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Country of origin as a determinant of young Europeans` buying attitudes — marketing implications

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Keywords: *country of origin effect; buying decisions; young Europeans; brand*

Abstract
Research background: Country of origin and brand image are among the main factors influencing consumer buying decisions. The phenomenon known as the Country of Origin Effect (COE) refers to the influence of a country's image on consumer product evaluations and the perception of brands originating from specific countries. The COE describes consumer attitudes towards certain product categories and is connected with the perception of quality of such products manufactured in particular markets. The changing market conditions and proliferation of hybrid products cause certain problems for consumers who find it increasingly difficult to identify the country of origin of specific products and face a dilemma whether a product manufactured in China is of equal quality as a product of the same brand, but manufactured in France.
Purpose of the article: The main purpose of the paper is to identify the young Europeans` attitudes towards the country of origin of purchased products. An attempt has been made to answer two research questions: firstly, whether are young Europeans guided by stereotypes associated with the country of origin of specific product categories in their conscious buying decisions? Secondly, do young European consumers attach higher value to a product's brand than its country of origin?
Methods: The analysis has been based on literature studies and empirical data collected in two different period of time 2008 and 2015 among 1362 respondents (in 2008) and 1125 respondents (in 2015) from eight European countries (Czech Republic, Finland, France,

Germany, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Great Britain). In the exploratory empirical study, the author of the paper used two research methods: PAPI in 2008 (Paper and Pen Personal Interview) and CAWI in 2015 (Computer Assisted Web Interview).
Findings & Value added: The study results reveal that in some countries, namely Poland and the Czech Republic, young consumers are guided in their deliberate buying choices by certain mental schematics perpetuated, for example, in the mass media (the best wine comes from France, best watches are made in Switzerland, and superior quality cars originate from Germany). Respondents representing other nationalities showed more support for domestic products. By far, the most ethnocentric in their choices turned out to be the French who in almost all product categories showed preferences for products originating from their country. Furthermore, the empirical study showed that with respect to different product categories young European consumers attach more importance to a product's brand than its country of origin.

Introduction

A consumer decision is a free choice made by a decision-maker with respect to his/her behaviour where possible variables are taken into consideration (Hoyer & Maclnnis, 2004, p. 223; Iyengar *et al.*, 2009). Making this decision by choosing and purchasing a product is the solution to the problem of a particular need that arises. Various determinants contribute to making a particular consumer decision which is related to choosing between two or more alternative behaviours (Peter & Olson, 2004, p. 165; Barker & Ota, 2011, pp. 39–63; Freitas Santos & Cadima Ribeiro, 2012, pp. 294–311). The purpose of the evaluation of alternatives is choosing the one that will bring consumers the greatest benefit and satisfaction, and will be in accordance with their preferences, values, needs and financial capabilities (Pappas, 2016, pp. 92–103).

Among the most readily cited factors impacting consumer perception of a product or brand and influencing on buying decision is the country of origin effect (COE) which — incidentally — is also the most researched international aspect of consumer behaviour (Heslop *et al.*, 1998, pp. 113–127; Pereira *et al.*, 2005, pp. 107–128; Maheswaran *et al*., 2013, pp. 153–189; Katsumata & Song, 2016, pp. 92–106). COE is sometimes defined as "the influence (positive or negative) of the country of production/assembly on consumer evaluation of a product's quality" (Lee & Schaninger, 1996, pp. 233–254; Nebenzahl *et al.*, 2003, pp. 383–406; Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2003, pp. 402–433). In other words the country of origin effect is the influence of a country's image on consumer evaluations of products and brands originating in that country. The impact of country of origin on perception and evaluation of products associated with specific countries has been confirmed in a large number of studies (e.g. Maheswaran *et al*., 2013, pp. 153–189; Jiménez & San Martín, 2014, pp. 150–171; Brodie & Ben-

son-Rea, 2016, pp. 322–336). In literature one can find a view that COE refers to consumer attitudes towards certain product categories evaluating the quality of such products on the basis of their country of origin. These attitudes rest mainly on existing stereotypes (at least when the consumer is first confronted with a product) (Ahmed & d'Astous, 2008, pp. 75–106; Maheswaran *et al*., 2013, pp. 153–189). In this paper, it has been accepted that COE is a stereotype determining consumer purchase decisions attached both to the country where a product is made and to the product's category. An attribute strictly connected with the country of origin effect is the "Made in..." label (Rashid *et al*., 2016, pp. 230–244). Those consumers who pay attention to the country of origin information usually look for a positive match (based also on stereotypes) between the product type and the source-country, and choose, for example, Japanese consumer electronics or German cars (Yasin *et al.,* 2007, pp. 38–48; Jiménez & San Martín, 2014, pp. 150–171; Brodie & Benson-Rea, 2016, pp. 322–336). This view is shared by many researchers, such as Khachaturian and Morganosky (1999, pp. 21–30), who believe that consumers look for country-of-origin cues mainly with respect to specific product categories (the best watches come from Switzerland, wine and perfumes from France, and leather products from Italy). However, in the globalization and internalization era, when the products are made in many and differentiated countries, the buyers very often are not aware where the product was really manufactured (Ha-Brookshire, 2012, pp. 19–34). Before the buying decision is made, they evaluate the product taking into account other attributes than country of their origin and the country image. One of the evaluation criteria is the reputation of the brand (Chen *et al*., 2011, pp. 638–642; Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013, pp. 200–206).

The main purpose of the paper is to identify the young Europeans` attitudes towards the country of origin of purchased products. An attempt has been made to answer two research questions firstly, whether are young Europeans guided by stereotypes associated with the country of origin of specific product categories in their conscious buying decisions? Secondly, do young European consumers attach higher value to a product's brand than its country of origin?

The analysis has been based on literature studies and empirical data collected among 1362 respondents (in 2008) and 1125 respondents (in 2015) from eight European countries (the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Great Britain). In the exploratory empirical study, the author of the paper used two research methods: PAPI in 2008 (*Paper and Pen Personal Interview*) and CAWI in 2015 (*Computer Assisted Web Interview*). The usage of different methods in two different

years of measurement (2008 and 2015) was mainly caused by the development of the internet and its tools (especially social media) from 2008 to 2015. In 2008 the CAWI method brought little results in researched countries, that`s why the author decided to use traditional method of PAPI. In the 2015, when the usage of social networking is very high among young Europeans, the author decided to use CAWI (also because of costs and speed). In 2008 the countries were chosen from different parts of the Europe: West and South (Great Britain, Portugal, Spain, France, Germany), North (Finland), East (Poland, the Czech Republic), and because of the possibility of conducting research there (the author conducted research herself in some countries and used befriended individuals who helped in the measurement). In 2015, the same countries were used for comparison with the results from 2008. The author decided to conduct the measurement the second time in order to examine the changes (or lack of them) in the attitudes of young Europeans regarding to the influence of COE in their conscious buying decisions. The changes in the consumer attitudes could be expected because of the world`s situation connected with the divergence processes (increasing of consumer ethnocentrism, nationalism, etc.).

The paper and its results can have a managerial contribution because COE is very often taken into account by companies as an attribute in their marketing strategies. For example, when the country of manufacture has a good tradition and reputation in producing particular category of product the managers usually underline it in the promotion campaigns (or on the packages of products). But in the situation when the country of manufacture has bad image, producers usually try to hidden that fact (Rashid *et al*., 2016, pp. 230–244). The knowledge when consumers pay attention on the country of manufacture and their preferences according to the COE of different categories of products, which represents the results of this study, will allow to adapt the marketing activities in the researched countries (Cui *et al*., 2014, pp. 312–321).

The paper is structured as follows: the first part of the paper includes an overview of the literature on country of origin effect and its importance in the buying decisions. Following this, the research method and the results of the empirical studies are presented. Conclusions and implications are then forwarded and, finally, study limitations and suggestions for future research are explained.

Literature review

The Country of Origin Effect (COE) is widely described in the literature, there are many explanations of that term as well. Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009, pp. 726–740) tried to analyze the definitions existing in the different scientific studies. They distinguished three groups of definitions because of the described aspects, which are: general image of the country, the image of a country that impacts the products evaluation, and the image of products manufactured in a certain country. In this paper the Country of Origin Effect is associated with the consumer's attitudes to the product (different categories of products) made in a certain country based on stereotypes existing in the awareness of consumers (Nebenzahl *et al*. 2003, pp. 383–406; Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2003, pp. 402–433). The COE depends on many factors, among which development level, category of product or consumers` demographic features or their awareness can be distinguished.

Many studies have been conducted on the country of origin effect and its relation to economic, demographic and cultural variables (Katsumata & Song, 2016, pp. 92–106; Jiménez & San Martín, 2014, pp. 150–171). This subject is still important and new projects in this area are continuously being undertaken to include new processes and circumstances such as the globalisation and internationalisation of companies and markets (Pecotich & Rosenthal, 2001, pp. 31–60; Rashid *et al*., 2016, pp. 230–244).

The following literature review is a brief outline of research findings in this scope. For example, one of the first research conducted by Papadopulos and Heslop (1993, p. 76) showed that in the all studied countries, including Holland, France, Germany, Greece and Hungary respondents were very positively predisposed to Japanese products. A positive bias towards products made in highly developed countries was also found in experiments where cars of the same make produced in different countries such as Germany, the Philippines or Mexico were compared. Consumers expected lower prices for cars assembled in the Philippines but were inclined to pay higher prices for cars manufactured in Germany (Johannson & Nebenzahl, 1986, pp. 101–126). Germany has a strong image as a "producer" of good cars in the international marketplace, even in the situation of many acquisitions of German cars` brand by foreign companies (Wang & Yang, 2008, pp. 458–474; Maheswaran *et al*., 2013, pp. 153–189).

The studies conducted by Verlegh and Steenkamp (1997, pp. 2136–2140) show a clear relationship between importance of the country of origin information and the level of economic development: consumers in less developed countries pay greater attention to products' country of origin than their counterparts in highly developed countries. Consumers usually

evaluate more highly the products from more developed countries, because they are a kind of guarantee of high quality standards. Such conclusions are the results of many other studies (e.g. Roth & Romeo, 1992, pp. 477–497; Sharma, 2011, pp. 285–306). What is more, Ercan (2010, pp. 1–15) concluded that consumers usually are able to pay more for products which are manufactured in more developed and democratic countries. In the research of Jiménez and San Martín (2014, pp. 150–171) also occurred that the Mexican consumers have better attitude to American products than to domestic ones. But this research also showed that the consumers` trust is higher in the case of brands with good image.

The significance of COE depends also on the category of purchased products. In the literature there are some conclusions that people better judge products when they have positive associations with the country of origin (Yasin *et al*., 2007, pp. 38–48; De Mooj, 2013; Raggio *et al*., 2014, 133–144). These associations are a kind of stereotypes which include the countries` traditions and specialization in manufacturing particular products. These stereotypes show, for example, that the best quality leather products (shoes, bags) come from Italy, cosmetics, wine or cheese from France, cars from Germany, electronics from Japan or chocolate or clocks from Switzerland (De Mooj, 2013; Roth & Romeo, 1992, pp. 477–497). Those stereotypes are often used by the companies in their marketing strategies. When there is a good association between category of product and country of manufacture they underline it (e.g. adding some specific symbols, colors associated with that country). But when there is not a positive association between category of product and country they try to hide it. For example, Bruno Banani is a German brand of perfumes, shoes, clocks, etc., but the sound of the brand indicate for an ”average” consumer the Italian origin.

However, in contemporary international markets the “intuitive” meaning of the COE is misleading given that a product can be designed in one country (usually in the country where the company headquarters are located), its various parts manufactured in a number of other countries (usually where labour costs are low), and the final product assembled in yet another country (Chao, 1993, pp. 297; Parkvithee & Miranda, 2012, pp. 7–22; Rashid *et al*., 2016, pp. 230–244). It leads to proliferation of hybrid products made in multiple countries (Johansson & Nebenzahl, 1986, pp. 101–126). The literature refers to such products as being denationalised due to “deterritorialisation” of production processes. In this phenomenon the “Made in” label loses its value, since many products would have to carry the label “Made in Everywhere”. An example of consumer disorientation is the study made by Ratliff in which Americans were asked to name the place where

Volkswagen Fox was made. The result was that 66% of the respondents believed that the car was made in Germany whereas only 8% pointed to Brazil where Volkswagen Fox was actually manufactured (Thakor & Lavack, 2003, pp. 394–407).

Hybrid products appear on the global market at an ever-increasing pace (Ha-Brookshire, 2012, pp. 19–34). This causes certain problems for consumers who have difficulty in identifying the country of origin of specific products and face a dilemma whether a product manufactured in China is of equal quality as a product of the same brand but manufactured in France (Chao, 1993, pp. 291–306; Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2008, pp. 39–71; Katsumata & Song, 2016, pp. 92–106). In such market circumstances where consumers are confronted with hybrid products, the country of origin effect is being transferred from the product category or industry (Swiss — cheese, watch, Japanese — electronics, German — car, etc.) onto brand (Ryan, 2008, pp. 13–20; Diamantopoulos *et al*., 2011, pp. 508–524; Jiménez & San Martín, 2014, pp. 150–171). Consumers increasingly ignore the label "Made in" in favour of the brand name which for them conveys specific quality attributes (Lee & Ganesh, 1999, pp. 18–39; Jiménez & San Martín, 2014, pp. 150–171). Accordingly, the actual country of manufacture becomes less important than the brand and the country with which the brand is associated (Brodie & Benson-Rea, 2016, pp. 322–336). The studies conducted by Leclerc *et al.* (1994, pp. 263–270) on consumer perception of products coming from various countries showed that for the respondents more important than the country of origin was the product's brand, its popularity, ease of pronunciation and remembering, and its congruence (also in the name) with a given market and its language. A similar view present other researchers e.g. Brodie and Benson-Rea (2016, pp. 322–336), Usunier, (2011, pp. 486–496), Diamantopoulos *et al*. (2011, pp. 508–524), Thakor and Kohli (1996, pp. 27), stating that in the era of business internationalisation and globalisation the traditionally construed COE is no longer the most important variable taken into account by consumers in their purchase decisions. The researchers believe that COE is being replaced with the "brand origin" orientation where the brand origin is defined as "the place, region or country to which the brand is perceived to belong to by its target consumers". According to these researchers the place of a product's manufacture (the label "Made in") is less important than the origin of its brand. They argue that for an average Englishman the Guinness is no less Irish for the reason that it is brewed in London rather than Dublin (such as a Toyota motorcar will always be Japanese even if it is assembled — for example — in Derby). Therefore, owing to the changing market circumstances quite probably the COE is being replaced with the Country of

Brand Origin Effect (CBOE) (Brodie & Benson-Rea, 2016, pp. 322–336; Usunier, 2011, pp. 486–496, Diamantopoulos *et al*., 2011, pp. 508–524).

Research methodology

The empirical research on young consumers' behaviour, including the influence of the country of origin on products' perception, was conducted firstly in the 2008, and secondly in 2015. For the purpose of the study (in both measurements) it was accepted that the term "young consumers" referred to people from 18 to 30 years of age, students still financially dependent on their parents, part-time students who combined education with employment, as well as the ones who were financially independent and often managed their own households. The "young consumer" age bracket was purposefully extended to 30 years because participants of the research came from higher education institutions in different countries, where the average student age varies according to local education systems, e.g. in Germany it is certainly higher than in Poland or Portugal.

The study in 2008 covered a total of 1362 young respondents representing different countries: 391 Polish, 149 Czech, 128 Spanish, 164 Portuguese, 82 French, 183 German, 146 Finnish, and 119 British. The respondents were mostly students of higher education institutions based in the respective countries. As research method PAPI — (*Paper and Pen Personal Interview*) was used. The author tried to use the internet survey, but the results were very low (only some filled questionnaires in Poland and Finland). That is why it was decided to use the traditional measurement method — printed questionnaire which was individually filled by respondents (PAPI). In some countries (Spain, Germany, Poland), the author conducted research herself, and in other countries it was done by befriended individuals who helped in the measurement. In the 2008 study a non-probability sampling procedure was used, which consisted of gradual recruitment of appropriate individuals in order to achieve the best possible response from the group. The employed sampling technique has a bearing on interpretation of the results: the findings should not be generalised over the whole population of young people as they only represent the views of the studied groups of respondents. In the Table 1 the summary of both measurements was presented.

The study in 2015 covered a total of 1125 respondents young respondents representing eight European countries: 225 Polish, 110 Czech, 132 Spanish, 123 Portuguese, 66 French, 202 German, 112 Finnish, and 155 British. The respondents were young people who use internet tools (like an

e-mail or social media, mostly Facebook), because the link to Web survey (*Computer Assisted Web Interview* — CAWI) was distributed via those tools. The sampling method (non-random) influences the fact that the results can`t be used as generalisation for the young population in each country.

The questionnaire — the same in each measurement — consisted of questions concerning, firstly, their preferences regarding to country of origin particular products (in the situation when the respondent has no budget limitations), and secondly, the importance of the criteria which are taken into account during making buying decisions different products` categories (eight evaluation criteria were taken into account, namely: price, quality, friends' recommendations, sales assistants' recommendations, advertisements, appearance/packaging, brand, and country of origin). The element differentiating the research questionnaire in particular countries was the language (it was translated in the origin language of the participants). In the preparation of the different versions of the questionnaire a back translation procedure was used in order to eliminate any mistakes stemming from linguistic, lexical or context differences (Craig & Douglas, 2006).

Results

In the first part of the study, the young Europeans were asked to name the countries from which they chose (or would choose) products of different categories, i.e. food, cosmetics, clothes/footwear, consumer electronics, and cars. Table 2 presents the highest percentage scores in those different categories both in 2008 and 2015 measurement.

In the Polish group of respondents the results show that young Polish consumers were the most ethnocentric with respect to foodstuffs, with 62.3% inclined to buy Polish food products in 2008 and 85.6% in 2015. Having a choice of cosmetics young Poles would certainly go for products made in France in both years of measurement. With respect to clothes and footwear the Poles would choose an Italian design as well in 2008 as in 2015 (in the second measurement the increased number of respondents preferred Italian fashion). The preferred consumer electronics products would come from Japan in both measurements (followed by Germany with a score of 13.3% in 2008 and 16.2% in 2015), and finally cars would have to come from Germany (53%) in 2008, but in the 2015 from Japan (47.8%).

Young Czechs also preferred domestic food products, with the second place going to Italian cuisine. The country of origin for cosmetics was also important to young Czech consumers, and if they had a choice they would like personal care products to come firstly from France in both years of measurement. In the clothes and shoes category young Czech consumers showed a preference for Italian style in 2008, but in 2015 majority of respondents would chose French fashion. Most Czechs would choose Japan as the preferred country of origin for consumer electronics (67% in 2008 and 39.6 in 2015). Having a choice of cars made in specific countries most consumers in the Czech group were inclined to own vehicles made in Germany in both years of measurement. What is interesting the second choice were Czech cars in both years. This result could be due to a popularity of the Skoda brand which many people associate with the Czech origin.

The results reported in the Spanish group show the greatest ethnocentrism with respect to food products with as many as 86.4% (in 2008) and 95.2% in 2015 respondents preferring Spanish food over imports. Such a high score reflects specific eating habits of Spaniards, who prefer Mediterranean diet, and therefore most readily buy domestic foodstuffs. Furthermore, eating domestic food products in Spain is a kind of custom in line with the conviction that "ours is the best". Spanish consumer ethnocentrism is also apparent in the clothes/footwear category (the result is certainly due to the presence of many domestic fashion brands in the Spanish market which have become international trade marks popular in markets beyond Spain. These include such brand names as Zara, Cortefiel, Massimo Dutti, Springfield, Sfera, Mango, Inditex (Pull and Bear, Stradivarius, Oysho and Bershka). Having a choice of cosmetics most Spanish respondents would buy French products (similar results in both years). In the case of consumer electronics young Spaniards would go for products made in Japan. A car, however, would have to come from Germany in 2008, but from Japan in 2015.

The country of origin preferences of young Portuguese consumers indicate that they would most readily buy Portuguese food products with as many as 86.8% in 2008 and 96.7% in 2015 respondents choosing domestic food in favour of imports. Having a choice, a majority of those consumers would buy French cosmetics (54.4% in 2008 and 38.4% in 2015), but in the second place they pointed to products made in Portugal (14%/24.3%). With respect to clothes and footwear the young Portuguese would go for domestic products in both measurements. In turn, Japan was chosen as the preferred country of origin for consumer electronics in 2008 and 2015. Portuguese consumers would choose Germany as the preferred country of origin for cars (57.8% in 2008 and 67.3% in 2015).

Majority of young German respondents would choose German food in both years of measurement. Regarding to cosmetics they many of them preferred German in 2008 (36.8%), but the greatest amount from the 2015 group indicated French (38.4%). They would like to have clothes and shoes from Italy (in majority). There was a change observed in case of consumer electronics. In the 2008 majority of German respondents wanted to have Japanese electronics (45.9%), but in 2015 the greatest number of the respondents indicated Germany as a country of origin (54.2%). According to the cars category young Germans occurred to be ethnocentric with preferences to German origin.

French consumers are known for preferring domestic brands and goods made in France over imports. The study on young French consumer's country-of-origin preferences confirmed this opinion. And thus 83.9% in 2008 and 98.1% in 2015 of young French respondents preferred French food. A similar result was achieved in the cosmetics category (the second choice were products made in the United States). With respect to clothes and footwear French consumers would also choose France as the most preferred country of origin for such products in both years of measurement. Even though country of origin does not make much difference for young French consumers with respect to most product categories, nevertheless they would prefer Japanese consumer electronics (with the decrease of results comparing 2008 and 2015) over French products indicated as the second choice (19.4%/31.2%). The greatest percentage of young French consumers would choose their own country as the maker of cars in both years of measurement (with the increase in 2015).

In the Finnish group, again the most readily purchased domestic product was food with as many as 93.8% in 2008 and all respondents in 2015 showing preferences for Finnish products over imports. On the other hand most Finns would choose French cosmetics (40.65/35.5). In the case of clothes and shoes the most preferred country of origin indicated by young Finns was also Finland in both measurement, followed by Italy (20.8%/19.3%). In turn, for the young Finns the best source country for consumer electronics was Japan, with the great increase in 2015. And finally, the greatest percentage of young Finnish consumers would choose a car made in Germany (both in 2008 and 2015).

Finally, the young British consumers would most likely buy domestic foodstuffs (55.1% in 2008 and 78.3% in 2015) and — as the second choice — Italian food products (15.9%/12.2%). In the case of cosmetics, again the greatest percentage of British respondents indicated domestic products as the most preferred in both years. Having a choice of clothes or footwear, young British consumers would buy products made in the United Kingdom

first in 2008 (43.5%), but in Italy in 2015 (28.2%). On the other hand the young Britons indicated Japan as the most preferred country of origin for consumer electronics. If they were to buy a car, the biggest percentage of British respondents in 2008 (26.1%) would choose a car made in Germany, but in 2015 the car produced in the United Kingdom.

In the second part of the empirical study, whose purpose was to test the supremacy or otherwise of brand over a product's country of origin in purchase decisions, the findings indicate that for many product categories brand is more important (in both years of measurement). The detailed results showing the ranking of brand and country of origin among eight purchase criteria suggested to respondents (price, quality, friends' recommendations, sales assistants' recommendations, advertisements, appearance/packaging, brand, and country of origin) are presented in Table 3. The respondents had to sort each criterion in order of its importance, where 1 — *the most important criterion* and 8 — *least important criterion*. In all the surveyed countries brand was perceived as a more important criterion than country of origin. The results also revealed that country of origin is a rather important variable when purchasing a car or food products, and in turn the least significant in the selection of cosmetics and clothes or footwear.

Comparing the years of measurement 2008 and 2015 the results presented in the Table 3 indicate also the increasing importance of country of origin in majority of researched categories of products (especially food, cars and electronics devices). This situation can be caused because of increasing ethnocentrism in the European countries according to purchase different categories of products (Fernández-Ferrín *et al.*, 2015, pp. 73-88).

Discussion

The analysis of literature indicated that the country of origin effect depends on many variables, like development level or product category (Wang & Yang, 2008, pp. 458–474; Ercan, 2010, pp. 1–15; Maheswaran *et al*., 2013, pp. 153–189; Jiménez & San Martín, 2014, pp. 150–171). The literature underlined some stereotypes existing between category of product and its country of manufacture (e.g. the best fashion comes from Italy, cars from Germany and electronics from Japan) (Yasin *et al*., 2007, pp. 38–48; De Mooj, 2013; Raggio *et al.*, 2014, 133–144). One of the research question the author of the study tried to answer was: *are young Europeans guided by stereotypes associated with the country of origin of specific product categories in their conscious buying decisions?* On the basis of the studies (both in 2008 and in 2015) presented in the paper and their results, it could

be said that in some countries, namely Poland and the Czech Republic, with respect to certain product categories young consumers are guided in their conscious buying decision by certain mental schematics perpetuated, for example, in the mass media. Analysing the results obtained in Poland and the Czech Republic vis-à-vis existing stereotypes regarding specific product categories (the best are French cosmetics, German cars, Japanese electronic products, Italian clothes and shoes) it can be said that consumers in both these groups exemplify buyers guided by a so-called positive match: product category — country of origin. Purchase preferences of young Polish/Czech consumers with respect to specific product categories can be characterised as follows:

Polish/Czech consumers would preferably buy:

- food originating in Poland/the Czech Republic,
- cosmetics made in France,
- shoes made in Italy,
- consumer electronics from Japan,
- cars from Germany/Japan.

The other respondents groups were more supportive of their domestic products. By far the biggest "patriots" were young French consumers who in all but one category (the exception was consumer electronics) indicated their preferences for products made at home.

Applying the criterion of economic development of the respective countries to the studies` (2008 and 2015) results, it can be observed that there is a certain regularity, namely young respondents coming from more developed countries (France, United Kingdom, Germany, Finland, and also Spain and Portugal) showed greater support for domestic products. Even in instances where those respondents chose another country as the most preferred source of specific product category, the second choice usually was their own country. These results once again confirm the findings of previous studies conducted previously by other researchers (Roth & Romeo, 1992, pp. 477–497; Ercan, 2010, pp. 1–15; Sharma, 2011, pp. 285–306; Jiménez & San Martín, 2014, pp. 150–171).

The most clear-cut finding of the survey analysis by product type is that respondents in all groups showed very strong preference for domestic food. It should be also added that the number of respondents who preferred their domestic food increased in each group comparing the results from 2008 and 2015. Also in many surveyed groups a preference for French cosmetics was noted, Japanese consumer electronics and German cars. But it has to be emphasized that the preferences for German cars changed in 2015 in two groups (Polish and Spanish), a majority of those respondents would prefer Japanese car in 2015. The greatest similarity of responses

across all surveyed groups was noted with the three categories: cosmetics, consumer electronics and cars. On the other hand the greatest variance was observed in the food and clothes/shoes categories. An interesting case is the clothes/footwear category, in which most respondents (except for Poles, Czechs and Germans) chose domestic origin for these products.

The literature overview showed also that the value of brand is becoming higher than the country of origin because consumers don`t follow the trends in the hybridization process. It is not easy for them to recognize where the product was made (Brodie & Benson-Rea, 2016, pp. 322–336; Usunier, 2011, pp. 486–496; Diamantopoulos *et al.*, 2011, pp. 508–524). Exploitation of the country of brand origin effect (CBOE) is clearly apparent in marketing activities worldwide, also in Poland. To make use of a still better image of certain product categories if they originate from specific countries (positive COE), producers choose brand names whose sounds unequivocally suggest a desired origin (Agrawal & Kamakura, 1999, pp. 255–267; De Mooj, 2013; Raggio *et al.*, 2014, 133–144). The result is that consumers are unaware of the true country of origin for many products they buy. An example is the Gino Rossi footwear brand, well known in Poland, whose name suggests the Italian origin of both the firm and the shoes it makes. A similar example can be found in Russia, where Carlo Pazolini women's shoe brand is clearly recognised by clients as being Italian, while in fact it is a Russian brand owned by a Russian company. Actually a designer of that name has never existed and the shoes are made in Russia and China. Yet another example from the Polish fashion industry is the Americanos brand (fashion jeans manufacturer) whose name suggests American origin, whilst the producer is in fact Polish.

The results of the studies conducted among young Europeans suggest that such marketing ploys make sense in the case of e.g. Polish consumers, whose perception of certain products is still affected by country of origin information. On the other hand, such tactics could be of little effect to attract young French, British or German consumers, since in these groups the study revealed the biggest bias towards domestic products irrespective of product category.

On the other hand, international corporations could pay more attention to the promotion and exposition of brands since young European consumers consider a product brand to be more important than country of origin. Buying a brand's product consumers expect quality, no matter if the product was made in China, India or USA.

Conclusions

The literature review and the primary research showed the significance of COE both in the consumer decisions and marketing strategies of companies in the international scope. They also emphasized the shift of COE into CBOE which is associated with the changes in the international environment and the consumer behaviour. The research problem and the results presented in the paper have great managerial implications. The knowledge of the consumers` attitudes to the particular countries and the products can be used in the preparation of adequate marketing solutions.

Conducting empirical studies and using primary methods is almost always associated with certain limitations, and this only increases when research is conducted in multiple countries. There are thus, unsurprisingly, some limitations related to the presented research problem and its scope. Firstly, in questionnaires, although a respondent replies to a given question about how they behave (or would behave) in particular situations, it could be that their actual behaviour would slightly differ from the one declared. Secondly, the questionnaire was translated into different languages. Although the back translation technique was used, some lexical differences could appear. Thirdly, the research methods gathering data in 2008 and 2015 were different (the best practice, in the purpose of comparison, is to use the same methods in all measurements). Another limitation of the presented research is that the non-random sampling and the sample size lead to the lack of possibility of extrapolating the results to the whole population for each individual country. This notwithstanding, research limitations are very often a stimulus to either continue the study or expand it, especially in relation to international activities.

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Annex

Table 1. The summary of the research in 2008 and 2015

Methodology	2008	2015
Respondents	Persons from 18 to 30 years of age	Persons from 18 to 30 years of age
Number of respondents	1362	1125
Research method	PAPI	CAWI
Research instrument	Printed questionnaire	Internet questionnaire
Sampling method	Non-random	Non-random
Possibility of generalization	No	No

Table 2. Young Europeans' country of origin preferences for different product categories*

Product Category / Research Group	Food		Cosmetics		Clothes/ Footwear		Consumer electronics		Cars	
	2008	**2015**	**2008**	**2015**	**2008**	**2015**	**2008**	**2015**	**2008**	**2015**
Poland	**PL** 62.3	**PL** 85.6	**FR** 58.6	**FR** 49.8	**IT** 34.5	**IT** 45.6	**JP** 71.3	**JP** 66.9	**DE** 53.0	**JP** 47.8
Czech Republic	**CZ** 72.7	**CZ** 69.5	**FR** 56.6	**FR** 61.3	**IT** 29.1	**FR** 41.3	**JP** 63.7	**JP** 39.6	**DE** 36.6	**DE** 45.9
Spain	**SP** 86.4	**SP** 95.2	**FR** 53.3	**FR** 58.3	**SP** 51.2	**SP** 67.4	**JP** 61.1	**JP** 52.5	**DE** 39.6	**JP** 45.5
Portugal	**PT** 86.8	**PT** 96.7	**FR** 54.4	**FR** 38.4	**PT** 31.3	**PT** 48.3	**JP** 52.2	**JP** 47.4	**DE** 57.8	**DE** 67.3
France	**FR** 83.9	**FR** 98.1	**FR** 71.0	**FR** 78.2	**FR** 31.2	**FR** 57.3	**JP** 43.9	**JP** 37.0	**FR** 46.3	**FR** 62.8
Germany	**DE** 63.4	**DE** 77.1	**DE** 36.8	**FR** 38.4	**IT** 33.8	**IT** 45.3	**JP** 45.9	**DE** 54.2	**DE** 73.7	**DE** 87.5
Finland	**FI** 93.8	**FI** 100	**FR** 40.6	**FR** 35.5	**FI** 26	**FI** 38.1	**JP** 40.6	**JP** 64.2	**DE** 54.2	**DE** 37.3
United Kingdom	**GB** 55.1	**GB** 78.3	**GB** 37.7	**GB** 29.9	**GB** 43.5	**IT** 28.2	**JP** 42	**JP** 56.3	**DE** 26.1	**GB** 37.9

** Consumers had the following product origins to choose from: Czech (CZ), Danish (DK), Finnish (FI), French (FR), Greek (GR), Spanish (SP), Dutch (NL), Japanese (JP), German (DE), Portuguese (PT), American (US), British (GB), Italian (IT), Polish (PL) and others.*

Table 3. Ranking of brand (B) and country of origin (CO) among 8 suggested purchase criteria

Product Category / Research Group	Year of study	Food		Cosmetics		Clothes/ Footwear		Consumer electronics		Cars	
		B	**CO**	**B**	**CO**	**B**	**CO**	**B**	**CO**	**B**	**CO**
Poland	**2008**	4	6	2	8	3	6	3	6	2	4
	2015	4	3	3	5	2	7	2	5	1	2
Czech Republic	**2008**	5	6	2	8	4	7	2	7	2	5
	2015	4	3	3	7	3	7	2	6	2	4
Spain	**2008**	3	4	4	8	3	8	3	6	2	4
	2015	2	3	3	6	2	7	4	6	2	4
Portugal	**2008**	5	4	3	7	4	8	5	8	5	5
	2015	3	2	4	7	3	7	3	7	3	4
France	**2008**	3	3	2	8	4	8	3	8	4	5
	2015	2	1	2	3	2	6	3	6	2	3
Germany	**2008**	6	5	3	8	3	7	3	6	6	3
	2015	5	2	2	5	2	6	2	3	1	2
Finland	**2008**	5	3	3	8	3	8	3	8	3	5
	2015	3	2	3	5	2	7	2	4	2	3
United Kingdom	**2008**	4	7	2	8	4	8	3	8	3	8
	2015	2	3	3	6	3	6	2	5	2	3