**From branded exports to traveler imports: building destination image on the factory floor in South Korea**

1. **Introduction**

Country image constitutes a crucial factor in international marketing, as notions, stereotypes and ideas about countries and their products continue to be a pervasive factor in consumer judgment and decision making (Zeugner-Roth & Diamantopolous, 2009). The apparent underlying assumption that the country-of-origin effect acts as a phenomenon of relevance to marketing only in the direction of country-to-good has recently been questioned (White, 2012). Indeed, country image not only affects the evaluation of goods from a country. Goods, brands and services that are marketed as having a particular origin do in turn also exert an effect upon the image of the country with which they are associated (White, 2012).

The implication is that there exists an oscillatory influence between brands, products and services that goes beyond mere co-dependence between brands. It therefore follows that the image of products, services and brands associated with a particular country is defined in part by the country’s image (Bilkey and Nes, 1982; Keller, 1993; Verlegh and Steenkamp; 1999). Similarly, a country’s image is defined in part by the aggregate image of the products, services and brands associated with the country (White, 2012). Indeed the nature of places, in the phenomenological sense, is generally understood as contingent on the meaning attributed to them (Tuan, 1977). The oscillatory mechanism involved derives from the notion that consumers arrive at a summative value judgment, or attitude, through a weighting of the aggregate sum of associations held towards the object are evaluating (Keller, 1993). This summative value judgment, or attitude (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1977; Ajzen, 2001), is never static but always in flux, such that the dynamics of meaning does not follow a linear transfer path but rather moves as in a pendulum. In other words, the meaning derived from an association to a country does not rest statically with, for instance, a product, service or brand but rather meshes with a pre-extant meaning attributed to the object. This new summative meaning then transfers back to become a co-defining element of the country image.

At a superficial level, the oscillatory nature of meaning through association sheds light on a co-dependence between image and commerciality. Specialization and the formation of clusters constitute a particularly relevant area in which an individual firm and its image can have a large impact on a country’s long-term economic development. But this particular case often and also operates in places on the sub-national level such as provinces, states, cities and regions. In the case of countries, it is perhaps more reasonable to assume that the firms, products and brands perceived as being from a particular country, play a role in the attitude formation towards the country as a whole and in various settings. In other words, place achieves an extended relevance by transcending commerciality of goods to extend into service-related venues of which tourism is one expression.

On another level, this paper resonates with White (2012) by questioning the apparent underlying assumption that the country-of-origin effect only constitutes a phenomenon of relevance to marketing in the direction of country-to-good. Whatever the nature of commercial relevance (goods, services, places, persons), their brand marketing as expressed in having a particular origin also exerts an effect upon the image perception of the country with which they are associated (ibid) also referred to as Product-Country Image (PCI). In other words, the evaluation of commercial relevance based on the particular country origin also affects the country image to in turn affect behavior (cf. Ajzen and Fishbein, 1977; Keller, 1993). As such, image provides information and knowledge cues to facilitate decision making processes (Gertner & Kotler, 2002). This paper postulates that in the case of tourists’ decision making and behavior, under study here, country image as expressed in their Product-Country Image (PCI) ultimately impacts their visiting intentions to the destination. Succinctly, this study proposes that any attempt to relate PCI with the image of a destination as perceived by tourists (Tourism Destination Image- TDI) requires the testing of a model that explicitly incorporates attitudinal theoretical constructs for product country images to shed light on visiting intentions to a place. In that sense, through a survey that encompasses the product evaluation, perception of country image and visit intention of South Korea by Americans, this study bridges the gaps revealed by missed opportunities in the literature to draw together the fields of PCI and TDI (see Hankinson, 2004; Mossberg and Kelppe, 2005) and previses the integrative models of Nadeau, Heslop, O’Reilly and Luk (2008) and of Elliot, Papadopoulos and Kim (2010) with a path model that engages the evaluation of theoretical constructs of PCI that pertain to origin effects with those of TDI, *in the reverse*. That is, to eventually integrate the various instances of the commercial relevance of origin to place image.

1. ***Country Image: expressing the commercial relevance of place image***

In marketing literature, country image has been operationalized differently depending upon the context and scope of the research. From a general standpoint, country image refers to consumers’ overall mental maps and opinions about a country based on the information and associations attached to the country (Kotler, Haider, & Rein, 1993). These country-specific knowledge structures and associations include “representative products, economic and political maturity, historical events and relationships, traditions, industrialization and the degree of technological virtuosity” (Bannister & Saunders, 1978, p. 562).

Naturally, when country image is viewed along with products, the term reflects the relationship between a country and products from (or made in) that country (Hooley, Shipley, & Krieger, 1988; Li, Fu, & Murray, 1998; Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002) or more accurately, a perceived relationship between a product and a country (Magnusson et al., 2011). Consumers often evaluate the quality of the product based on these country-product associations (Knight & Calantone, 2000; Laroche, Papadopopoulos, Heslop & Mourali, 2005) and prefer the product from the country that they perceive favorably (van Ittersum, Candel, & Meulenberg, 2003). Certainly, perceptions and generalizations that are made about a country by relating products to the country reinforce PCI. According to Nebenzahl, Jaffe and Lambert (1997), PCI not only provides people with images in their evaluation of the country’s brands and products but also ultimately influences their decision making relating to purchase from that country. In order to embrace the multidimensionality and distinctiveness of the country-image construct (Zeugner-Roth and Diamantopolous, 2009; Laroche, Papadopoulos, Heslop and Mourali, 2005), and by extrapolation, this reasoning should also apply to the purchase of tourism products and offerings from that country.

According to Nadeau et al. (2008), an explanation of the possible effect of both product- and country-images on people’s attitude towards the country and its products is in fact embedded within PCI theory. Read and dissected in reverse, the implication therefore is that country image is influenced by product image. This is certainly not farfetched since for example, fashion firms constantly seek to connect their brands to fashion-centered countries such as France and Italy. Fashion firms use these countries’ images as the cradle of style makers and trend setters (Amine, 2008; Hauge, Malmberg, & Power, 2009). There subsequently exists a reciprocal relationship between country image and product image (Jansson & Power, 2010). The implication for the above extrapolation that underlies this paper is that not only country names help consumers judge products and brands in their evaluation and decision making processes, but also that the perception of the country image(s) is affected by the product image it conveys (White 2012). For example, just as “being South Korean” infers meaning to the brand Samsung, the idea that Samsung is South Korean also infers meaning to the understanding of the country South Korea.

A country image effect on consumer behavior has been a popular research topic in marketing, but the term has not been uniformly defined (Zeugner-Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). And yet, a conceptual construct of exploration that is common to both fields of PCI and TDI is place. Place is broadly defined here to refer to a geopolitical entity that includes country, state, province and region. Place image as a concept is central to theories in place branding and marketing and yet, as Elliot and Papadopoulos (2010) lament, its complexity and theoretical implications for both PCI and TDI have not yet been fully circumscribed and thus need more scrutiny. Given the premise in this study of the oscillatory nature of the influences between relevance of commerciality (from goods to services) and image, the theoretical discussion necessitates navigation between PCI and TDI through their initial stage of product perception to the final effects (of image) on attitude formation towards a place as expressed in behavior such as touristic intention to visit that place. Furthermore, if the image of a place has a significant influence on consumer behavior, the theoretical shortcut between PCI and TDI should then lie in attitude theory (Nadeau et al., 2008). Laroche et al. (2005), Papadopoulos, Heslop, & Bamossy (1990), Parameswaran & Pisharodi (1994) and Zeugner-Roth & Diamantopoulos, (2009) recognize that consumer attitude is the most appropriate means to clarify the operationalization of country image as it helps conceptualizing and measuring country image. While attitude is the composite of cognitive, affective, and conative responses to the object, the first two independently affect the last (Liska, 1984). This study defines and operationalizes country image as the summation of consumers’ cognitive (beliefs) and affective (emotional) responses (to PCI) toward a particular country, which leads to certain behaviors regarding the country (conative response), including the desire to interact with the country through visitation.

**2.1 *Country Brand Image through Products***

Succinctly, consumers evaluate a product based on the factors associated with the product (Szybillo & Jacoby, 1974), which leads them to form a summative judgment (attitude) toward the product; a judgment that ranges from good to bad or pleasant to unpleasant (Ajzen 2001). In the context of country-of-origin effect, a country functions as one important factor that helps consumers form a judgment toward a product. To many, country image affects consumers’ evaluation and attitude toward the product from that country (e.g., Han, 1989; Laroche, Papadopoulos, Heslop, & Mourali, 2005; Zeugner-Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009; Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). Amine (2008) claims that the impact of country image is identified across different product categories such as hedonic (e.g., apparel) and utilitarian products (e.g., automobiles and cell phones). However, because other countries easily copy the features of these products, brands have been considered to be a major tool for product differentiation (Gertner & Kotler, 2002). But as Han and Terpstra (1988) assert, the influence of country image on consumer product evaluation and attitude is often greater than a brand name. It is subsequently, only a short step to reasonably assume that firms, products and brands perceived as constituents of a particular country play a role in the attitude formation toward the country as a whole in various settings including visit intentions. To that extent, the emerging notion that a reverse effect may exist in the relationship between product- and country-image perceptions is comforted. That is, consumers’ perception of country image may be influenced by their perception of the product from that particular country (Zevedo, 2004; Sun & Paswan, 2011; White, 2012) and their perception of product quality is one of the important determinants in shaping country image (Sun & Paswan, 2011). The reputation of product quality or company’s craftsmanship expressed as constitutive competitive assets in the combination of brand name and significance enhances the image of the country with which the brand, product or company is associated (Loo & Davies, 2006) in an increasing number of contexts (Aaker, 1991) including tourism and travel. The implication is that a co-branding strategy exists between the country and its products as an effective marketing practice for brand positioning and communication of both the country and products in an increasingly competitive global marketplace (Balabanis and Diamantopolous, 2004; White, 2012).

This product-country co-branding strategy is part of the conscious branding effort by a country to attract for example investments, skills and tourists (Gertner & Kotler, 2002). As Tourism constitutes one of the most relevant commercial activities in the contemporary global economy (Ashley, De Brine, Lehr, & Wilde, 2007), branding a country as a tourism destination (Zevedo, 2004) requires that the destination image to be constructed and conveyed, ultimately influences consumer intention to visit the place (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Kim & Richardson, 2003). In that sense, the proposition of a model of evaluation of these constitutive elements of place branding (Anholt, 2004) therefore requires an integrative approach that reconciles the role that products of a particular country could play, through the creation of favorable country image, in determining the attitude of potential tourists towards a destination (evaluation) as expressed in their visiting intentions. This is done here by relating American consumers’ attitude towards South Korean products to their summative evaluation as expressed in their visiting intention to that country. As an expression of the different levels involved in the summative evaluation in consideration here, the building of hypotheses leverages on the above discussion and is subsequently gradual.

**2.2 Hypotheses Development**

**2.2.1 *Product Evaluation to Product Attitude***

There is a general consensus that consumers form their attitude toward a product based on their evaluation of the product in various contexts (Erickson, Johansson, & Chao 1984; Manrai, Lascu, & Manrai 1998). Knight and Calantone (2000) found that U.S. and Japanese consumers formed favorable attitudes toward a product when they perceive the product to be reliable and of good quality. Carter (2009) came to a similar conclusion with U.S. consumers by demonstrating a positive link between product evaluation and product attitude. More recently, Lee, Lee, and Garrett (2013) confirmed that consumers’ satisfactory judgment on product functionality leads to their positive attitude toward the product. In view of the earlier theoretical discussion of the possible linkage between consumers’ attitude toward a country’s product and visiting intention to that country through an evaluation of that country’s image, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Consumers’ evaluation of South Korean products has a positive impact on their attitude toward the country’s products and offerings.

**2.2.2 *Product Evaluation to Country Image***

White (2012) posited that consumers determine the image of a country based on their evaluation of the product from that country and validated this proposition across different product categories and countries of different levels of economic development. Sun and Paswan (2011) found that the positive relationship between product evaluation and country image - people affect and desired interaction - was supported for both hedonic products (backpacks) and utilitarian products (Color TVs) among U.S. consumers (developed country) and Chinese consumers (developing country). Although their study did not include country belief as one of country image components, several researchers have established country image as a composite of country belief, people affect, and desired interaction (e.g., Heslop & Papadopoulos, 1993; Laroche et al., 2005, Papadopoulos et al., 1990; Zeugner-Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). Based on these theoretical arguments from extant literature, this paper postulates the following hypotheses:

H2a: Consumers’ evaluation of South Korean products has a positive impact on their

beliefs toward South Korea.

H2b: Consumers’ evaluation of South Korean products has a positive impact on their

affection toward the people of South Korea.

H2c: Consumers’ evaluation of South Korean products has a positive impact on their

desire to interact with South Korea.

**2.2.3 *Product Attitude to Country Image***

Consumer attitude toward the product from a specific country is one of the important determinants affecting the image of the country (Martin & Eroglu, 1993). In a similar vein, consumers’ perception of a country’s brand image is positively influenced by their positive experience with the country’s cultural products (Jun & Cho, 2006). Kang and Yang (2010) demonstrated that the reputation of South Korean corporations enhances consumers’ attitudes toward its products and the country, indicating a possible positive relationship between South Korea and its products (made in South Korean factories by South Korean companies). While there is no indication of studies that have yet to explicitly examine the relationship between product attitude and country image, the literature referred to and the view of country image as made of the components of country belief, people affect, and desired interaction provides a comfortable leverage for this study to propose that:

H3a: Consumers’ attitude toward South Korean products has a positive impact on their beliefs toward South Korea.

H3b: Consumers’ attitude toward South Korean products has a positive impact on their affection toward the people of South Korea.

H3c: Consumers’ attitude toward South Korean products has a positive impact on their desire to interact with South Korea.

**2.2.4 *Country Belief and People Affect to Desired Interaction***

Many researchers have incorporated cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions of attitude from attitude theory to explore country belief, people affect, country image and desired interaction with the country, respectively (Heslop & Papadopoulos, 1993; Laroche et al., 2005; Zeugner-Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). Zeugner-Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009) propose that consumers’ belief and affection toward a country and its people independently influence their desires to interact with them based on a two-component view of attitude (Liska, 1984). By investigating Belgium consumers’ perception toward the country image of Denmark and Spain, Brijs (2006) empirically confirmed that the positive causal paths from country belief and people affect to desired interaction exist. This paper advances the following hypotheses based on preceding works on interrelationships among the three components of country image:

H4: Consumers’ belief toward South Korea has a positive impact on their desire to interact with South Korea.

H5: Consumers’ affection toward South Koreans has a positive impact on their desire to

interact with South Korea.

**2.2.5 *Desired Interaction to Visit Intention***

According to Crompton (1979) consumers’ need for social interactions is a major explanation for how they (consumers) become tourists. Uysal and Jurowski (1994) confirm that consumers decide to visit a certain place or destination to facilitate social interaction. More recently, several researchers established a positive relationship between desired interaction and intention to visit a foreign country in various tourism settings. Chen and Chen (2011) argue that a desire to interact with local people and cultures motivate consumers to participate in international volunteer tourism. Similarly, when selecting a foreign country for study abroad, students place much importance on social factors such as interacting with people in the host country and learning about its culture (Nyaupane, Paris, & Teye, 2011). In view of these arguments, this paper subsequently posits:

H6: Consumers’ desire to interact with South Korea has a positive impact on their intention to visit South Korea.

Figure 1 presents the proposed research model illustrating the causal relationships among constructs of interest to this study.

“Insert Figure 1 here”

1. **Method**

**3.1 *Measures***

The survey instrument to test the proposed model in this study comprised of three sections. The first one measured how consumers perceived the image of South Korean products in general. The adoption of a “global” evaluation of general products rather than specific products or brands from a particular country has been justified by several researchers (Crawford & Garland, 1988; Laroche et al., 2005). A three-item semantic differential scale used in Bluemelhuber, Carter & Lambe’s study (2007) was adapted to examine consumers’ attitude toward South Korean products. Consumers’ evaluation of South Korean products was measured by six items adapted from the previous study (Klein, Ettenson, & Morris, 1998). The measurement used the seven-point Likert scales anchored with “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (7).

The second section measured how consumers perceived the image of South Korea. Laroche et al., (2005) approached country image through consumers’ cognitive, affective, and conative perceptions toward the country. These perceptions were reflected in consumers’ country beliefs (cognitive), people affection (affective), and desired interactions (conative) and were measured through three semantic differential scales, each consisting of three items. This study used the same scales to assess the image of South Korea.

The last section of the survey examined consumers’ intention to visit South Korea with a two-item seven-point Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree, 7 – strongly agree) adapted from a behavioral intention study by Davis, Bagozzi, & Warshaw (1989). The demographic information of participants in the survey was also examined in this section.

**3.2 *Sampling and Data Collection***

This study collected data using the online survey from a consumer panel of an online research firm. The criteria for survey participants were U.S. male and female consumers aged 18 years and above, and the sample size was set to 500. Korean-Americans were excluded from sampling to avoid any favorable bias toward South Korea and its products. Also any incomplete surveys were excluded. Thus, no missing data were identified.. No missing data were identified as the online survey was designed. The sample comprised of 311 females and 189 males. The mean age was 46.5 years. Various sample size testing methods were referenced to test the adequacy of the sample size. Siddiqui (2013) and Stevens (2002) recommended that 15 cases per indicator as a cutoff sample size. Westland (2010) suggested the following equation, n > 50*r*2 – 450*r* + 1100 where n is sample size and *r* is the ratio of indicators to latent variables, to identify the minimum sample size. The present study’s sample size of 500 satisfies the lower bound of the sample size for structural equation modeling.

**3.3 *Analysis***

This study used Cronbach’s alpha to evaluate the internal reliability of scale items and computed the correlations and descriptive statistics of each construct. A two-step approach recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) was employed to evaluate (1) the reliability and validity of the measurement model with Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA); and (2) the proposed research model illustrating the hypothesized relationships among constructs with the structural equation modeling (SEM) technique. The overall model fit was assessed by Kline’s (2005) recommendation which includes Chi-square (χ2), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Standardized RMR (SRMR). SPSS 18.0 and LISREL 8.80 were used for the analysis.

1. **Results**

**4.1 *Measurement Model Testing***

The reliability and validity of the measurement model were tested using confirmatory factor analysis. One item from the product evaluation scale was excluded from the analysis due to a low squared multiple correlation (Hooper, Coughlan, & Mullen, 2008). The fit statistics met the suggested cutoff values (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Steiger, 2007) and confirmed an excellent model fit: *χ2* = 394.24 with 137 *df* at *p*-value < 0.001; RMSEA of 0.063; CFI of 0.99; and SRMR of 0.32. Cronbach’s alpha for each construct was in the range of 0.89 to 0.98, and factor loadings ranged from 0.73 to 0.98 with *p*-values < 0.001. The composite reliability (CR) ranged from 0.89 to 0.98, and the average variance extracted (AVE) ranged from 0.73 to 0.95. The results of the measurement model and descriptive statistics are presented in Tables 1 and 2, respectively.

“Insert Tables 1 and 2 here”

**4.2 *Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing***

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was performed to evaluate the proposed research model and hypotheses. The overall fit indices indicated a good model fit: χ2 = 470.53 with 142 *df at* *p*-value < 0.001; RMSEA of 0.069; CFI of 0.99; and SRMR of 0.052. All proposed paths in the research model were statistically significant. The standardized path coefficients were shown in Table 3.

Consumer evaluation of South Korean products had a positive impact on consumer attitude toward the products, supporting Hypothesis 1 (β = 0.71, *p* < 0.001). It also positively affected consumer beliefs toward South Korea, supporting H2a (β = 0.62, *p* < 0.001), consumer affection toward its people, supporting H2b (β = 0.41, *p* < 0.001), and consumer desires to interact with the country, supporting H2c (β = 0.13, *p* < 0.01).

With regard to the relationships between consumer attitude toward the product and the country image, the results supported the hypothesized relationships. Consumer attitude toward South Korean products had a positive impact on consumer beliefs toward South Korea (H3a: γ = 0.14, *p* < 0.001), consumer affection toward its people (H3b: γ = 0.37, *p* < 0.001) and consumer desires to interact with the country (H3c: γ = 0.18, *p* < 0.001).

Both consumer beliefs toward South Korea and consumer affection toward South Koreans increased their desires to interact with the country. Thus, H4 (γ = 0.21, *p* < 0.001) and H5 (γ = 0.47, *p* < 0.001) were supported respectively. Lastly, consumer desires to interact with South Korea positively affected their intentions to visit the country. Thus, H6 was supported (γ = 0.68, *p* < 0.001).

“Insert Figure 2 and Table 3 here”

1. **Discussion**

**5.1 *From positive attitude to products to intention to visit***

Countries create, maintain, and enhance their images through various resources. Such resources include countries’ inherited and natural assets (e.g., beautiful scenery, rich culture and traditions, or favorable weather) or man-made assets (e.g., products, events, people, or technologies) (Kotler, Haider, & Rein, 1993). While early studies on country image centered more on inherited and natural assets, the focus of the recent studies have shifted to man-made assets (e.g., Kang & Yang, 2010; Lee, Toth, & Shin, 2008; Sun & Paswan, 2011; White, 2012).

The present research conceptualized country image as consumers’ cognitive and affective responses toward a particular country, which lead to their desired interaction with the country (Laroche al., 2005; Zeugner-Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). It proposed that products contribute to the creation of a country’s image with which the products are associated and that this country’s image positively impacts upon consumers’ intention to visit the country. Ten hypotheses were sequentially proposed to examine these relationships, and all were supported.

Consumers’ evaluation of the quality, design and value of South Korean products positively affected their attitudes toward the products; and indeed even the affection that consumers hold to the country in general can be demonstrated to have this influence on consumers’ attitudes (Chen, Matur & Maheswaran, 2014). This outcome was congruent with previous studies that demonstrated the positive association between consumers’ product evaluation and product attitude (Carter, 2009; Knight & Calantone, 2000; Lee et al., 2013). This study also came up with findings similar to those of Sun and Paswan (2011) and White (2012), which established a positive association between product evaluation and country image (with various products and countries). When consumers evaluated South Korean products positively, they hold favorable beliefs toward South Korea’s economic and technological advancement and educational level (country belief). Likewise, consumers’ positive evaluation of South Korean products led them to form an affection toward South Koreans (people affect) and to believe the country to be a good and ideal strategic partner (desired interaction).

As proposed, consumers’ attitudes toward South Korean products were positively related to:

1. Their beliefs about South Korea
2. Affections toward its people, and
3. Desires to interact with the country

These outcomes were parallel to findings of prior studies, which evidenced consumers’ attitude toward a country’s products as an important determinant of consumers’ attitude formation toward country image (Jun & Cho, 2006; Martin & Eroglu, 1993).

With regard to the interactions among components of country image, this research supported the two-component view of country image, that is, consumer belief about a country and affection toward its people together influence consumers’ desire to interact with the country (Brijs, 2006; Zeugner-Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). This study found consumers to be more willing to interact with South Korea when they believed the country to be economically and technologically advanced and its people to be well-educated, trustworthy, diligent, and likable.

It is thereby confirmed that consumers’ willingness to interact with South Korea was a significant indicator of their intentions to visit the country. This outcome was expected as the positive relationship between desired interaction with the country and visit intention has been established in various contexts (Chen & Chen, 2011; Nyaupane et al., 2011).

By situating the sequence in which a country like South Korea uses products as antecedents to eventually become a desirable tourist destination, this study complements Nadeau et al. (2008) who failed to emphasize the importance of sequence involved from product evaluation to image creation and visit intention. In the data presented herein, the predictive strength of the exogenous construct ‘product evaluation’ is high. The effects of reported quality evaluation and attitudes are significant to the extent that the connection (in this study) from the initial independent variable can be traced through several mediating steps (that include product image, country image formation, etc.) all the way to the visiting intention as the outcome variable. For historical reasons, South Korea constitutes a unique representation of how the image creation of a country is driven first by the evaluation of the quality of its products and brands to eventually create a country of origin effect on the intention to visit the country as a destination. Linking back to the idea that associations determine the nature of the place, here the associations to the country image of South Korea derived from being exposed to its products and brands associated to the country influence how South Korea as a destination is understood. At the same time, the idea of South Korea as a tourist destination affects how the products and brands are understood creating a sustained oscillation of meaning between these two dimensions of commercial relevance in which the country image of South Korea manifests itself.

But then, although it can be said that South Korea owes its rise to fame because of its success as an exporter first and tourist destination later, the method employed here cannot account for the historical sequence in which this happened. It rather simply links the two together. There is a good case to be made in the example of South Korea that industrial success in exports from factory floors did indeed precede the subsequent increase in visibility that contributed to its burgeoning success as a tourist destination.

Essentially, and simplistically, the outcome (visit intention) is the result of the meaning valence multiplied by meaning intensity (meaning valence x meaning intensity = visit intention). In other words, there is a multiple threshold that combines product visibility with product meaning to eventually affect the visiting intention outcome. The presentation of the product affects the visibility of the country to eventually impact the intention to visit the country through the creation and attribution of meaning to the country. It is essentially a country-of-origin effect working in reverse (inverse as used by White 2012).

1. **Final considerations**

The present research has significant theoretical implications as it clearly confirms the proposed model. In international marketing, it is believed that the image of a country influences consumer behavior toward the product from that particular country. An emerging notion of a country image-product relationship is that a reverse effect, products affecting country image, exists (Loo & Davies, 2006; Sun & Paswan, 2011; White, 2012). However, this reverse relationship still remains an understudied research topic and requires more empirical supports to receive scholarly attention in the field of international marketing. The findings in this study suggest that international marketing scholars may diversify their approaches to delve into country image effects.

Though the construct of country image has been a subject of much debate (Zeugner-Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009), there is nevertheless some agreement that attitude theory is an appropriate theoretical foundation to examine it (Parameswaran & Pisharodi, 1994; Zeugner-Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). By providing empirical evidence for the two-component view of country image (PCI and TDI) based on attitude theory, this study therefore adds value to the extant literature on country image constructs and contributes to the expansion of this research area.

Country image in the contexts of international marketing and tourism forms two research domains that have been examined independently of each other (Nadeau et al., 2008). However, some researchers have argued that these two domains are inter-related (Mossberg & Kleppe, 2005) as product-based country image (PCI) contributes to the creation of tourism-based country image (TDI), and attitude theory serves as a theoretical foundation to merge both country image concepts (Nadeau et al., 2008). By empirically demonstrating that product-based country image has a positive impact on country image which in turn increases consumers’ intention to visit the country, this study supports that country image in international marketing and tourism contexts are linked. Furthermore, the paper tentatively claims contribution to bridging the gap existing between the literatures in these two domains.

As products have positive impacts on consumers’ perceptions toward country image in this research, it is suggested that policy makers could cultivate country image and reputation through product image. This finding has practical implications for how a country should utilize its industries to improve country image and its competitiveness, especially in the tourism industry. With globalization, products travel across the globe in the form of imports and exports, and country image attached to these products travels together and is transferred to product users. The increasingly global consumers who are impressed by products of high-quality and superior-designs from a specific country thus show potentials to become visitors to that country. Therefore, a co-branding partnership between a country’s manufacturing industries and tourism industry is highly recommended. On the smaller scale of regions or cities, an inverse effect of products on places can be applied as well. Policy makers could develop and market region- or city-specific indigenous products or industry clusters to attract international visitors who wish to have product- or industry-related experiences.

1. ***Limitations and Future Research***

Consumers’ attitude toward a country’s products may vary depending on product categories. For example, South Korean car brands are perceived to be less favorable than their competitors from Europe and Japan. However, consumers consider South Korea as a producer of innovative and high-quality smart phones and electronic goods because of industry leaders such as Samsung and LG (Schultz and Maguire, 2013). Although the use of general products in this research has been justified by a group of scholars (Laroche et al., 2005), future research may approach to investigate the same topic with specific products to overcome the perceptual discrepancies consumers may hold toward various products from the same country. It will also help shed light on how this issue pertains to the development of a country’s image. Arguably, this topic is the central issue this paper has delved into, i.e. are successful exports a path to visibility for the country? Or do certain industries linked to particular product categories actually drive TDI? And to push it further, it would also be of value to examine whether notions of certain countries that are driven by ideas about their exports would take different forms in different cultural and developmental contexts. If so, does this evoke a divergence in effects on visiting intentions from those contexts? Finally, on a general level there is also room to see more cross-pollination between the various academic sub-disciplines concerned with the various forms of the commercial relevance of place, including for example, origin effect research, place branding, tourism and public diplomacy. Surely the type of lateral interaction between these areas, that the present work has been striving towards, can provide viable advances across these fields.

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