultimately produces decision outcomes, including

attention, attitude, and purchase willingness. Among these outcomes, attitude toward the product refers to the consumer's evaluation of its ability to meet their purchasing motivation (Mittal, V., and al., 1999). In consumer behaviour research, country-of-origin image primarily refers to its influence on consumers' evaluation of products from that country, particularly their attitude toward the product and their purchase willingness. Drawing on the four-stage model of the consumer decision-making process and country-of-origin image with dimensional segmentation, this article establishes a corresponding model to analyze the mechanism of the role of country-of-origin image in consumer product evaluation. The study of country-of-origin image generally takes the concept of country of origin as its starting point. Country-of-origin analysis primarily determines whether the product's origin (usually the country-of-origin label) influences consumer evaluation and preferences (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). For example, consumers generally believe that products from developed countries are superior in quality to those from developing countries. For example, domestic consumers generally consider German cars better than those from their origin. Furthermore, recent negative or positive news about specific countries often affects consumers. For example, affected by mad cow disease in the United States, Chinese consumers are generally concerned about American beef.

However, studying consumer product preferences based solely on the abstract dimension of origin is too intuitive and simplistic to address the origin issue. It is difficult to explain accurately how product origin attributes influence consumer choice. In this regard, foreign researchers have proposed a relatively systematic and comprehensive system for analyzing the issue of origin, namely the concept of country-of-origin image. Research on this topic can help explain the impact of a specific dimension of a product's country of origin image on consumer perceptions and attitudes (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). Therefore, to better understand the country of origin's type and degree of influence, the image of the country of origin and its dimensional division constitutes a fundamental concept. Since the 1970s, foreign researchers have proposed different explanations for the dimensional decomposition of the image of the country of origin. Among them, the distinction between national and national product images is an important axis for decomposing the image of the country of origin. Compared with the initial assimilation between national image and country of origin image, this decomposition gives the country-of-origin image a more operational guiding role for enterprises (Bilkey & Nes,1982). With the development of many studies, the dimensional decomposition of national and national product images or product images has gradually become a consensus. National image mainly refers to the overall impression consumers form of a country through various forms of learning, media advertising or consumption experience. It is presented through specific indicators such as economy, politics, culture and natural environment. National product image refers to the general perception of attributes and the overall impression of consumers on products of a given country. It is the sum of product-related characteristics in the image of the country of origin. For example, products made in Japan are generally considered durable, while those made in Germany are generally associated with precision and craftsmanship.

Furthermore, decomposing the image of the country of origin into cognitive, emotional, and normative dimensions is another important area of research for researchers (Laroche, M. and al., 2005; Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). The cognitive dimension of country of origin image refers to consumers' general understanding and perception of the target country at several levels, including economic, political, cultural, etc. (Laroche, M. and al., 2005); the emotional dimension of country of origin image refers to the consumer's emotional expression toward the target country, manifested by the degree of affection for the country, its people, or its products (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999); the normative dimension of country of origin image refers to the personal or social normative influence that consumers will experience when faced with products from the target country (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). A product's country of origin influences consumers' perception of the target product's attributes. This

phenomenon is called the "country of origin effect" (Schnettler, B. and al., 2008). Generally, when consumers perceive that the target country has the necessary advantages and skills to produce a specific product, this contributes to developing a positive attitude toward it. Regarding food, Van et al. believe that the specific quality of food stems primarily from the particular humanistic functioning or natural environment of the country of origin. These factors can shape a unique identity for the produced food and provide corresponding added value (Van Ittersum, K. and al., 2003). Therefore, decomposing the structure of the image of the country of origin into humanistic and natural levels is an important direction for research on the dimensions of the image of the country of origin in the food sector. First, regarding country-of-origin image at the natural level, Van et al. measured country of origin image based on five elements: a favourable natural environment, a sufficiently clean environment, suitable soil type, appropriate sunshine, and appropriate rainfall, in their study of the image of the region of origin and consumer evaluation of food (Van Ittersum, K. and al., 2003).

Williamson et al., in their study of the impact of country-of-origin information on consumers' choice of red wine, found that environmental factors in the country of origin (clean water, clean air, and clean soil, recognized as a producer of fresh, healthy, and natural foods) were important stimulators (Williamson, P. O and al., 2016). Costa et al. found that geographical factors in the image of the country of origin (sunshine and soil fertility) influenced the quality of the fruit produced (Costa, C. and al., 2016). In summary, natural factors primarily refer to the suitability of the target country's natural conditions for producing a given product, particularly the quality of natural foods or certain raw materials, generally reflected by specific indicators such as the atmosphere, soil, and climate. Regarding the image of the country of origin at the humanistic level, van et al. believe that it can mainly be reflected through aspects such as sufficient professional knowledge, sufficient traditions, and an appropriate culture (Van Ittersum, K. and al., 2003). Of course, factors such as security and tradition in the image of the country of origin are also important stimuli that can influence consumers' product choices at the humanistic level (Williamson, P. O and al., 2016). Furthermore, Costa et al. also reflect the humanistic level of the image of the country of origin through the skills, creativity, and hard work of workers and use this to confirm its significant link with high-value-added products (usually industrial products) (Costa, C. and al., 2016). In summary, humanistic factors mainly refer to professionalism and other aspects related to humanistic factors in producing a product in the target country. Perceiving the need for the professional knowledge and skills necessary to manufacture high-quality products, consumers can distinguish products from different countries, generally through know-how, tradition, and craftsmanship.

It is, therefore, crucial to decompose the country-of-origin image of imported food products into two levels, humanistic and natural, based on the national image of origin and the national image of the product. This not only helps to explain in more detail the origin of the impact of the country-of-origin image on consumer attitudes towards products but also to provide more precise marketing and procurement guidance to companies producing and operating imported food products.

Hypothesis Development

Country of Origin Image as an External Symbol of Quality:
Country of origin is an important external cue for resource assessment, especially regarding information asymmetry and uncertainty (Bilkey & Nes, 1982; Peterson & Jolibert, 1995). The concept of country of origin (COO) was introduced by Schooler (1965), suggesting that consumers' trust and perceived liking of the country of origin influences their judgment, independent of the intrinsic characteristics of the product. According to information processing theory, consumers use brand, price, and country of origin cues to form judgments (Olson & Jacoby, 1972). Therefore, the image of the country of origin (COI) can be used as a heuristic indicator of perceived quality and influence loyalty, safety, and perceived outcomes (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999).

- *Hypothesis 1:* Country of origin image positively influences consumer attitudes towards ivory and imported products.
- *Hypothesis 2:* Country of origin image positively influences the perception of imported products.

Multidimensional country image: Country image is not limited to a single understanding. However, it consists of cognitive (professional competence, economic development), affective (cultural friendliness, empathy or rejection), and normative (political or moral values) dimensions (Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002; Usunier, 2006). Han (1989) distinguishes between two explanatory models: the halo model (halo model), in which the overall image of the country directly influences product evaluation, and the simple configuration model, which assumes that corporate image is based on historical context. Roth and Romeo (1992) introduced the concept of country-product matching. They emphasized that a country's image is more influential when it is perceived to match the product category under consideration (e.g., Germany matches cars, France matches fashion).

- *Hypothesis 3:* Perceived quality mediates the relationship between country-of-origin image and attitudes towards imported products.

Attitudes towards imported products and the moderating role of ethnocentrism: People who buy foreign products hold different perceptions. Among the identified moderating variables, ethnocentrism occupies an important position. According to Shimp and Sharma (1987), ethnocentric consumption is the tendency to choose domestically produced products with moral and economic advantages. These biases may weaken or reverse the positive impact of the image of the country of origin on attitudes toward imported products. This dimension is particularly important in emerging markets such as Côte d'Ivoire, where consumers are trapped between globalized standards and the logic of protecting local resources (Kouadio & Bahi, 2017).

- *Hypothesis 4:* Ethnocentrism negatively moderates the relationship between country-of-origin image and attitudes towards domestically produced products, suggesting that this effect is weakened for consumers with higher levels of ethnocentrism.

Based on the analyzed literature and the hypotheses formulated regarding Attitude towards the imported product, a conceptual framework was developed.
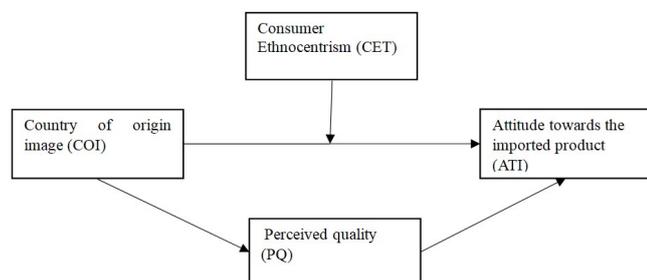

Figure 1. The conceptual framework

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design: The Study adopts a descriptive quantitative approach to analyse the impact of country-of-origin image on Ivorian consumers' attitudes towards foreign brands, taking into account the identified mediating and moderating effects. The study uses a cross-sectional research design to collect data from a sample of consumers in the city of Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire at a specific representative point in time.

Sampling and data collection: This study is based on an empirical survey conducted using a structured questionnaire. A group of Ivorian consumers residing in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, with varying income levels, participated in the study. A random sample of 342 respondents was recruited in the city of Abidjan to collect quantitative data using a structured questionnaire. The study was conducted using a non-probability quota sampling method that took into account socio-demographic variables (gender, age, education level, income level). The data collection period lasted three months in order to ensure a diversity of responses. To ensure community representativeness, the researchers selected participants in public spaces such as shopping malls and markets. The goods selected in this study were rice, clothing and household utensils. These product categories were chosen because they represent the main budget items for every household in Abidjan and reflect the current economic situation in Côte d'Ivoire. To ensure the representativeness of each socio-economic category, random sampling was used to allow the results to be generalised.

Data Collection Materials: For this study, the main data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire administered to Ivorian consumers in the city of Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire. This questionnaire was designed to rigorously measure awareness and attitudes towards imported products according to country of origin. It comprises 18 questions grouped into four main sections corresponding to the latent variables of the theoretical model. The questionnaire was constructed on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (completely), allowing robust differential measurement of attitudes. The measures for each variable were taken from the literature. The country-of-origin image variable (5 items), adapted from the work of Roth and Romeo (1992) and Papadopoulos and Heslop (2003), measures cognitive and symbolic attitudes towards the country of origin; visual quality (5 items) based on the work of Zeithaml (1988) and Dodds et al. (1991), assesses perceptions of product performance and reliability. Attitude towards imported products (4 items), based on the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), measures the emotional and behavioural evaluation of products. Consumer ethnocentrism (4 items) was included to determine the extent to which domestic consumers prefer or reject foreign products for moral or economic reasons, as modified by CETSCAL.

Data analysis methods: To identify recurring themes and consumer choice motivations, qualitative interview data is processed using content analysis, while quantitative data is analysed descriptively using a partial least squares structural equation model (PLS-SEM) to test hypotheses. Firstly, the PLS-SEM approach provides a comprehensive assessment by considering both structural and measurement models, allowing for accurate estimation of relationships between variables (Hair et al., 2020; Wiredu et al., 2023). This approach is particularly beneficial for research exploration, as it effectively manages complex relationships, including mediating and moderating effects, even with small sample sizes (Meng et al., 2023). Furthermore, the PLS-SEM methodology has been widely adopted across various disciplines and extensively used in commercial product research, demonstrating its robustness and reliability in comparable research settings (Wiredu et al., 2023).

Profile of Respondents' Sociodemographic Factors: Table 2 presents the characteristics of the respondents. 62,28% (n = 213) of the participants were male. Regarding age, the largest age group was between 18 and 27 years, representing 46,49% of the sample, followed by those aged 28-37 (32,46%), those under 48 (14,04%), and those aged 38-47, who accounted for 7,02% of the total respondents. Concerning the respondents' level of education, a substantial proportion of the study participants (61,68%) held higher education degrees. Based on the Ivorian government's tax rate, respondents' monthly income was divided into four categories: low income (< 100,000 CFA francs), lower middle income (100,000 to 300,000 CFA francs), upper middle income (300,000 to 500,000 CFA francs), and high income (500,000 CFA francs and above). The majority of respondents fell into the low-income category (30,4%), followed by those in the lower-middle-income category and the upper-middle-income category, both have 23,4%, and finally, the high-income category (22,9%).

Table 1 : Data collection instrument

Variables	items	Scale (1 to 5)
Country-of-origin image (COI) (Roth & Romeo, 1992; Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2003)	The product's country of origin is technologically advanced.	
	The product's country of origin is known for its industrial know-how	
	The product's country of origin applies strict quality standards	
	The product's country of origin enjoys a good international reputation.	
	The country's products are generally trustworthy.	
Perceived product quality (Zeithaml, 1988; Dodds et al., 1991)	The product seems reliable for everyday use.	
	The quality of the product meets my expectations.	
	The product is made of good-quality materials.	1 2 3 4 5
	The product is good value for money.	
	The product is designed to last.	
Attitude towards the imported product (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Batra et al., 2000)	I have an overall favourable opinion of the product.	
	I would buy this product if I had the opportunity.	
	I would recommend this product to my family or friends.	
	This product is a good choice in its category.	
Consumer ethnocentrism (Shimp & Sharma, 1987 - CETSCALE)	Buying imported products can harm the national economy.	
	It is better to buy local products, even if foreign products are sometimes cheaper.	
	Ivorian citizens should prioritise supporting local businesses.	
	I am proud to buy pro	

Table 2. Socio-demographic factors of respondents

Category	Amount	Ratio (%)
Gender		
1 = male	213	62,28
2 = female	119	34,80
0 = I don't want to specify	10	2,92
Total	342	100
Age		
1 = Under 18s	48	14,04
2 = 18 - 27 years old	159	46,49
3 = 28 - 37 years old	111	32,46
4 = 38 - 47 years old	24	7,02
5 = 48 years and over	0	0
Total	342	100
Educational level		
1 = Unenlightened	34	9,94
2 = Primary school	0	0
3 = Secondary school	97	28,37
4 = University	211	61,68
5 = Other	0	0
Total	342	100
Income level		
1 = below 100.000 FCFA	104	30,4
2 = 100.000 – 300.000 FCFA	80	23,4
3 = 300.000 – 500.000 FCFA	80	23,4
4 = 500.000 FCFA and above	78	22,9
Total	342	100

Table 3. Means and standard deviations of description statistics

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
COI	342	14.4591	4.39372
PQ	342	16.4386	5.26823
CET	342	12.8684	3.97834
ATI	342	12.9298	3.8446

Table 4. Correlation analysis

Variables	COI	PQ	CET	ATI
COI	1	.737**	.777**	.752**
PQ	.737**	1	.846**	.830**
CET	.777**	.846**	1	.845**
ATI	.752**	.830**	.845**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Descriptive Analysis: Table 3 below presents the mean and standard deviation of descriptive statistics. Regarding the country-of-origin image variable,perceived quality, Consumer ethnocentrism, and Attitude towards imported products were 14.4591, 16.4386, 12.8684, and 12.9298, respectively, and show their strong correlation with Attitude towards imported products.

Correlation analysis: Table 4 below presents the results of correlation analysis on Attitude towards imported productsfor imported products (rice, clothing, and household appliances. The results show that all the coefficients of correlation are positives and significant.

RESULTS

Measurement reliability and validity: To assess the internal reliability of the construct, this study used several tests, including Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, factor loadings, and average variance extracted (AVE). To achieve high internal reliability of a construct, the composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha, and factor loading thresholds should be 0.70 or higher (J. F. Hair et al., 2021). Table 5 shows that the four constructs in the model (ATI, CET, IOC, PQ) have good psychometric properties. The reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha, rho_a, rho_c) were above the recommended thresholds of 0.70 or 0.80, indicating high internal consistency between items. Item factor loadings are generally high (above 0.70), except for ATI1 (0.695) and COI2 (0.685), which is acceptable given the overall strength of the construct indicators.In addition, the VIF values were all below 5, indicating no significant multicollinearity between the items. Deleting the COI1 item improved the construct validity of the COI variable, as shown by the AVE values above the threshold. In conclusion, the measurement model is statistically robust and can be used to test structural relationships in the overall model.

Measurement of Discriminant validity established on Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio: This study used the heterogeneous trait/unitary trait ratio and the criteria of Fornell & Larcker (1981) to assess discriminant validity. As shown in Table 7, the results of both approaches confirm that the expected model has strong psychometric properties. The very high correlations between the variables indicate positive and significant relationships. This suggests that to improve consumer purchase preferences, it is crucial to focus on improving product accessibility and reinforcing cultural and social attitudes. These results can guide marketing strategies, focusing on improving customer experience and product perception.

Discriminant validity based on cross-loading criterion: Table 8 below shows the matrix of interfactorial loadings between the items (ATI1-PQ5) and the latent variables Attitude toward intention (ATI), Consumer ethnocentrism (CET), Country of origin image (COI), and Perceived quality (PQ). The table was designed to assess the discriminant validity of these concepts, i.e., to ensure that each item correlates more strongly with its factor than with other items.The analysis showed that each factor attributed greater weight to itself than the other factors. For example, items ATI2, ATI3, and ATI4 had high loadings on the ATI ($\geq$0.88) and low loadings on the other variables.

Table 5. Measurement Model

Variables	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)	VIF
ATI	ATI1	0.695	0.859	0.866	0.906	0.708	1.494
	ATI2	0.888					3.582
	ATI3	0.885					2.601
	ATI4	0.883					3.302
CET	CET1	0.869	0.896	0.899	0.927	0.761	2.885
	CET2	0.868					2.942
	CET3	0.878					3.312
	CET4	0.874					2.647
COI	COI2	0.685	0.777	0.804	0.856	0.601	1.615
	COI3	0.803					1.919
	COI4	0.881					2.065
	COI5	0.716					1.474
PQ	PQ1	0.814	0.905	0.906	0.929	0.725	2.093
	PQ2	0.827					2.222
	PQ3	0.881					3.035
	PQ4	0.881					2.859
	PQ5	0.851					2.809

Table 6. Measurement of Discriminant validity established on Fornell-Larker Criterion

	ATI	CET	COI	PQ
ATI	0.842			
CET	0.85	0.872		
COI	0.764	0.79	0.703	
PQ	0.829	0.848	0.767	0.851

Table 7. Measurement of Discriminant validity established on Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio

	ATI	CET	COI	PQ
ATI				
CET	0.963			
COI	0.953	0.966		
PQ	0.945	0.939	0.912	

Discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker criteria): Discriminant validity is an important component of construct validity and indicates how accurately the measurement results describe the proposed theoretical construct. Hanseler and al., (2016) determined that the research model was adequate if the structural value of the structural model was less than 0.90. A strong correlation between variables indicates a positive and significant relationship. This suggests that to improve consumer purchasing preferences, it is crucial to focus on improving product accessibility and reinforcing cultural and social attitudes. These results can guide marketing strategies, focusing on improving customer experience and product perception.

A similar pattern was observed for CET (CET1-CET4), IOC (in particular, IOC4 compared to IOC = 0.879), and PQ (PQ3 compared to PQ = 0.880). This confirms good discriminant validity, as these items measure their underlying concepts to a greater extent. Overall, the model's constructs differed from each other, reinforcing the reliability and validity of the measurement model in this study.

Model goodness of fit: The model fit was assessed using several indices provided by Smart-PLS. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) was 0.071, below the generally accepted threshold of 0.08 (Henseler et al., 2014), indicating that the model fits the data well.

Table 8. Discriminant validity based on cross-loading criterion

	ATI	CET	COI	PQ
ATI1	0.695	0.596	0.55	0.685
ATI2	0.888	0.766	0.712	0.687
ATI3	0.884	0.728	0.629	0.715
ATI4	0.883	0.756	0.669	0.707
CET1	0.715	0.869	0.71	0.776
CET2	0.76	0.868	0.672	0.738
CET3	0.662	0.878	0.646	0.684
CET4	0.81	0.874	0.721	0.754
COI1	0.292	0.282	0.339	0.208
COI2	0.446	0.491	0.664	0.425
COI3	0.56	0.636	0.796	0.548
COI4	0.709	0.696	0.879	0.733
COI5	0.575	0.574	0.715	0.619
PQ1	0.639	0.662	0.668	0.815
PQ2	0.703	0.699	0.631	0.828
PQ3	0.721	0.732	0.67	0.88
PQ4	0.755	0.779	0.684	0.881
PQ5	0.708	0.734	0.613	0.851

Table 9. Structural Model fitness

|	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.071	0.098
d_ULS	0.866	1.626
d_G	0.554	0.68
Chi-square	1052.589	1148.335
NFI	0.791	0.772

Table 10. Hypothesis testing

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	S. D	T statistics	P values	Results
H1: COI ->ATI	0.163	0.163	0.051	3.227	0.001	Supported
H2: COI ->PQ	0.767	0.769	0.025	30.306	0.000	Supported
H3: COI->PQ ->ATI	0.249	0.247	0.049	5.068	0.000	Supported
H4: COI*CET->ATI	-0.024	-0.024	0.015	1.600	0.110	Unsupported

The values of the distances d_ULS (0.866) and d_G (0.554), although not strictly thresholder, are still within acceptable limits and do not indicate a significant deviation between the observed and reproduced data matrices. In contrast, the standardized fit index (NFI) was 0.791, slightly below the recommended threshold of 0.90 for good fit (Bentler & Bonett, 1980). This suggests that the model's overall fit is acceptable but could be improved, especially by integrating other variables or optimizing the items. Finally, we give the chi-square value (1052.589) for informational purposes, although this index is not as important in PLS-SEM as it is in CB-SEM-type structural equation modeling. The results indicate that the model exhibits a satisfactory fit, which warrants further explanation of the structural relationships between the underlying variables.

Hypothesis testing: In the second stage of our analysis, we utilize the structural model to test the hypothesis of the current study, using a bootstrap sample of 5,000 individuals. Table 10 below presents the results of the analysis showed that country of origin image (COI) had a significant effect on consumer attitudes towards purchase intention (H1, β = 0.163, p = 0.001) and perceived quality (H2, β = 0.767, p < 0.001). In addition, perceived quality significantly mediated between cost information and purchase intention (H3, β = 0.249, p < 0.001). In addition, perceived quality significantly mediated between country-of-origin image and consumer attitudes towards purchase intention (H3, β = 0.249, p < 0.001). This suggests that the country-of-origin image affects consumer attitudes toward purchase intention directly but indirectly through perceived quality. Furthermore, the moderating effect of consumer ethnocentrism (CET) on the relationship between country-of-origin image and consumer attitudes towards purchase intention is insignificant (H4, β = -0.024, p = 0.110). This indicates that the level of consumer ethnocentrism does not significantly change the effect of country-of-origin image on consumer attitudes towards purchase intention. Therefore, the first three hypotheses are valid, and the fourth hypothesis is rejected.
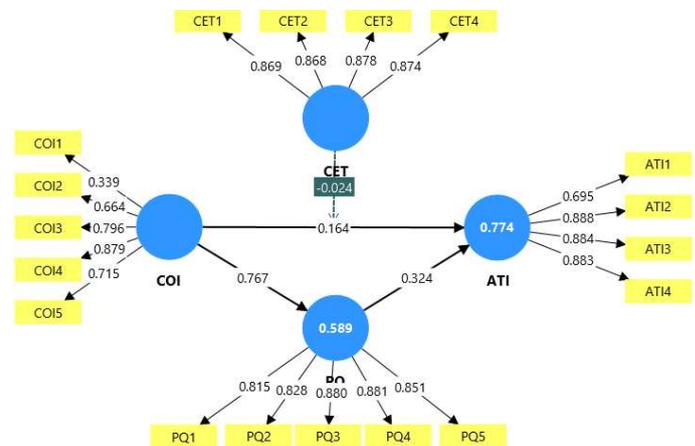
Figure 2. The final Model

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study show that consumers in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, hold different attitudes towards imported products. These results are consistent with existing studies (Zeithaml, 1988; Olson & Jacoby, 1972) emphasizing perceived quality and availability in purchase decisions. However, despite the theoretical importance of consumer ethnocentrism, its impact on attitudes toward foreign products is not significant based on quantitative results.

Critical discussion of the research: The results of this study confirm most of the theoretical model's hypotheses and reveal some important differences. Hypothesis H2 (image of origin positively affects perceived quality) is strongly supported. This means that Ivorian

consumers in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, associate luxury goods from other countries with luxury goods (Roth & Romeo, 1992; Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2003). Hypothesis H1, which linked country of origin image to attitudes towards imported products, was also supported, but to a relatively low degree, suggesting that other factors mediated or moderated this relationship. The mediating effect of perceived quality in the relationship between country of origin image and attitude (H3) was significant, confirming the hypothesis that perceived quality plays an important role in forming product attitudes. This is consistent with models of shopping behavior assessment (Zeithaml, 1988; Dodds et al., 1991). In contrast, hypothesis H4, which tested the moderating effect of ethnocentrism on the relationship between country-of-origin image and attitude, was not supported. This lack of significance suggests that ethnocentrism does not necessarily change consumer attitudes toward the country of origin in a given context. This can be explained by the fact that the influence of ethnocentrism is weaker or more ambiguous in areas with greater access to foreign products perceived to be of higher value or in higher demand. Another explanation is that despite its international credibility (Shimp & Sharma, 1987), the CETSCALE cannot fully capture the complexity of the relationship between ethnocentrism and economic pragmatism in the Ivorian context. Finally, the post-hoc test's psychometric index confirmed the scale's convergent and discriminant validity after removing one entry (COI1), thus improving the robustness of the results. However, the scale still has some limitations, such as the predominance of males in the sample (more than 80%), the high geographic concentration of the population in Abidjan, and the lack of other control variables, such as advertising impressions or brand awareness, which could have improved the interpretation of purchasing behavior. A qualitative comparative approach through interviews and focus groups helped to explore the contradiction between the rhetoric of favoring local products and the practice of favoring imported products.

Theoretical implication: The results of this study make an important contribution to the consumer behavior research literature in developing countries, particularly in Francophone Africa. Firstly, this study links two key dimensions of international marketing, namely country image (COI) and perceived quality (PQ), based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) model (Ajzen, 1991). The results show that, in addition to cultural and normative quality variables, the country image also plays an explanatory role and that these variables play an important role in shaping consumer attitudes towards imported products. By including variables in the 'country of origin effect' category, this study confirms the importance of product attributes (tangible and intangible) in shaping purchase intentions, which is consistent with the findings of Zeithaml (1988) and Shih & Fang (2004). The significant moderating effect of perceived quality on the relationship between country image and attitudes suggests that perceived product assessment plays an important role in the decision-making process and suggests the need to integrate variables based on modeling attitudes and product experience. On the other hand, theoretical validation is needed to rule out structural validity (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). In a region like Côte d'Ivoire, where consumption is globalized but identity is still strong, ethnocentrism may be implicit or explicit. It may be difficult to capture with standardized indicators. This suggests that cultural frameworks need to be adapted or adjusted to fit the cultural realities of Africa. This study presents a flexible and extensible theoretical model that emphasizes the integration of cultural, cognitive, and perceptual variables to explain purchasing behavior in emerging markets. Thus, this study lays the foundation for future research using mixed modeling (quantitative and qualitative) and international comparative methods.

CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights the important role of country image and perceived quality in shaping consumer attitudes towards imported products, contributing to a deeper understanding of consumers' purchasing preferences in urban Côte d'Ivoire. The empirical results of the PLS-SEM analytical model show that the image of the country

of origin significantly impacts perceived quality and consumer attitudes. The study also confirms that country of origin image indirectly affects perceived quality, emphasizing the importance of product attributes in purchasing decisions. On the other hand, ethnocentrism has no significant effect on the relationship between the image of the country of origin and attitude. This suggests that in this open environment, the influence of national expectations is much smaller than tangible factors such as the country of origin's quality, performance, and reputation. However, this study does the opposite. First, because this study is based on a cluster sample in Abidjan, it is difficult to generalize the findings to other regions of Côte d'Ivoire or other African cultural contexts. Second, self-driven data collection methods may lead to biases in public interest and understanding. In addition, this sample did not consider important purchase motivation factors such as brand name, price, and respondents' business views. Future research should be extended to other cities and neighborhoods to explore how demand varies with urban development and income. Qualitative methods (interviews, focus groups) could qualitatively explore the mechanisms behind consumer perceptions, particularly the trade-off between national pride and the appeal of foreign products. Finally, including variables such as brand image, social media influence, and generational dynamics can help better understand the complexity of Ivorian consumers' attitudes toward foreign products.

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