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**Role of brand and country of manufacture in the consumer  
decisions among young people from Poland and Czech Republic –  
results of empirical study**

## **Abstract**

This paper presents the phenomenon of “Country of Origin” which is considered as one of the main factors determining customers’ knowledge about the brand or type of the product. Many consumers take into account this criteria buying specific type of products, e.g. Swiss watches, Japanese cars or French wines. But the globalization and internationalization processes of companies in contemporary world cause the formation of hybrid products. It causes questions for the customers which have problems with recognizing product’s country of origin and become confused because they don’t know if, for example, the product with the French label but made in China is of the same quality as product made in France.

The main purpose of this paper is to present problems mentioned above and to show the results of empirical researches conducted by the author of this paper among young people in Poland and Czech Republic.

Results of the empirical researches show that product’s origin isn’t the most important factor in making decisions of young consumers (in Poland and Czech Republic). But the same consumers consider stereotypes according to the type of product and its country of manufacture. That’s why the phenomenon of “Country of Origin” is so important in creation of marketing strategies (esp. promotion, brand, packaging) of international companies.

## **Keywords:**

Country of Origin, brand, cultural differences, young consumers, consumers’ choices

## Literature review

Country of origin (related with COO – *Country of Origin Effect*) is one of the main factors determining customers' knowledge about the brand or type of the product. Since many years it is one of the most often researched issues associated with consumer behavior existing on different markets (Heslop, Papadopoulos, Bourk, 1998, pp. 113-127; Verlegh, Steenkamp, 1999, pp. 521-546; Lee, Brinberg, 1995, pp. 286-291; Al-Sulaiti, Baker, 1998, pp. 150–199). COO<sup>1</sup> in short is defined as an impact (positive or negative) that product's country of origin has on consumer's quality evaluation of the product (Lee, Schaninger, 1996, pp. 233-254). In other words country of origin effect is an influence of particular country's image on opinion of the consumer about the products and brands that represents this country (Ryttel, 1999, p. 8). In literature there can be found other views which say that COO is consumers' attitude towards certain categories of the products made in particular countries which evaluate the quality of goods produced on the particular markets. This attitude is mainly based on (at least on the initial stage of knowledge concerning the products which originate from the particular countries) existing stereotypes (Bilkey, in: Papadopoulos, Heslop, 1993; Roth, Romeo, 1992, pp. 477-497).

„*Made in*” label attached to a product is closely related to country of origin effect. Consumers which take notice of country of origin and type of the product usually look for so-called positive match associated with - among other things - stereotypes and thus choose e.g. French wines, Japanese home electronics or German cars, convinced that types of the products which originate from the particular country present the highest quality. Also Khachaturian and Morganosky recon that consumers which take COO into consideration mainly focus on the quality of the particular products deriving from certain countries (for example the highest quality watches originate from Switzerland, wine, perfumes from France

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<sup>1</sup> In English literature exist also terms *COOL* (*Country of Origin Labeling*) or *COM* (*Country of Manufacture*).

and leather goods from Italy) (Khachaturian, Morganosky, 1999, pp. 21-30). Papadopoulos, Heslop, Bamossy and others also highlight the importance of the country of origin effect in context of consumer's decisions. Results of their researches show importance of this factor in buying process concerning products which originate from different countries (Heslop, Bamossy, 1991, pp. 283-294; Liefeld, Heslop, Papadopoulos, Wall, 1996, pp. 57-81).

The goal of this article is to present the complex problem related to origin of country effect and results of the research conducted in this field among young consumers from Poland and Czech Republic.

In presented matter many researches has been conducted describing, among others, origin of goods and different economic, demographic or cultural factors. The topic is still current and the new projects concerning changes in conditions and processes on the international market which include among others globalization and internationalization of rising number of companies, are being proceeded.

The selected review of the researches conducted so far in the presented field is shown below. For instance, research conducted by Wang and Lamb presents COO with reference to products that derive from developing countries. Authors don't distinguish the consumers' attitude towards particular product which originate from particular country but describe general consumers' attitude towards products made in countries less and more developed. The results show more positive attitude towards products (regardless of category) deriving from less developed countries than more developed ones (1983, pp, 71-84). The similar results were obtained by Papadopoulos and Heslop, which while describing activity in the year 1990 stated that in all of the European countries (among others Netherlands, France, Germany, Greece and Hungary) observed very positive attitude towards Japanese origin (country classified as one of the most developed countries). More positive attitude towards products made in highly developed countries observed while comparing the cars of the same brands

produced in Germany, Philippines or Mexico. Customers expected lower prices for the cars produced in Philippines and were ready to pay the higher price for the same cars produced in Germany (Johannson, Nebenzahl, 1986, pp. 101-126).

On the other hand research conducted by Verlegh and Steenkamp show the close relation between importance of the country of origin and level of development. In the less developed countries customers more often consider product's country of origin than in highly developed countries (1997, pp. 2136-2140; Iyer, Kalita, 1997, p. 7). Other researches show the relation between COO and demographical features of buyers. It plays part mostly in the group of older people, less educated and with conservative political point of view (Maheswaran, 1994, pp. 354-365; Leonidou, Hadjimarcou, Kaleka, Stamenova, 1999, pp. 126-142). Karcz shows relation between importance (from the customer's point of view) of the country of origin and level of its standardization (international range). With the increasing level of standardization the impact of country of origin on the customer's behavior decreases (Karcz, 2004, p. 251).

But the „traditional” description and meaning of COO becomes on the contemporary international market very unclear and confusing because of the fact that, for example *design* of many products is created in one country (usually it is the origin country where the headquarters is based), particular elements are produced in other countries (usually in places where lower costs can be obtained) and finally the product is assembled in whole in other country (Baker, Michie, 1995; Chao, 1993, pp. 291-306). It results a proliferation of hybrid products which means more than just one country involved in the production process (Han, Terpstra, 1988, pp. 235-255; Johansson, Nebenzahl, 1986, pp. 101-126). Bruzda writes about this situation as emerging denationalization of the product caused by deterritorialization of the production process where „Made in...” „lose its value” because in case of some products the label should say „Made in everywhere” (Bruzda, 2001). Research conducted by Ratliff

can be an example. Americans were asked to name the place where Volkswagen Fox is produced. The results show that 66% of those pooled stated that the cars are produced in Germany and only 8% of respondents mentioned Brazil where production of Volkswagen Fox really takes place (Ratliff, 1989, in: Thakor, Lavack, 2003, pp. 394-407).

Hybrid products are more and more often present on the global market, what's more it's production trend increases rapidly. It causes problems for the customers which have problems with recognizing product's country of origin and become confused because they don't know if the product with the French label but made in China is of the same quality as product made in France (Chao, 1993, pp. 291-306). In current economic situation where there are a lot of hybrid products there's observed a transformation of COO from the level of product's category (Swiss – cheese, watch, Japanese – electronics, German – car etc.) to the level of brand. The customers more often don't pay attention to „Made in” label but take into consideration the brand expecting the specific quality (Lee, Ganesh, 1999, pp. 18-39; Ammonini, Keogh, Sweeney, 1998, pp. 13-27; Zhang, 1996, pp. 50-68; Thakor, Kohli, 1996, pp. 27-42). In this connection the real country of origin becomes less important for the customers than it's brand and country associated with the product. Leclerc, Schmitt and Dubé conducted the research in the field of perceiving the products from the different countries. It turned out that for those pooled brand, knowledge concerning brand and the fact that it can be easily pronounced, remembered and adjusted (also the name of the product) to the language of the particular country is more important, than the product's country of origin (Leclerc, Schmitt, Dubé, 1994, pp. 263-270). The similar point of view present Thakor and Kohli who recon that in the era of internationalization and globalization of the companies COO is not a crucial factor any more when it comes to buying products by the consumers. They state that COO is being replaced with „origin of brand” defined as „a place, region or country to which it is related to” (Thakor, Kohli 1996, p. 27). In the opinion of these authors the place where

product was made (country of origin – „Made in...”) is less important than origin of the brand. They recon that Guinness won't become less Irish for average Englishman because of the fact that it was produced in London and not in Dublin (just like Toyota will always be Japanese although it is produced among others in Derby). Because of the changing situation on the market, COO will be predictably soon replaced with COOLE - Country of Origin Labeling Effect (Lim, O'Cass, 2001, pp. 120-136).

Changeability and complexity of presented matter influence scientist's interest for whom it becomes a subject of many international research projects. Besides described above researches where consumers are aware and know the origin of brand (but not necessarily know the country of origin where the product was made) there can be found many examples where buyers are not sure what's the origin of the product's brand. The companies very often take advantage of unawareness while creating marketing strategies. For instance in Canadian researches concerning consumer's opinion and attitude towards in the first experiment calculators with French-sounded label and in second experiment calculators with English-sounded label, those pooled preferred „English label”. English-sounded brand seemed to have something in common with the calculator's country (region) of origin. It turned out that for respondents, French name of a brand didn't associate with it's high quality (Thakor, Pacheco, 1997, pp. 15-30). This transformation of COOLE can be found since many years on many foreign markets, also on Polish one. Producers wanting to take an advantage of better perception of some foreign product categories (besides grocery) apply in their strategies foreign-sounded brands. Very often many customers don't realize what kind of products they buy and don't know if it's a domestic product or it originates from foreign country. Polish producers apply this strategy and very often use foreign-sounded brands (from an average Polish customer point of view) taking advantage of positive impact of country of origin effect. For example famous brand Gino Rossi (brand of shoes) which name imply Italian origin of

the company and the products. Not a lot of people know that headquarter of the company is based in Słupsk (Poland) and not in Italy (worth mentioning is that Gino Rossi is the founder of the company and a lot of designs come from Italy)<sup>2</sup>. Also in case of clothing brand - Reserved the English sound of the brand imply the foreign origin of the collection (as many people are convinced), but in fact Polish company - LPP is the owner of that brand. These products are another example of hybrids. Can they be named Polish? Assuming origin of the company as a main criterion in the definition of "Polish product" that products can be classified as Polish ones. But when it comes to production aspect clothes branded by Reserved are classified as foreign ones, especially as Chinese, Bengali or Indonesian because that's the place where production takes place. Top Secret, Americanos, Tatum or Carry are another examples of brands in Polish clothing branch which names doesn't indicate Polish origin (Bartosik-Purgat, Schroeder, in: Bilski, Kłysik-Uryszek, 2005, pp. 27-36). Next example of the research (conducted on the American market), concerning origin of the particular brands, shows Leclerc. American respondents pointed out fragrance brand – Egoiste, Frusen Gladje ice creams and Yoplait yoghurts as foreign brands which mainly originate from France and Great Britain. Only few knew these are American brands which belong to native companies. The main factor which „confused” American consumers was the pronunciation and foreign sound of the brands. However these products received high notes from these consumers for its origin which is a result of positive example of COO. For instance French yoghurts or perfumes are perceived as high quality products (Leclerc, Schmitt, Dubé, 1994, pp. 263-270). Such tactics including positive aspect of COO and resulting in boosting sale and interest in particular brand are very often applied by companies. The advert of Russian vodka Stolichnaya shown in American television made people thought that Smirnoff and Wolfschmidt also originate from Russia (Leclerc, Schmitt, Dubé, 1994, pp. 263-270).

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<sup>2</sup> There is (in Poland) a positive fit between leather products and Italian origin saying that shoes and products made from leather are the best quality when they are produced in Italy.

Companies which exist on developing (eastern) markets and want to enter western markets with its own label cope with the (problem of) COO and COOLE. Very often such activity leads to failure because not famous, very often hard to pronounce brand and unattractive country of origin results in lack of interest from the western consumers. This situation includes many Polish companies which were forced to sale their high quality products under foreign - known brand. In Polish clothing branch there can be found many examples like Vistula, Bytom or Próchnik. This companies sale their products and use recognized all over the world brands names like Pierre Cardin or Boss.

Above-mentioned problem concerning origin of the product and importance of the country of origin in the buying decisions process became one of the main subjects of the researches conducted on young people on Polish and Czech market. Methodology and research results are presented below.

### **Research Hypothesis**

Basing on the literature and observations of the young consumers in context of presented matter, the following hypothesis were advanced and verified.

**Hypothesis 1.** Country of origin is not the key factor determining young customers while shopping.

**Hypothesis 2.** Young customers consider brand as one of the main buying criterion.

**Hypothesis 3.** When making conscious buying decisions, young consumers don't follow the stereotypes concerning the particular category of the product and its country of origin.

### **Methodology of empirical research**

Empirical research, in the field of consumers' behavior concerning preferences regarding the country where particular categories of products are manufactured, was conducted in the year 2005-2007.

In the research, young consumers are defined as persons in age from 18 to 30 years old, who still study and very often depend financially on their parents as well as individuals who study and work at the same time, are financially independent and run independent households. The age range was extended to 30 years old persons on purpose because students from different European Universities have taken part in the research presented in the next part of the article. Because of different European education systems average age is also different in each country, e.g. in Germany it is definitely higher than in Poland or Portugal and Spain.

391 respondents from Poland and 149 from Czech who were students representing The Universities of Economics from Poland (Poznań, Gdańsk, Wrocław, Łódź) and Republic Czech University of Life Science (*Česká zemědělská univerzita v Praze*) – Faculty of Economics and Management took part in mentioned research.

In the survey a most classic type of non-random sample was used – purposeful selection. It means completely subjective and „convenient” choice of the entities which participated in the research, in hope of receiving the widest and complete information. An applied method has an impact on the results and its interpretation which means that the results shouldn't be generalized for the whole population but they can characterize the respondents' point of view.

The main element of the survey was the inquiry form including questions concerning among others country of origin of the particular products categories and the factors which are concerned while making buying decisions. The distributed questionnaire which was used in the research was the main method applied in the project. Besides that Individual in-depth

Interview method (in case of some of individuals) was used as an addition in order to gain more respondents. The particular persons (students, research workers) who had been suitably trained in the first place conducted the research with the use of drew up inquiry form which was the main research tool. After finishing the interview the research team and persons conducting the research were checking if the questionnaires were completely filled out.

## **Research results**

In the first part of the research respondents were asked to evaluate importance of the factors (price, country of origin, outward appearance – packaging, brand, salesman's recommendation, quality, friend's recommendation or advertising) which take into consideration while buying the products representing different categories, i.e. food, cosmetics, clothes/footwear, home electronics and cars. Detailed results of the research are presented in table 1.

Regardless of country and market, country of origin is not the most crucial factor taken into consideration by the consumers, and the research conducted among Polish and Czech consumers confirm this thesis. When it comes to product categories the place where products originate from matters the most for Polish and Czech customers in case of cars (2,13 and 2,2) and for Polish customers in case of home electronics (1,97). These are the products which are not classified as durable (FMCG) products in case of which the quality is not the key factor. The country of origin is usually related to the quality which is a very important factor in case of these two kinds of products which are usually expensive. Research shows slight differences concerning this two product categories. When buying home electronics Poles first consider it's quality, brand, price, friend's recommendations, packaging, origin of the country and finally salesman's recommendations. The similar order characterize Czech group which pointed out quality, price, brand, friend's and salesperson's recommendations as

a main criterions concerned while buying home electronics. Less important is the product's country of origin, its outward look and enticing advert.

**Table 1. Choice criteria used by young Poles and Czech Republic in context of purchasing particular product's categories**

**(arithmetic average)**

*Criterion - not important*

*Criterion – more or less important*

*Criterion - important*

*1*

*2*

*3*

<b>Products</b>	<b>Food</b>		<b>Cosmetics</b>		<b>Clothes/ Footwear</b>		<b>Home electronics</b>		<b>Cars</b>	
<b>Criterion</b>	<b>PL</b>	<b>CZ</b>	<b>PL</b>	<b>CZ</b>	<b>PL</b>	<b>CZ</b>	<b>PL</b>	<b>CZ</b>	<b>PL</b>	<b>CZ</b>
<b>Price</b>	2,29	2,17	2,6	2,25	2,37	2,49	2,47	2,46	2,53	2,52
<b>Country of origin</b>	1,54	1,63	1,35	1,46	1,5	1,52	1,97	1,74	2,13	2,2
<b>Outward appearance (packaging)</b>	1,8	1,9	1,96	1,96	2,25	1,84	1,98	1,93	2,27	1,84
<b>Brand</b>	1,89	1,76	2,7	2,28	2,16	2,1	2,6	2,55	2,58	2,57
<b>Salesman's recommendation</b>	1,42	1,59	1,57	1,66	1,35	1,55	1,95	2,09	1,75	1,99
<b>Quality</b>	2,7	2,78	2,73	2,6	2,7	2,7	2,73	2,87	2,68	2,81
<b>Friend's recommendation</b>	1,9	2,15	2,0	2,13	1,65	2,13	2,05	2,4	1,99	2,35
<b>Advertising/promotion</b>	1,44	1,49	1,62	1,55	1,34	1,4	1,49	1,5	1,46	1,62

Source: Author, based on the results of the research (conducted in 2005-2007).

In the case of buying a car Polish group pointed out the most important criteria in the similar order as in case of buying home electronics. When it comes to Czech group, they concern quality, brand, price, friend's recommendations and country of origin in the first place, then salesman's recommendations, look and advertising.

In case of other product categories the results, concerning country of origin, slightly distinguish between both groups of respondents. Poles a little bit more than Czechs consider country of origin when it comes to home electronics. In case of other products' categories Poles attach less importance to country of origin than Czechs. Generally all respondents (Poles as well as Czechs) while shopping consider other factors which are more important than the country of origin.

In case of food - quality, price and friend's recommendations (Polish and Czech group) turned out to be more crucial. Very interesting is the fact that in case of conscious choosing grocery's country of origin all respondents chose domestic products, Poles – Polish, Czechs – Czech (see table 3).

When it comes to cosmetics in following order: quality, brand, price, friend's recommendations, packaging, adverts and salesperson's recommendations are more important for Poles than the country of origin. Czechs while buying cosmetics similarly pay attention to quality, price, brand, friend's recommendations and packaging. When it comes to clothes/footwear most important for Poles is still quality, then price, packaging and finally brand or friend's recommendations. Czechs put quality, price, friend's recommendations and brand on the first place and doesn't pay attention to salesman's recommendations and ads.

It needs to be highlighted that all of the groups of the respondents don't put advert in the first place (factor comes in the last place in ranking) when it comes to their buying decisions. This situation may be caused by the fact that all groups of respondents are the students of Economic Universities who know adverts goals and how they are being created.

To sum up the above mentioned analysis concerning the importance young consumer's buying criterions, the first hypothesis which states that country of origin is not the key factor determining young customers while shopping can be acclaimed as true. Both groups which took part in the survey pointed out other factors than country of origin to be the crucial buying criterions. In case of all the product's categories, the most important turned out to be quality, price and brand (it should be added that Czechs much more than Poles take into account friends' opinions when buying). Among analyzed product categories, country of origin is of the great importance when it comes to cars and home electronics, however also in this case this factor is not the number one criterion.

The second hypothesis which assumes that young customers consider brand as one of the main buying criterion is false because in case of different product's categories and respondents, brand didn't come high in the ranking. Brand's positions in ranking among criterions of buying decisions were estimated and based on the level of importance rated by those respondents. The results are presented in table 2.

**Table 2 Brand's position in ranking among criterions concerning buying decisions**

<b>Country</b> <b>Type of the product</b>	<b>Poland</b>	<b>Czech Republic</b>
<b>Food</b>	4	5
<b>Cosmetics</b>	2	2
<b>Clothes/Footwear</b>	3	4
<b>Home electronics</b>	3	2
<b>Cars</b>	2	2

Source: Author, based on conducted empirical research (2005-2007).

On the basis of respondents analysis there can be stated that brand plays similar role both (crucial key) for Poles and Czechs. In the case of product categories brand is the most

important when it comes to cars and cosmetics, Poles as well as Czechs pointed out brand as the second crucial criterion in the buying process concerning mentioned types of products.

In the second part of the research respondents were asked to point out the countries which products they tend to (or would) buy in terms of distinguished product categories: food, cosmetics, clothing/footwear, home electronics and cars. This are the types of products which represent stereotypes showed in the theoretical part of the article. The following table shows the highest percentage results concerning answers of Polish and Czech respondents who pointed out the countries which products they would buy (if they had such choice)<sup>3</sup>.

**Table 3 Poles` and Czechs` preferences in terms of country of origin (particular product categories)**

Selected country  Type of the product	Country <i>(The highest number of selections)</i>	
	Poland	Czech Republic
	%	%
Food	Poland	Czech Republic
	61,4	73,7
Cosmetics	France	France
	56,5	56,6
Clothes/Shoes	Italy	Italy
	33,4	28,3
Home electronics	Japan	Japan
	69,3	65,7
Cars	Germany	Germany
	54,0	35,4

Source: Author, based on conducted empirical research (2005-2007).

Presented results show the level of patriotism characteristic for those respondents in case of food products because 61,4% of Polish respondents and 73,7% of pooled Czech tend to buy adequately Polish and Czech food. When it comes to cosmetics both groups of

<sup>3</sup> Selection range included following countries: Czech, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Spain, Netherlands, Japan, Germany, Portugal, USA, Great Britain, Italy, Poland and others.

respondents pointed France as the country where the best cosmetics and perfumes come from. In case of clothing/footwear products, Poles and Czechs tend to choose Italian design in this category. Among all respondents unanimity in case of home electronics and cars can be observed. Poles as well as Czechs if they had an opportunity they would go for tv set or hi fi stereo made in Japan and car produced in Germany.

Analysis of above mentioned results in terms of existing international stereotypes which consider different categories of products originating from particular countries (French cosmetics, German cars, Japanese home electronics and Italian footwear and clothing are the best) shows that those respondents are the example of buyers which take into consideration country of origin effect. However, while comparing the results the little discrepancies can be seen because in the first task country of origin wasn't pointed out as the most important criterion in case of all product categories. The results of the first task reflect the reality which is influenced by other factors than desire of possession which are: buyers' financial status (price as the main criterion of choice), esthetics values or influence of reference group.

The results of the second task show that third hypothesis stating that while making conscious buying decisions young consumers don't follow the stereotypes concerning the particular category of the product and it's country of origin, is not true in terms of all the product categories and consumers which took part in the survey.

## **Conclusions**

Summing up the results of the conducted research showed that the most important criterion of choice for those respondents regardless of product' type, is its quality and price. These two elements were perceived as "high quality" and "low price". On the basis of this two factors analysis there can be stated that high quality products not very often have low prices (Polish grocery products are the exception which can be seen in comparison of the

quality and price level of Polish products with western ones), there is usually an inverse dependence which means the lower product's price is the lower quality the products has. The importance of the low price in buying decisions process may be the result of financial status of the respondents which belong to young consumer segment.

The characteristic of Polish and Czech young consumer in terms of buying preferences, different types of the products and countries of origin can be based on the results of the conducted research and state that:

- Polish buyer rather buys:

- Polish food;
- French cosmetics;
- Italian shoes;
- Japanese home electronics;
- and German cars

- Czech buyer rather buys:

- Czech food;
- French cosmetics;
- Italian shoes and clothes;
- Japanese home electronics;
- and German cars.

The analysis of the results shows that company's endeavors (presented in the first part of an article) intended to use positive adjustment of the product category and country of origin (e.g. Gino Rossi footwear) are justified. Thus strategies which use country of origin effect are more legitimated. Companies' promotion activity is the field on which this kind of information may be the most efficiently used. For instance highlighting the Italian origin of the advertised footwear will have a positive influence on the feedback from Polish market,

also perfume brand with the French sound or German reliability shown in the car advert should be highlighted on every market that has been analyzed. Respondents which took part in the survey much more often consider other product's attributes (e.g. quality, price, brand) than country of origin and that's why thanks to right brand creation, logo or name of the product consumers positive attitude towards product can be established.

To sum up the above mentioned analysis, the country of origin effect is very important especially in case of creating the marketing strategy on the foreign markets. The acknowledge of consumer's attitude towards the country where product is produced allows applying right tactic in case of positive and negative attitude. Highlighting the country of origin in case of positive attitude and avoiding or adapting in case of negative attitude (example of Reserved and Americanos on the Polish market).

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