



# Conceptualising the influence of corporate image on country image

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the influence of  
corporate image

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The aim of this paper is to examine the influence of corporate image on shaping the image of its country of origin (hereafter country image).

**Design/methodology/approach** – The authors develop a conceptual framework and a series of propositions, grounded on previous studies on country of origin (COO), image transfer, corporate and place branding.

**Findings** – The framework proposes that the influence of corporate image on country image can be moderated by four individual (country familiarity, corporate familiarity, brand image fit and corporate brand category-country brand image fit) and two corporate level variables (international visibility and market visibility).

**Research limitations/implications** – A series of propositions is offered that aims to stimulate empirical research in this topical subject.

**Originality/value** – Despite increasing acknowledgement of the influence that the image of corporations may exert on the image of their COO, this relationship has been under-researched. This paper draws insights from theoretical and empirical studies to shed some light on this area. A framework is presented which transcends previous corporate image formation models by looking at the other way of the relationship between corporate image and country image.

**Keywords** Corporate image, Country image, Conceptual model, Country of origin

**Paper type** Conceptual paper

## Introduction

The effect of country of origin (COO) on product image has been extensively studied in the COO literature, and recently attention has also been placed on the influence of the COO on corporate image (e.g. Bernstein, 1984; Balmer and Gray, 2000). Yet the other side of the relationship, i.e. the influence that corporate image can wield on the image of the COO (hereafter, country image) has rarely been researched. Filling this gap is important, both in relation to theory and practice. Scholars note that when corporate communication activities endorse a link between the corporate brand and its COO, associations are likely to transfer from the corporate image to the image that individuals hold for the COO (Dowling, 1994; Olins, 1999; Anholt, 2000; Dowling, 2001; Van Ham, 2001; Cerviño, 2002; Melewar and Bains, 2002; Anholt, 2003; Keller, 2003; Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2008; Dinnie, 2008). Anholt (2000; 2003), for instance, argues that the image that an individual holds of a corporate brand may improve or even change the image of its COO. However, our understanding of this influence remains limited and emphasis on theory development is therefore necessary (Dinnie, 2008). Focussing on practice, governments are, more than ever before, concerned about managing the image of their countries (Van Ham, 2001) to enable differentiation, and



increase tourism, inward investment and exports (Kotler *et al.*, 1999; Olins, 1999; Kotler and Gertner, 2002; Papadopoulos, 2004). Understanding the positive or negative influence that the image of corporate brands can exert on their COO's image and the factors that are likely to affect this is, therefore, important for tourism boards, Ministries of Foreign Affairs and other organisations that drive nation branding efforts (Anholt, 2007). Associating a country with corporate brands that consumers hold favourable images for, may serve as a source of favourable associations for nation branding initiatives.

Our paper aims to review studies in product, corporate and place branding, as well as image transfer and COO literature, to conceptualise the influence of corporate image on country image and also identify antecedents and variables that potentially moderate this influence. The resulting conceptual framework attempts to open the black box of a long-ignored side of the relationship between corporate image and country image. We encourage scholars to empirically test our propositions in different contexts to advance theory in this branding domain.

The paper begins by introducing the core concepts, corporate image and country image. Taking into account that the literature has reached no consensus on how to conceptualise and operationalise corporate image (Gotsi and Wilson, 2001; Balmer, 2008) and country image (Laroche *et al.*, 2005; Roth and Diamantopoulos, 2009) we start by reviewing definitions, determinants and measures for the two constructs. Our focus then shifts to extant knowledge on the relationship between the two constructs and the gap that this study seeks to address. We then reveal our conceptual model and a series of propositions on the influence of corporate image on country image, highlighting key antecedents and moderators.

## Corporate image

### *Definitions*

Multiple perspectives within and between different disciplines have resulted in a plethora of definitions characterising corporate image (Table I).

The organisational behaviour literature views organisational image as perceptions of organisational members towards their organisation, including “the way they believe others see the organisation” (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991, p. 520). Psychologists extend this approach, depicting corporate image as a symbolic link between an organisation and its various publics (Grunig, 1993). Similarly, sociologists discuss corporate image as “sensed” and “communicated” (Alvesson, 1990), and strategists characterise corporate image as “the impression of the overall corporation” held by its various publics (Gray and Smeltzer, 1985, p. 73). In the marketing literature, some writings place emphasis on the organisational production of corporate image (e.g. Dichter, 1985; Gray, 1986; Olins, 1989; Dowling, 1994). Dichter (1985, p. 75), for instance, views corporate image as “the total impression an entity makes on the minds of people”. The second group of definitions view corporate image as perceptions, (mental) pictures or impressions of an organisation that reside in the public's mind (Winick, 1960; Spector, 1961; Carlson, 1963; Britt, 1971; Margulies, 1977; Gronroos, 1984; Johnson and Zinkhan, 1990; Balmer, 1995; Balmer and Stotvig, 1997; Gray and Balmer, 1998; Balmer and Gray, 2000; Balmer, 2001; Gotsi and Wilson, 2001; Balmer and Greyser, 2002). For example, Balmer (1995, p. 25) conceptualises corporate image as the “held perceptions of an organisation by a group or groups” and Johnson and Zinkhan (1990, p. 346) as

Discipline	Definition	Author(s)
Organizational behaviour	Organizational image refers to the way that an individual or group see their organization	Bromley (1993); Hatch and Schultz (1997, 2000)
Psychology	Symbolic associations between organizations and stakeholders	Grunig (1993)
Sociology	The inner picture (sense image) and fabrication (communicated image)	Alvesson (1990)
Strategy Marketing	External creation of corporate image Importance of the organization in the creation of corporate image Perceptions, (mental) pictures or impressions of an organization that reside in the public's mind  Beliefs about an organization Cognitive and affective components constitute the corporate image construct	Gray and Smeltzer (1985) Dichter (1985); Gray (1986); Olins (1989); Dowling (1994) Winick (1960); Spector (1961); Carlson (1963); Britt (1971); Margulies (1977); Gronroos (1984); Johnson and Zink(1995)Han (1990); Balmer (1995); Balmer and Stotvig (1997); Gray and Balmer (1998); Balmer and Gray (2000); Gotsi and Wilson (2001); Balmer and Greyser (2002) Dowling (2004) Cohen (1963); Bernstein (1984)

**Table I.**  
A review of  
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“the impression of a particular company held by some segment of the public”. The third stream of research conceptualises corporate image at the cognitive level. Dowling (2004, p. 21) indicates that corporate image is “a person’s beliefs about an organisation”. When explaining the differences between corporate image and corporate reputation, Balmer (1998, p. 971) states that corporate image refers to the “latest beliefs”. Yet, scholars over the years have broadened this view by incorporating the multiple interactions that form corporate image. Experiences, impressions, beliefs, feelings and knowledge about a company are all sources that shape corporate image (Bernstein, 1984; Dowling, 1986; Van Riel, 1995; Markwick and Fill, 1997; Melewar, 2003). In this realm corporate image is hence defined as “the net result of the interaction of all the experiences, impressions, beliefs, feelings and knowledge that people have about a company” (Bevis, 1967, quoted by Bernstein, 1984, p. 125). Therefore, both cognitive and affective components are included in the corporate image construct (Cohen, 1963; Barich and Kotler, 1991; Dowling, 2001).

### *Determinants*

The factors that shape corporate image can be grouped into three broad categories, namely, corporate, environmental and individual determinants. Corporate factors include corporate personality, corporate identity, and corporate communications (de Chernatony, 1999; Balmer, 2001). These are highlighted in various conceptual models on the corporate image and corporate identity management process, where the company itself is seen as the main factor that shapes stakeholders’ perceptions of the organisation (e.g. Abratt, 1989; Balmer, 1995; Wilkison and Balmer, 1996; Stuart, 1998). Yet, environmental factors may also influence corporate image formation.

Kennedy (1977) discusses this under “extraneous influences”, Dowling (1993) under “super and subordinate images”, Markwick and Fill (1997) under “environmental influences”, Balmer (1998), Stuart (1999) and Balmer and Gray (2000) under “environmental forces” and Gray and Balmer (1998) under “exogenous factors”. Such influences include, among others, the image of the industry that the company operates in (Bernstein, 1984), the image of the firm’s COO (Dowling, 1993; Balmer and Gray, 2000) and competitors’ actions (Kennedy, 1977). Last, several studies have also identified factors that relate to the individual receiver as additional determinants of corporate image. Kennedy (1977), Bernstein (1984) and Dowling (1986, 1993), for instance, stress the influence that current and prior personal experiences with the company (through its products, customer-facing personnel, etc.) have in determining corporate image. The receiver’s own economic, social and personal background may influence the assessment of such experiences and, hence, may influence corporate image formation (Bromley, 1993, 2001; Fombrun, 1996; Gotsi and Wilson, 2001).

### *Measures*

Despite the acknowledged importance of the corporate image construct, literature has reached little consensus on how to operationalise corporate image (Van Riel *et al.*, 1998; Flavian *et al.*, 2004). Dowling (1988) and Van Riel *et al.* (1998) propose a broad range of methods to measure corporate image, including not only closed methods like surveys but also open methods. According to Van Riel *et al.* (1998), the selection of the corporate image measurement technique is affected by a number of determinants such as the conceptualisation of the corporate image construct (corporate image as a holistic impression of the relative position of a company, as a sum of several perceived attributes of a company, or as a network of meanings), the aim of the study, the ease of data analysis, the costs of data gathering, the appeal of the technique from the respondents’ perspective, the type of result generated by the measurement technique, the data collection method and finally the kind of task required to evaluate a company. Methods to operationalise corporate image, therefore, range from attitude scales, Q-sort, photosort, laddering, Kelly Repertory Grid (KRG) and the natural grouping method.

Although surveys are acknowledged as the most frequently used method in corporate image studies (Van Riel *et al.*, 1998), scholars apply a variety of measures to encapsulate corporate associations in the eyes of stakeholders (Nguyen and Leblanc, 2001; Berens and van Riel, 2004). Perhaps the closeness of concepts that relate to such associations may partly explain this confusion (Balmer, 2008). For instance, some studies measure corporate image assuming that attributes of a company’s image are similar to those of a person (e.g. Spector, 1961; Davies *et al.*, 2003; Slaughter *et al.*, 2004). Davies *et al.* (2003) and Slaughter *et al.* (2004), for example, extend Aaker’s (1997) understanding of brand personality and apply this at the corporate level. Other measures focus on specific corporate associations. For instance, Newell and Goldsmith (2001) propose the Corporate Credibility Scale to measure corporate associations related to trust. Table II reviews some of the available measures. The main gap in the measurement of corporate image is the absence of a widely adopted and standardised scale that can be applied to all corporate brands and to different stakeholders (Davies *et al.*, 2001).



Table II.

Year	Author(s)	Dimensions	Sub-dimensions	Items	Items origin
2004	Slaughter <i>et al.</i>	Enterprise	Modernity Adventure	Cool, trendy, young Imaginative, up-to-date, exciting, innovative	
		Competence	Boldness Conscientiousness Drive	Extrovert, daring Reliable, secure, hardworking Ambitious, achievement oriented, leading	
		Ruthless	Technocracy Egotism Dominance	Technical, corporate Arrogant, aggressive, selfish Inward looking, authoritarian, controlling	
		Chic	Elegance Prestige Snobbery	Charming, stylish, elegant Prestigious, exclusive, refined Snobby, elitist	
		Informality Machismo Boy Scout		Casual, simple, easy going Masculine, tough, rugged Studies of human personality and brand personality	
		Innovativeness		Original research Friendly, attentive to people, pleasant, family-oriented, cooperative, personal, helpful, clean, honest	
		Dominance	Successful, popular, dominant, busy, active	Interesting, exciting, unique, creative, boring, plain, original	
		Thrift	Low budget, low class, simple, reduced, sloppy, poor, undersized, deprived		
		Style		Stylish, fashionable, hip, trendy	

## Country image

### Definitions

Despite the widely acknowledged importance of country image, a closer look at the literature reveals multiples conceptualisations of the construct (Table III).

In line with Hsieh *et al.*'s (2004), Mossberg and Kleppe's (2005) and Roth and Diamantopoulos's (2009) classifications, three main approaches can be identified in conceptualising country image depending on their focal image object. The first approach focuses on product image, i.e. studies that define country image at the product level (e.g. Narayana, 1981). In the country of origin (COO) literature country image has been traditionally conceptualised as consumers' perceptions of products that originate from a country (Papadopoulos *et al.*, 1988; Papadopoulos *et al.*, 1990; Martin and Eroglu, 1993; Li *et al.*, 1997; Thakor and Katsanis, 1997; Lee and Ganesh, 1999; Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2000; Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2002, 2003). Nagashima (1970, p. 68), one of the first to describe country image, defines it as:

[...] the picture, the reputation, the stereotype that businessmen and consumers attach to products of a specific country.

Similarly, Han (1990, p. 24) indicates that country image can be understood as "consumers' general perceptions about the quality of products made in a given country". Other researchers such as Narayana (1981), Bilkey and Nes (1982) and Roth and Romeo (1992) adopt a similar product-oriented approach to describing country image.

The second approach focuses on product-country image and includes authors that see country image and product image as two independent but related constructs (e.g. Lee and Ganesh, 1999), hence, calling for greater attention to the concept of

Approach	Authors
(1) Product image: country image is conceptualised at the product level	Nagasgima (1970, 1977); Narayana (1981); Bilkey and Nes (1982); Han and Terpstra (1988); Han (1989, 1990); Roth and Romeo (1992)
(2) Product-country image: Product image and country image are two independent but related parts	Li <i>et al.</i> (1997); Knight and Calantone (2000); Jaffe and Nebenzahl (2001); Nebenzahl <i>et al.</i> (2003); Papadopoulos and Heslop (2003)
(3) Overall country image: Country image as a broad construct determined by multiple factors. Three groups of studies can be identified:	Bannister and Saunders (1978); Desborde (1990); Kotler <i>et al.</i> (1993); Martin and Eroglu (1993); Askegaard and Ger (1997); Allred <i>et al.</i> (1999); Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999); Verlegh (2001); Kotler and Gertner (2002); Gertner and Kotler (2004)
(3a) Overall country image is defined as perceptions, (mental) pictures or impressions of a country that reside in the public's mind	Desborde (1990); Allred <i>et al.</i> (1999); Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999)
(3b) Overall country image is conceptualised as a cognitive structure	Kotler <i>et al.</i> (1993); Martin and Eroglu (1993); Kotler and Gertner (2002); Gertner and Kotler (2004)
(3c) Overall country image is defined as a cognitive and affective network	Askegaard and Ger (1997); Verlegh (2001)

Source: Adapted from Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009)

**Table III.**  
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country image

country image itself (Jaffe and Nebenzahl, 1984; Han, 1989, 1990). In this realm, scholars insist on extending the traditional narrow concept of COO (Ger, 1991), to capture both product evaluation and country image aspects (Papadopoulos *et al.*, 1988; Papadopoulos *et al.*, 1990; Kochunny *et al.*, 1993; Parameswaran and Pisharodi, 1994; Häubl, 1996; Lee and Ganesh, 1999). For example, Knight and Calantone (2000, p. 127) view country image as “a consumer’s perceptions about the quality of products made in a particular country and the nature of people from that country”.

Finally, the third approach considers country image as a generic construct that is shaped by a wide range of factors and not only by the country’s products (e.g. Martin and Eroglu, 1993). Within this stream of research three groups of studies can be identified. The first group includes authors that conceptualise country image as perceptions, mental pictures or impressions of a country located in the individual’s mind. For example, Desborde (1990, p. 44) views country image as “the overall impression of a country present in a consumer’s mind (...)”. The second group encapsulates studies that see country image as a cognitive structure. For example, Martin and Eroglu (1993, p. 193) argue for conceptualising country image as an independent entity, entirely dissociated from the image of the country’s products and view the construct as “the total of all descriptive, inferential and informational beliefs one has about a particular country”. Similarly, Kotler *et al.* (1993; Kotler and Gertner, 2002; Gertner and Kotler, 2004) define country image as “the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that people have of a place. Images represent a simplification of a large number of associations and pieces of information connected with a place” (Kotler *et al.*, 1993, p. 141). Last, Askegaard and Ger (1997) and Verlegh (2001) adopt a broader perspective and acknowledge not only a cognitive but also an affective component within the country image construct. They see country image as a network of elements or associations. Verlegh (2001, p. 25), for instance, defines country image as “a mental network of affective and cognitive associations connected to the country”.

#### *Determinants*

COO studies have traditionally considered consumers’ perceptions of products as the sole factor that shapes the image of countries (Dinnie, 2004), thereby equating the image of products with the image of their COO (Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2002). Yet, place branding research proposes a wide range of additional determinants of country image, including the country’s education, culture, media, people, sports, and so on. Anholt (2002, 2003, 2005) also notes the role of commercial and corporate brands. He acknowledges, for instance, the importance of corporations in influencing the image of countries like Korea (Anholt, 2000) and the United States (Anholt and Hildreth, 2004). Van Ham (2001) similarly argues that a nation’s firms are the most perceptible country-brand ambassadors, and Olins (1999) points out the mutual influence between corporate brands and the image of their COO. The corporate, environmental and individual determinants identified for corporate image, can therefore also have an impact either directly on country image or on the influence of corporate image on country image. First, the personality, identity and communication strategy of a company can influence the strength of corporate-country associations in an individual’s mind (Keller, 1993). For example, if the company creates a link with its COO through its corporate visual identity and/or its corporate communications, it is more likely to influence the image of its COO. Second, the image of the company’s

industry, classified as an environmental determinant of corporate image, can also have a direct effect on country image (Dowling, 1994, 2001). Other environmental factors such as political, economic, social and technological forces have also been acknowledged in the place branding and COO literature as factors shaping country image (e.g. Graby, 1993; Allred *et al.*, 1999; O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2000; Jaffe and Nebenzahl, 2006). Finally, the individual's background is highlighted as a variable influencing country image (e.g. Bilkey and Nes, 1982). Stereotypes are also widely recognised to influence people's images of countries (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2000; Gertner and Kotler, 2004; Pharr, 2005; Dinnie, 2008). Furthermore, O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2000) and later Dinnie (2008, p. 47) acknowledge that "personal experience of a country through working or holidaying there can play a key role in the image an individual holds of a country". Similarly, research undertaken by Heslop and Papadopoulos (1993), Gnoth (2002), Papadopoulos and Heslop (2002) and Dinnie (2004) stress the importance of travelling to a country in the formation of one's image of a country.

### *Measures*

Reflecting early conceptualisation of country image at the product level, the construct has been traditionally measured through product-specific attributes (Narayana, 1981; Bilkey and Nes, 1982; Han, 1990; Roth and Romeo, 1992; Shimp *et al.*, 1993). Nagashima's (1970, 1977) 20 seven-point semantic differential items have been adopted by a noteworthy number of subsequent studies (Narayana, 1981; Cattin *et al.*, 1982; Johansson and Nebenzahl, 1986; Chasin and Jaffe, 1987; Han and Terpstra, 1988; Papadopoulos *et al.* 1990; Roth and Romeo, 1992; Wood and Darling, 1992). Yet, over the last two decades scholars have also incorporated country-specific items to measure country image (see Table IV for a review of some measures).

An overview of the studies in Table IV shows that the measures of country image can be classified into three groups:

- (1) the country image construct is operationalised at the cognitive level;
- (2) country image is comprised of a cognitive and an affective component; and
- (3) cognitive, affective and conative components constitute the country image construct.

Martin and Eroglu (1993) measure country image against three cognitive dimensions:

- (1) political;
- (2) economic; and
- (3) technological.

Li *et al.* (1997) extend Martin and Eroglu's (1993) scale by also measuring product image in order to explore the relationship between country image and product image. Allred *et al.* (1999) operationalise the country image construct at the cognitive level and adopt a multidimensional approach. Similarly, d'Astous and Boujbel's (2007) country personality scale developed to measure country image using human-relevant items is another alternative to measure country beliefs.

The second group contains Yaprak and Parameswaran's work that uses measures that include general product attitudes and general country attitudes (Yaprak and

**Table IV.**  
Measures of country  
image

Year	Authors	Facet(s)	Dimension(s)	Items	Scales	Items origin
1986	Yaparak and Parameswaran	Product	General country and product attitudes Specific product attributes	14 items (products) 24 items	Five-point Likert Five-point Likert	Not provided
		Country-people	General country and product attitudes	10 items. Not listed but deduced from the findings are as follows: People are well-educated Places emphasis on technical/vocational training People are hard-working People are likeable Technical skills of workforce are high Friendly toward my country in international affairs Participation in international affairs People are motivated to raise living standards	Five-point Likert	Not provided
1987	Parameswaran and Yaparak	Product	General product attitudes Specific product attributes	14 items	Five-point Likert	Marketing, consumer
		Country-people	General country attitudes	9 (for cars) or 8 (for cameras) or 7 (for calculators) items People are well-educated Places emphasis on technical/vocational training People are hard-working People are creative People are friendly and likeable Technical skills of workforce are high Friendly toward my country in international affairs	Five-point Likert Five-point Likert Five-point Likert	Behaviour literature Boddewyn (1981)

(continued)

Year	Authors	Facet(s)	Dimension(s)	Items	Scales	Items origin
1990	Papadopoulos et al.	Product	4 dimensions	Actively participates in international affairs People are motivated to raise living standards People are proud to achieve high standards 17 items	Seven-point SD	Nagashima (1970); Darling and Kraft (1977) Kelman (1965)
		Country-people	Industrial development & orientation Affect	Managing economy well Technically advanced Industrious Admirable role in world politics Refined taste Trustworthy Likeable	Seven-point SD	
1993	Heslop and Papadopoulos	Product	4 dimensions	(Want more investment) <sup>a</sup> 17 items	Seven-point SD	Nagashima (1977)
		Country-people	Belief Affect	Managing economy well Technically advanced Industrious Role in world politics Refined taste Trustworthiness Likeable people (More investment) <sup>a</sup> (Closer ties)	Seven-point SD	Previous research EUROBAROMETER Intuitive logical
		Link				

(continued)

Table IV.

Year	Authors	Facet(s)	Dimension(s)	Items	Scales	Items origin
1993	Martin and Eroglu	Country	Political	Demotatic vs. dictatorial system Economically developed vs. economically underdeveloped Civilian vs. military government Predominantly industrialised vs. predominantly non-industrialised Free market vs. centrally planned system High vs. low standard of living Stable vs. unstable economic environment High vs. low quality of products Existence of vs. lack of a welfare system	Seven-point SD	Questionnaire and focus group
			Economic	High vs. Low labor costs Exporter vs. importer of agricultural products High vs. low level of technological research		
			Technological	High vs. low literacy rates Mass produced vs. handcrafted products		
1994	Parameswaran and Pisharodi	Product	General product attributes: 3 dimensions Specific product attributes: 3 dimensions	12 (German products) 11 (Korean products) items 4 items (for cars) or 11 items (for blenders)	Ten-point Likert Ten-point Likert	COO literature Dealer and retailers

(continued)

Year	Authors	Facef(s)	Dimension(s)	Items	Scales	Items origin
		Country- people	General country attributes: people	GCAI: 5 items (Germans)  Well-educated Achieving high standards Raised standard of living Technical skills Hard working GCAI: 6 items (Koreans) Well-educated Achieving high standards Raised standard of living Technical skills Friendly & likeable Artistic & creative 3 identical items for the two source countries Similar political views Economically similar Culturally similar 15 items	Ten-point Likert	Parameswaran and Yaprak (1987); Pisharodi and Parameswaran (1992); Yaprak and Parameswaran (1986)
1986	Haub	Product	4 dimensions	Nice Friendly Pleasant Peaceful	Six-point summated rating	Scott and English (1989); Bayus (1991); Gupta and Ratchford (1992); Chaiken and Maheswaran (1994)
		Country	Affective evaluation of country		Six-point summated rating	Parameswaran and Yaprak (1987); McGee and Spiro (1991); Pisharodi and Parameswaran (1992); Martin and Eroglu (1993); Jaffe and Nebenzahl (1993)

(continued)

Table IV.

Year	Authors	Facet(s)	Dimension(s)	Items	Scales	Items origin
1997	Li et al.	Product Country	Cognitive evaluation of country Evaluation of country's car industry Political	Competent Reliable State-of-the-art Successful High quality standards and control Well-trained workforce Highly motivated workers 4 items Economically developed vs. economically underdeveloped Civilian vs. military government Predominantly industrialised vs. predominantly non-industrialised Free market vs. centrally planned system High vs. low standard of living Stable vs. unstable economic environment High vs. low quality of products Existence of vs. lack of a welfare system High vs. low labour costs High vs. low level of technological research High vs. low literacy rates Mass produced vs. handcrafted products China has a highly developed economy?	Five-point SD Five-point SD	Roth and Romeo (1992) Martin and Eroglu (1993)
1999	Alfred et al.	Country	Economy		Seven-point	Marketing and non-marketing literature, focus groups <i>(continued)</i>

Year	Authors	Facet(s)	Dimension(s)	Items	Scales	Items origin
			Labour	<p>China's economy is highly industrialised?</p> <p>China is technologically very advanced?</p> <p>China has a very powerful economy?</p> <p>China's economy is very modern?</p> <p>China is very kind/considerate of workers' rights?</p> <p>Working conditions in China are very clean?</p> <p>Working conditions in China are very safe?</p> <p>Chinese workers are very well paid for their time?</p> <p>Chinese workers are very well treated?</p> <p>China does not exploit its labour?</p> <p>Chinese political system is very similar to ours?</p>		
			Politics	<p>China's political system is very stable?</p> <p>China is a very peaceful country?</p> <p>Chinese citizens have a great deal of freedom?</p>		
			Work culture	<p>Chinese workers are very reliable?</p> <p>Chinese workers are very hardworking?</p> <p>Chinese workers are very well educated?</p>		
			Vocational training	<p>Chinese workers pay very close attention to details?</p> <p>Chinese workers are very well trained?</p> <p>Chinese workers are very admired?</p>		
			Environment	<p>China is very clean?</p>		

(continued)

Table IV.

Table IV.

Year	Authors	Facet(s)	Dimension(s)	Items	Scales	Items origin
1999	Lee and Ganes	Product-brand	3 dimensions	<p>China is very concerned about the environment?</p> <p>China has very high pollution control standards?</p> <p>China aggressively protects the environment?</p> <p>China does not exploit the environment?</p> <p>China's trade practices with the US are very fair?</p> <p>Chinese are very friendly?</p> <p>I like Chinese people very much?</p> <p>China's government is very cooperative with ours?</p> <p>China is a very dependable ally?</p> <p>15 items</p>	Nine-point Likert	Parameswaran and Yaprak (1987); Johansson and Nebenzahl (1986); Jaffe and Nebenzahl (1984); Nagashima (1970)
		Country-people	Overall image: country	Emphasises technical/vocational training	Nine-point Likert	Parameswaran and Yaprak (1987); Boddewyn (1981)
			Overall image: people	<p>Is friendly to the USA in world affairs</p> <p>Actively participates in world affairs</p> <p>Is an economically advanced country</p> <p>Are well educated</p> <p>Are hard working people</p> <p>Are creative</p> <p>Are friendly and likeable</p> <p>Have high technical skills</p> <p>Are proud to achieve high standards</p>		

(continued)

Year	Authors	Facet(s)	Dimension(s)	Items	Scales	Items origin
2000	Papadopoulos et al.	Product	Overall image: country and people 4 dimensions	Are motivated to raise their living standards	Seven-point SD	Nagashima (1977)
		Country-people	Advancement	Technology	Seven-point SD	Heslop and Papadopoulos (1993); Wish et al. (1970); Forgas and O'Driscoll (1984)
				Wealth		
				Taste		
				Educated		
				Stable		
				Role in world		
				Know a lot		
				Hardworking		
				Truthworthy		
				Likeable		
				Ideal country		
				(Want to visit) <sup>a</sup>		
				(Aligned) <sup>a</sup>		
				(More investment)		
				(More imports)		
				(Closer ties)		
2001	Verlegh	Product	Desired links	11 items (tomatoes); 12 items (washing machines)	Several scales	Not provided
		Country	Natural landscape	A lot of unspoiled	Seven-point Likert	National stereotypes and perception of nations literature, group discussions, pre-tests
				Many forests and natural areas		

(continued)

Table IV.

Year	Authors	Facet(s)	Dimension(s)	Items	Scales	Items origin		
2003	Knight et al.	Product	Climate	Sunny Warm Hardworking Efficient Meticulous Creative Imaginative Artistic	Seven-point summated rating	Parameswaran and Yaprak (1987)		
			Competence	Positive feelings				
			Creativity	Pleasant feelings Enthusiastic Distrustful Irritated Hostile				
		Product	5 dimensions	Negative feelings	7 items	People are well-educated	People are well-educated	
			Country-people	People				
		2005	Laroche et al.	Product	Political situation	Technical skills of workforce are high Friendly toward the (home country) in international affairs	Seven-point D	Papadopoulos <i>et al.</i> (1988); Papadopoulos <i>et al.</i> (2000); Nagashima (1977)
					2 dimensions	6 items		
				Country-people	Country beliefs	Rich-poor	Seven-point SD	Papadopoulos <i>et al.</i> (1988); Li <i>et al.</i> (1997)
				People affect		Technologically advanced – not advanced High-low level of education Trustworthy – not trustworthy		

(continued)

Year	Authors	Facet(s)	Dimension(s)	Items	Scales	Items origin
2007	d'Astous and Boujbel	Country	Desired interaction Agreeableness	Hard working – not hard working Likeable not likeable We should not have closer ties with - Ideal – not ideal country Would – would not welcome more investment from – Bon-vivant Reveller Amusing Agreeable Immoral Vulgar Decadent Offender Haughty Snobbish Mannered Chauvinist Organised Rigorous Flourishing Hard to work Religious Spiritual Traditionalist Mysterious Cowardly Wimpy Dependent Neutral	Five-point summated rating	Personal interviews, personality scales
<b>Note:</b> Items that appear in parentheses did not apply to the respondent's home country						

Table IV.

Parameswaran, 1986; Parameswaran and Yaprak, 1987). They operationalise country image at the cognitive and affective level. Later studies like those of Häubl (1996), Lee and Ganesh (1999) and Knight *et al.* (2003) base their scales on that of Parameswaran and Yaprak (1987), that has been criticised for focusing only on socio-economic dimensions of a country (Askegaard and Ger, 1997). In this line, Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009) argue that although several scales operationalise the cognitive component of the country image construct, a considerable number of existing scales fail to measure respondents' emotions as the items included in the affective dimensions either refer to beliefs or do not encapsulate respondent's emotions. Thus, they call for the development of a proper scale that captures country-related emotions. Häubl (1996) and Verlegh (2001) appear to be among the authors whose scales do acknowledge this affective dimension of country image.

The third group is led by Papadopoulos, Heslop and their colleagues. They present country image as a multidimensional construct measured against three components: cognitions (beliefs about the industrial development and advancement of the country), affect towards the country's people, and conations (desire for closer interaction with the country) (Papadopoulos *et al.*, 1989; Laroche *et al.*, 2005). Similarly, Parameswaran and Pisharodi's (1994) study identifies two dimensions within the general country attributes facet:

- (1) the interaction dimension that measures conation and is affected by the perception of economic, political or cultural similarity between the consumer's country and the COO; and
- (2) the people dimension that assesses cognition and affect.

Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009) criticise such measures, highlighting that they fail to capture normative and affective aspects. Parameswaran and Pisharodi (1994) also warn about the limitations of applying a standardised scale in different countries, as the items that determine each facet may vary from country to country.

### **Influence of corporate image on country image**

The influence that country image exerts on consumers' evaluations of products, known as COO effect, has been one of the most researched fields in international marketing over the past four decades (Tan and Farley, 1987; Peterson and Jolibert, 1995). Although writings have traditionally depicted the relationship between country and product images as unidirectional (Papadopoulos *et al.*, 1990), a few authors in the COO literature have demonstrated through empirical studies and/or conceptual models that product image is not only affected but can also affect country image (Table V summarises these studies).

Nagashima (1970), for instance, indicates that leading products from one country influence consumers' perceptions of that country. Han (1989) goes more in depth and identifies two causal and independent models showing the halo and summary roles of the country image, and later Li *et al.* (1997) argue for a simultaneous two-way causation between country image and product image. They hypothesise that one way through which consumers form the image of a country is by summarising their perceptions about the country's products. At the same time, consumers hold views of different countries and these views affect product evaluation, so the halo effect is used by Li *et al.* (1997) to also justify the reverse, country image affecting product image. A conceptual

Year	Author(s)	Source	Findings
1970	Nagashima	Insight	Leading product brands from a country can shape consumers' image of that country
1989	Han	Conceptual model - empirical research	Country image can act as a halo (country image affecting product image) or as a summary construct (product image influencing country image) depending on the familiarity with the country's products
1990	Papadopoulos <i>et al.</i>	Empirical research	The findings of the study indicate a bidirectional effect. Attitudes towards the products from a country can influence and/or be influenced by the views towards the country and its people. Thus, the authors question earlier studies for assuming that the influence is one-way
1991; 1996	Nebenzahl and Jaffe	Empirical research	A strong global product brand, Sony VCR, can enhance the weak country image of Russia and simultaneously this negative country image deteriorates the brand image of Sony
1993	Heslop and Papadopoulos	Empirical research	Under no circumstances is the product and country image relationship uni-directional. However, the direction of the influence is not so obvious. In certain countries one direction may be more predominant
1997	Kim and Chung	Conceptual model	Although the authors do not mention explicitly a bidirectional relationship, their theoretical framework suggests that a global brand image can be affected by the country image. At the same time brands from a certain country can influence the country image formation through their intangible assets or liabilities. The shared perception of these brands influences the overall image of the country
1997	Li <i>et al.</i>	Empirical research	Results confirm that product image affects country image. The reverse, the influence of country image on product image, is found to be moderated by consumers' familiarity with the country
2001	Jaffe and Nebenzahl	Conceptual model	Dynamic model. Country image can operate as a halo and as a summary effect simultaneously. Country image changes over time

**Table V.**  
A review of COO studies  
that highlight the  
influence of product  
image on country image

development of Han's (1989) earlier work is the dynamic model suggested by Jaffe and Nebenzahl (2001, p. 45). This model proposes that both effects (halo and summary) can perform simultaneously and that country image can change over time due to the experience with the country's products. Papadopoulos *et al.* (1990), Nebenzahl and Jaffe (1991, 1996) and Kim and Chung (1997) similarly highlight a bilateral relationship between product image and country image. Their findings indicate that attitudes towards the products from a country can influence and/or be influenced by views towards the country. Yet, Heslop and Papadopoulos (1993) argue that the direction of the influence is not always so obvious; in certain countries one direction may be more predominant than the other.

Despite growing interest in COO studies about this relationship at the product level, only a handful of writings within the corporate branding literature look into the relationship between corporate image and country image (a summary is provided in Table VI).

Bernstein (1984) is one of the first authors to capture country image as a factor that can shape corporate image. Later on, Dowling (1988, 1993) also incorporates country image in the "super and subordinate images" that influence corporate image and then Balmer and Gray (2000) include country image as an exogenous factor that affects corporate image. Worcester's (1990) empirical studies, however, highlight that this influence is quite complex. For instance, his findings illustrate that while favourability towards oil companies is not affected by being perceived as American-owned or as British-owned, favourability towards companies in the food industry is affected by the perceived nationality of ownership (Worcester, 1990).

The other side of the relationship (the influence that corporate image may exert on country image) has been less researched in the corporate branding, place branding and COO fields. Dowling (1994, 2001) appears to be one of the few authors to acknowledge a reciprocal relationship between corporate image and country image. Dowling's "network of images" depicts company image to be affected by but to also affect country

Year	Author(s)	Interaction	Contribution
1984	Bernstein	Unidirectional	A company's image can be affected by the image of the industry of which it is part and the image of its COO
1988; 1993	Dowling	Unidirectional	Super and subordinate images can influence the external groups' images of the company. Super and subordinate images refer to the country, industry and brand images
1990	Worcester	Unidirectional	The perceptions of companies' nationality of ownership can have an effect on how favourably or unfavourably they are regarded
1994; 2001	Dowling	Bidirectional	Country image can affect and can also be affected by the images people hold of its companies, industries and brands
2000	Balmer and Gray	Unidirectional	Perceptions of the organization can be influenced by a number of exogenous factors including country of origin, image and reputation

**Table VI.**  
A review of corporate branding studies on the relationship between corporate image and country image

image. A number of studies in the place branding literature have also recently called for attention to the influence of corporate image on country image (see Table VII).

Anholt (2000), for instance, sees corporations as a significant determinant of country image. The author emphasises the key role that companies like Hyundai, Daewoo, Samsung and LG have played in enhancing the brand image of Korea. Similarly, Van Ham (2001) and Cerviño (2002) suggest that firms are among the most visible country-brand ambassadors, Dinnie (2008) describes a country's companies as determinants of the nation-brand, and Olins (1999) and Van Ham (2008) go as far as to equate corporate brands with countries. Some empirical results also demonstrate the influence of corporate image on country image. For instance, Cerviño *et al.* (2005) show that the positioning of leading Spanish companies in foreign markets positively influences the external image of Spain. This empirical study supports Cerviño's (2002) earlier framework of a bi-directional relationship between corporate image and the image of the COO.

### The image transfer

Cognitive psychology through the schema congruity theory (Fiske, 1982; Fiske and Taylor, 1984; Sujan and Bettman, 1989), the categorisation theory (Rosch and Mervis, 1975; Rosch, 1978; Cohen, 1982) and the associative network theory (Collins and Loftus, 1975; Anderson, 1983) provides the theoretical basis to conceptualise the potential transfer of associations (image transfer) from corporate brands to countries in consumers' memory (Keller, 1993; Riezebos, 2003; Smith, 2004).

Year	Author(s)	Interaction	Contribution
1999	Olins	Bidirectional	The author equates corporate brands with countries: Sony is Japan and Japan is Sony
2000	Anholt	Unidirectional	Importance of corporations in influencing a country's image. Corporations such as Hyundai, Daewoo, Samsung and LG play a key role in enhancing the image of Korea
2001	van Ham	Unidirectional	A country's companies are among the most visible country-brand ambassadors
2002	Cerviño	Bidirectional	Reciprocal relationship between the image of corporate brands and the perceptions of their COO. Cerviño visually shows this bidirectional interaction by adapting the model designed by Kim and Chung (1997)
2005	Cerviño <i>et al.</i>	Unidirectional	The positioning of the leading companies of Spain in the foreign markets positively influences the external image of Spain
2008	Dinnie	Unidirectional	The author identifies the country's companies and brands as determinants of the essence of a nation brand
2008	van Ham	Bidirectional	In some cases the images of brands and countries merge in the mind of the consumer. Microsoft and Coca-Cola are America as Nokia is Finland (and vice versa)

**Table VII.**  
A review of place  
branding studies on the  
relationship between  
country image and  
corporate image

Individuals may have an existing schema for the country that is going to influence how new information is structured, organised, interpreted and assimilated with existing knowledge (Crocker *et al.*, 1984; Fiske and Taylor, 1984) and the level of congruence between that information and the schema. So, if a new instance is perceived to match the schema, it will be ascribed associations of the schema (Fiske, 1982). A schema is a “cognitive structure that contains knowledge about the attributes of a concept and the relationships among those attributes” (Fiske and Taylor, 1984, p. 149). The development of the schema theory is parallel to that of the categorisation theory (Fiske and Taylor, 1984), the latter maintaining that individuals organise information or objects into categories that help them process and understand their environment (Rosch and Mervis, 1975). People recognise category members by evaluating their similarity to the category prototype (Rosch and Mervis, 1975; Rosch, 1978; Fiske and Taylor, 1984). When a person comes into contact with a new member of a category, the beliefs and affect associated with that category are transferred to the new instance (Cohen, 1982; Fiske, 1982; Bhat and Reddy, 2001). Consequently, the perceived similarity between, for example, a parent brand and an extension influences the degree of transfer of associations (Aaker and Keller, 1990; Smith and Park, 1992). What sets cognitive research on schema apart from cognitive research on categorisation is that while the former focuses on the importance of prior knowledge in perception, memory and inference, the latter pays attention to the relationships among the different levels of categories as they are structured hierarchically and the process of storing the overall knowledge about a category as a prototype (Fiske and Taylor, 1984). However, both psychological theories have some commonalities like the notion of similarity (Boush *et al.*, 1987).

The associative network theory sees memory as a network of concepts (nodes) that are interconnected by links (Collins and Loftus, 1975; Anderson, 1983). Adopting an associative network approach, corporate image and country image can be conceptualised as mental networks of affective and cognitive associations linked to the corporate brand and the COO respectively (Collins and Loftus, 1975). Anderson (1983) explains that one set of nodes (for instance, related to a corporate image) can induce thinking about other nodes (for instance, related to country image). This process, known as the spreading activation process, predicts that the retrieval of the informational nodes of the interconnected network “is performed by spreading activation throughout the network” (Anderson, 1983, p. 261).

In the marketing literature, scholars have studied image transfer in areas such as brand extension (e.g. Bhat and Reddy, 1997; Grime *et al.*, 2002; Salinas and Perez, 2009), sponsorship (e.g. Gwinner, 1997; Gwinner and Eaton, 1999; Smith, 2004) and celebrity endorsement (e.g. McCracken, 1989; Lynch and Schuler, 1994). Riezebos (2003, p. 74) indicates that image transfer occurs when “the associations valuable to consumers are carried over from one brand to another”. Therefore, brand associations can be created when a brand becomes connected to another entity in memory and existing associations for the entity become linked with the brand (Keller, 1993).

### **Research propositions**

Looking at organisations from an open-systems theory perspective, firms interact with their environment (Boulding, 1956; Katz and Khan, 1966; Miller, 1972; Ackoff, 1974; Schein, 1980) and changes in the environment are likely to affect the organisation and

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vice-versa (Robbins, 1990). Through this lens, one would argue that corporate image is not only affected by, but may also affect country image. Consequently, the image of a country is not independent of the image of the companies from that country, i.e. the two image constructs are linked to each other. Echoing this, studies within corporate branding and place branding have highlighted the influence that corporate image can exert on country image (e.g. Dowling, 1994, 2001; Olins, 1999; Anholt, 2000; Van Ham, 2001; Cerviño, 2002; Dinnie, 2008). It is therefore proposed that:

*P1.* Corporate image positively influences country image.

#### *Antecedent variable*

Drawing on image transfer literature, it can be argued that if a corporate brand becomes linked to its COO in the consumer's mind, associations connected to the company can be carried over to its COO (Keller, 1993). The degree of association of a corporate brand with its COO is influenced by the branding strategy of the company (Keller, 1993). A company can establish a link with its COO by conveying its provenance through its corporate visual identity and also through corporate communication. Corporate visual identity includes the corporate name, logotype or symbol, typography and colour (Dowling, 1994; Melewar and Bains, 2002). The COO of a corporate brand can be communicated directly or indirectly through the corporate brand name, in the corporate logo, in the corporate slogan and/or in images within corporate advertisements (Papadopoulos, 1993; Thakor and Kohli, 1996; Keller, 2003; Riezebos, 2003). Corporate communication can create and/or reinforce the linkage between the corporate brand and its COO (Martin *et al.*, 2005) through repetition (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987) as many exposures to two nodes can result in building or strengthening the link between them (Henderson *et al.*, 1998; Till and Shimp, 1998). Consequently, when a corporate brand plays up its COO, it is more likely to elicit a transfer of associations from the corporate brand to the COO. Cohen (1982) and Boush *et al.* (1987) explain this phenomenon from a categorisation theory perspective and indicate that the application of the country name to the corporate brand name can determine membership in an existing category (country) and therefore, may elicit a transfer of associations from one to the other.

In line with the previous argument, Keller (2003, 2008) proposes that awareness of an entity is one of the main conditions to guarantee the transfer of associations from that entity to another. Several scholars within the branding literature have echoed this as an antecedent in their frameworks of brand image transfer (Smith, 2004). Similarly, COO studies stress that consumers need to be aware of the origin of products for the COO to influence their perceptions of products (Samiee, 1994; Paswan and Sharma, 2004). We can, therefore, argue that if consumers are not aware of the corporate brand and its COO, then no associations will be carried over from the corporate brand to its COO. In line with Johansson *et al.* (1985) and Balabanis and Diamantopoulos (2008) by COO we refer to the country where the headquarters of the company are located and not to "the place, region or country to which the brand is perceived to belong by its target consumers" (Thakor and Kohli, 1996, p. 27). The latter, which Thakor and Kohli (1996) label as brand origin, may not coincide with the actual COO due to ignorance, absence of information relating to the origin of a brand or intentional confusion created by companies. If this is the case it is likely that the associations will be carried over

from the corporate brand to a country other than the actual origin of the firm. We therefore formulate the following proposition:

- P2. If individuals are not aware of the corporate brand and its COO, corporate image will not influence country image.

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### *Moderating variables*

The strength of the influence of corporate image on country image is expected to be moderated by a number of individual and corporate level variables.

*Moderators at the individual level.* In the COO area, familiarity is often portrayed as a moderator of the COO effect or as a determinant of product evaluations, beliefs and/or purchase intention (e.g. Samiee, 1994; Lee and Ganesh, 1999; Pharr, 2005). Although results are sometimes contradictory (Nebenzahl *et al.*, 1997), several authors have shown that familiarity affects the image of a product (e.g. Johansson *et al.*, 1985; Papadopoulos *et al.*, 1988; Okechuku, 1994). Within the product domain, familiarity refers to the level of knowledge (Park and Lessig, 1981; Johansson, 1989) that arises from personal product experience (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987). Following Johansson's (1989) research, country familiarity is conceptualised in this study as the level of knowledge that can be acquired through experience. Thus, the familiarity construct is composed of an objective (actual experience) and a subjective component (respondent's thoughts) (Erickson *et al.*, 1984). Amongst other factors, country familiarity can derive from cultural aspects (Dowling, 1994; Anholt, 2002; Kotler and Gertner, 2002; Dinnie, 2004, 2008), media (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2000; Kotler and Gertner, 2002; Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2002; Dinnie, 2008), people (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2000; Jaffe and Nebenzahl, 2006), sports (Dowling, 1994; Dinnie, 2004) and tourism (Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2002; Dinnie, 2008).

Drawing from Olson and Dover (1978), we can argue that individuals who are familiar with a country due to different past experiences are likely to have created a stable and complex cognitive structure of country knowledge. Alba and Hutchinson (1987) add that the cognitive structures are more refined, complete and veridical when familiarity increases. Likewise, Roedder John *et al.* (2006, p. 559) indicate that experts' knowledge structures are more complex and involve "more brand associations, more brand association links, stronger brand association links (...) and greater hierarchical structuring in a consensus map". This underlines a negative correlation, i.e. the less familiar individuals are with the country of origin, the more salient the influence of corporate image will be. Consistent with this reasoning it is proposed that:

- P3. The positive influence of corporate image on country image is moderated by country familiarity.

At the corporate level, familiarity is also conceptualised as the level of knowledge that can be acquired through experience (Johansson, 1989). The corporate familiarity construct is, hence, composed of an objective (actual experience) and a subjective component (respondent's thoughts) (Erickson *et al.*, 1984). The more familiar individuals are with a corporate brand, the more likely they are to have stable, complex (Olson and Dover, 1978; Roedder John *et al.*, 2006), more refined, complete and veridical cognitive structures of company knowledge (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987). We can, hence, predict a positive correlation, i.e. the more familiar individuals are with a

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corporate brand, the more salient will be the influence of corporate image on country image. The following research proposition is, therefore, suggested:

- P4.* The positive influence of corporate image on country image is moderated by corporate familiarity.

The transfer of associations from the corporate brand to its COO is also determined by the perceived similarity between the two entities (Fazio, 1989; Gwinner, 1997; Keller, 2008). This mirrors studies in co-branding, celebrity endorsement, sponsorship and brand extension that show that the greater the perceived fit, match-up, similarity or congruence between two entities, the greater the potential image transfer (Boush *et al.*, 1987; Kaikati, 1987; Aaker and Keller, 1990; Park *et al.*, 1991; Dacin and Smith, 1994; Gwinner and Eaton, 1999; Bhat and Reddy, 2001; Smith, 2004). Looking at cognitive psychology literature, theories of stimulus generalisation (McSweeney and Bierly, 1984; Bierley *et al.*, 1985), cognitive consistency (Festinger, 1957; Heider, 1958) and categorisation (Mervis and Rosch, 1981) have long highlighted the importance of fit in image transfer (Aaker and Keller, 1990; Agarwal and Sikri, 1996).

Although there is no generally accepted definition and operationalisation of perceived fit within the brand extension literature (Grime *et al.*, 2002), Martin and his colleagues (Martin and Stewart, 2001; Martin *et al.*, 2005) review and classify prior definitions of product similarity into four approaches: feature-based similarity, usage-based similarity, goal-based similarity and brand-concept similarity. The latter approach proposes that perceived similarity between the parent brand and its extension can be based on their image (Park *et al.*, 1991). Bhat and Reddy (1997) refer to this notion as brand image fit. Applying these constructs to our study, brand image fit (or brand image consistency) can be defined as the similarity between the image of the corporate brand and the image of its COO.

In this paper, perceived fit comprises of two main dimensions, brand image fit and corporate brand category-country image fit. The degree of brand image fit will affect the image transfer such that when the corporate image converges with that of the country image, consumers are more likely to transfer corporate associations. The level of brand image fit not only affects the likelihood of image transfer, but also the potential degree of change in beliefs and affect towards a country (Crocker *et al.*, 1984). If they are consistent with each other, corporate image mainly reinforces existing country associations. We, hence, propose that:

- P5.* The positive influence of corporate image on country image is moderated by the perceived fit between the image of the corporate brand and the image of its COO (brand image fit).

Focusing now on the second dimension of perceived fit, Roth and Romeo (1992, p. 482) developed a framework that matches product category and perceived image of the COO, highlighting that a favourable product-country match exists “when important dimensions for a product category are also associated with a country’s image”. Germany and the automotive industry, and Japan and consumer electronics are examples of favourable matches. Similarly, Hong and Wyer (1989) and Jaffe and Nebenzahl (2006) conclude that country image is product category specific. In accordance with these studies, it is expected that if attributes of the corporate brand category and industry are also associated with the COO, corporate image will have a

reinforcing effect on country image. Hence, the following research proposition is suggested:

- P6. The positive influence of corporate image on country image is moderated by the perceived fit between the image of the corporate brand category and the image of the country (corporate brand category-country image fit).

*Moderators at the corporate level.* The influence of corporate image on country image is also moderated by the international visibility of the firm. Although the measurement of the level of internationalisation of a company has been discussed in the literature (e.g. Sullivan, 1994; UNCTAD, 1995; Ietto-Gillies, 1998), there is no general agreement on which indicator or index is the most adequate to assess it. A firm's geographical presence, i.e. the number of countries a corporation is operating in, is an indicator that determines the international visibility of a firm. The international visibility of the firm influences the frequency of exposure to the brand and, hence, the strength of the brand node in memory (Anderson, 1983; Keller, 1993). Therefore, the following proposition is suggested:

- P7. The positive influence of corporate image on country image is moderated by the international visibility of the corporate brand.

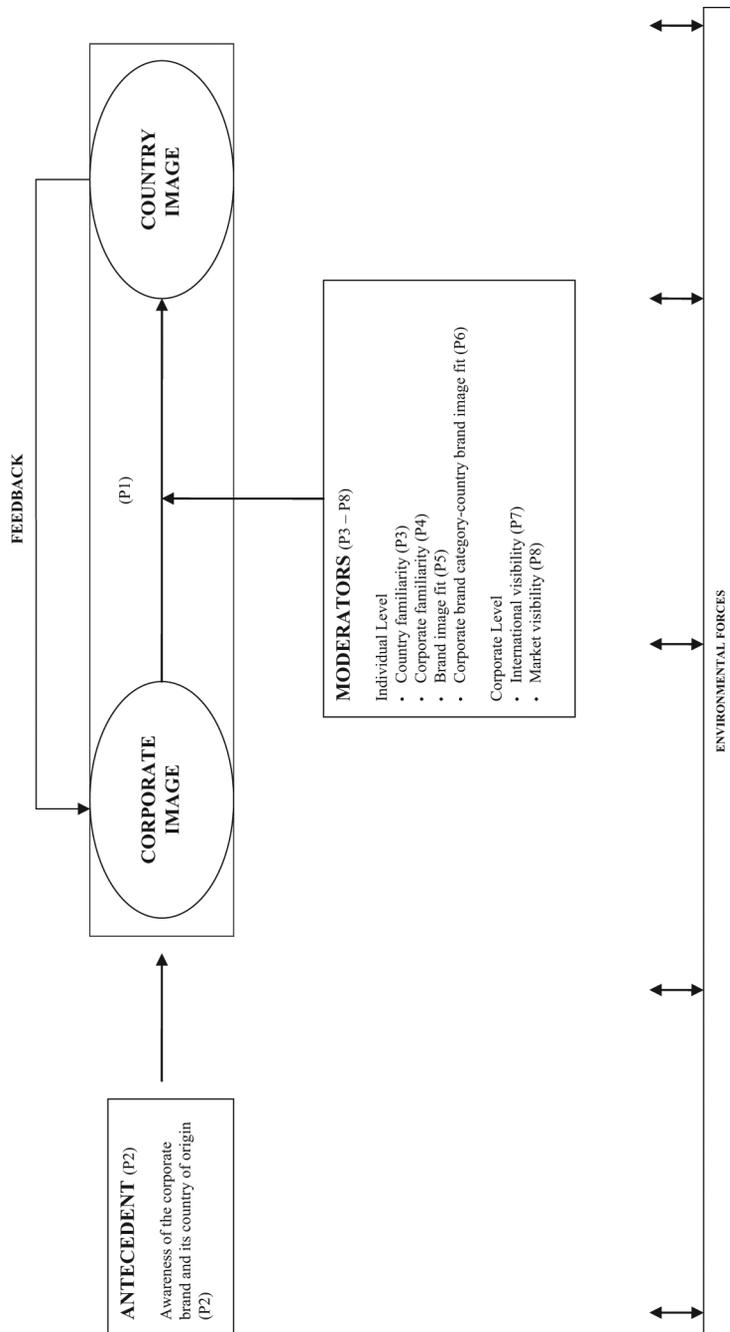
We have to highlight, however, that in some cases the internationalisation of the corporate brand may distance the corporate brand from associations with its COO. We argue that the influence of corporate image on country image will be stronger when firms operate in a large number of countries but also retain their association with their COO.

The last moderator relates to the market visibility of the corporate brand. Market presence is determined by the relative weighting of a brand in the market, measured in terms of market share (Noya, 2002). Balabanis and Diamantopoulos (2008) also add distribution intensity, advertising expenditure and presence in the media to refer to market visibility. In line with the previous argument, the company's visibility within a specific market influences the image transfer from the corporate brand to its COO. This leads us to formulate the final proposition:

- P8. The positive influence of corporate image on country image is moderated by the market visibility of the corporate brand.

### *Summary*

Our conceptual framework (Figure 1) shows that the influence of corporate image on country image can be moderated by the aforementioned four individual and two corporate level variables. Building on COO, image transfer and branding literature, the framework also includes awareness of the corporate brand and its COO as an antecedent condition (e.g. Samiee, 1994; Keller, 2003, 2008). Moreover, a feedback mechanism from country image to corporate image is depicted, taking into account the mutual influence between the two image constructs, as discussed in extant literature (e.g. Dowling, 1994, 2001; Cerviño, 2002). Last, mirroring corporate image formation models (e.g. Markwick and Fill, 1997; Stuart, 1999; Balmer and Gray, 2000), we acknowledge that environmental forces affect and are affected by this influence.



**Figure 1.**  
Conceptual model on the  
influence of corporate  
image on country image

### Conclusions

The effect of COO on product perceptions (COO effect) is one of the most analysed fields in international marketing. Recently, corporate branding frameworks also increasingly highlight the influence of country image on corporate image. However, the other side of the relationship, the influence that corporate image may exert on country image, has received limited attention. Dinnie (2008), therefore, bemoans the scarcity of studies examining the role of corporate brands in the development of the COO brand. To address this gap, we contribute to corporate and place branding theory by offering a conceptual framework that sheds more light on the influence of corporate image on country image. We identify antecedents and moderators that affect this influence, and offer a series of relevant propositions grounded on previous conceptual and empirical studies in product, corporate and place branding, image transfer and COO literature.

In developing our framework we have focused on theory development rather than theory testing. We trust that our propositions will serve as the basis to stimulate empirical studies and move this field of research forward. We urge researchers to test our propositions across different companies and countries. Yet, a series of possible challenges need to be considered. First, researchers need to ensure that the antecedent condition is met (that respondents are aware of the corporate brand and its COO) when testing our propositions in practice. One way forward would be to conduct a pre-test to select corporate brands that are well known to the population under study and for which consumers are aware of the COO. This could also be achieved through a free association technique to reveal the corporate brands that come to individuals' mind when they think of a specific country. A second challenge is that country image is a broad construct that is determined by a wide range of factors. Individuals may have a schema for a country that is influenced by many elements and, therefore, it may be challenging to measure the impact of a single factor (the image of a corporate brand) on the mental network of associations linked to that country.

However, our framework also raises a series of opportunities. For instance, the dynamic nature of the image construct suggests that the influence of corporate image on country image as depicted in our framework may change over time. Therefore, future studies may seek to track this influence through the use of longitudinal data. Also, in some cases, such as the USA, the image of a country is unthinkable without the influence of its companies, and consequently, the effect size will be larger than in other countries where corporations may not play such a determinant role. Last, but not least, further research may incorporate additional determinants that shape country image, in order to assess the relative impact of corporate image on country image against other factors.

Our study also has several implications for practice. If a company aims to take a proactive approach in nation branding and act as a country-brand ambassador, it should convey its provenance through its branding strategy. The degree of association of a corporate brand with its COO is largely determined by the branding strategy of the company (Keller, 1993). If a company plays up its COO, consumers will be more likely to establish a link between the two entities and therefore, corporate image is more likely to impact country image. Furthermore, nation branding managers and policy makers that may wish to choose companies to promote their countries need to consider not only the branding and communication strategy adopted by the company but also the market presence of that company and the level of brand image similarity that individuals perceive between the corporate brand and the country. The degree of fit may reinforce or change existing country associations.

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