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JEL classification: M21, M31
Preliminary statement
<https://doi.org/10.32910/ep.75.1.2>

ADVANCING BRAND ORIGIN CONCEPT THROUGH THE REVERSE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN EFFECT: THE CASE OF GENERATION Z

Product origin dispersion around the world in today's globalized market has aroused interest in depicting brand origin in more detail, the latter being considered a more distinctive cue of product origin. Due to the fact that the impact of product origin location on product evaluation has already been established many times, the purpose of this paper is to offer new insights into the less researched, reverse country of origin effect. More specifically, this paper deals with the impact of product attitude on the evaluation of brand origin, latter being viewed through the brand's country image and cultural background. Since this research is an exploratory one by nature, the PLS-SEM methodology was utilized, while the data collection was done through a questionnaire, through which 154 students from two Croatian universities belonging to generation Z completed the questionnaire successfully. The results point that brand attitude mediates the impact of product attitude on brand origin, implying that brand managers have to pay even more attention to product development strategies today, since favorable consumers' product and brand attitudes can have a spillover effect on the image of an entire country. The results of this research point to several practical implications for brand managers. The first is the fact that each product in a brand's portfolio must be optimal, as respondents showed that product attitudes influences brand attitudes directly. Brand managers need to keep in mind that consumers' product attitudes can be a whole set

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of triggers for thinking about the origin of a particular brand and forming attitudes toward the origin of that brand based on their own experiences or product perceptions. Finally, the results suggest not only that product attitude influences the components of brand origin, but also that products that reflect the values of their origin help to build a favourable image of brand origin. This paper gives a broader perspective to the country of origin effect studies, but also contributes to further brand origin conceptualization by observing the brand origin framework through both country and culture of brand origin.

Keywords: *brand attitude, brand origin, country of brand origin, culture of brand origin, generation Z, product attitude, reverse country of origin effect*

1. INTRODUCTION

Addressing the country of origin effect studies in the context of brand management, a mere search of the literature on this topic commonly discussed in the field of marketing, indicates that the mentioned phenomenon is predominantly observed with the viewpoint that the origin of a particular product is what drives the process of thinking about product's origin and what influences the consumer's evaluation of that product. The latter would lead to the conclusion that the effect of origin occurs only when the consumer becomes aware of the origin of a particular end product. However, looking at today's environment in which consumers form conclusions about products based on different stimuli, it becomes obvious that brands are those that interact and direct stimuli toward consumers, as well as that different products are only a part of brands' identities under which they have been placed on the market.

Another common pattern of thinking needs to be considered, and that is the cause-and-effect relationship within studies on the effect of product origin. While it is known that the origin of a product can influence consumers' product attitudes (Schooler, 1965; Bilkey i Nes, 1982; Roth i Romeo, 1992; Yagci, 2001; Tulipa i Muljani, 2015), this effect could be functioning the other way around. Product experience, whether positive or negative, can be the one that will initiate the consumer's search for further product information (Chang, 2004) and thus its origin, where the absorbed knowledge will reflect the consumer's attitude toward the product's origin. In particular, product attitude may be a precursor to the consumer's attitude toward product's origin (or to the attitude toward the component of the country of origin under which the product is marketed). Following all the above, if the product is a part of the brand's identity, there is a possibility that the

product is only a means for the consumer to create an experience with a brand, which will drive him to learn more about the brand to make a relevant view of it and everything related to it - which also applies for brand's origin. Meaning, this paper deals with an unconventional approach to origin effect studies in the field of marketing.

In order to observe the above-mentioned effect here, an empirical study is conducted, where respondents expressed their attitudes on a product selected, based on which their brand attitude is examined followed by the brand's origin evaluation. This way, this research made clear how do the consumers, based on the experience with the brand (through its product), draw conclusions about the brand origin and thus gave another perspective to the debate - which came first, chicken or egg?, in terms of country of origin effect studies. The paper is divided into six sections. The introductory section is followed by a chapter that reviews the literature on brand origin, after which the third chapter discusses studies on the reverse country of origin effect. The fourth chapter addresses the research methodology, while the fifth chapter presents the research findings. Finally, the last chapter provides further discussion on the facts observed in the paper, as well as some limitations and recommendations for further research.

2. BRAND ORIGIN LITERATURE OVERVIEW: COUNTRY OF BRAND ORIGIN AND CULTURE OF BRAND ORIGIN

Considering branding strategies regarding brand origin, the following question arises: if a brand is known for making certain local or global impression of its origin, whether it wants to express (or conceal) the country of origin- or the culture of brand origin? When defining brand origin, Thakor (1996) explains it as a country that consumers perceive it to be the brand's origin, while Balabanis and Diamantopoulos (2008) equated the origin of a brand with the actual geographical origin of the brand. Further on, Swaminathan, Page and Gürhan-Canli (2007) explained country of brand origin as a source of creating connection between consumers and brands, whereas Wu and Fu (2007) stressed that country of brand origin image influences consumers' product quality evaluations, and that country relating to the brand can awake certain emotions and attitudes toward that country, which will later be reflected in product evaluations. The country of brand origin effect is also discussed by Li, Wang and Yang (2011) who confirmed that this effect exists, and that in addition to the fact that consumers' positive country of brand origin evaluations affects the brand itself, it also affects the purchase intentions, whilst Eng, Ozdemir and Michelson (2016) added that it is worth considering the

connection between country of brand origin and the image of that country. When observing origin branding topics, Diamantopoulos, Herz and Koschate-Fischer (2017) looked into the association of regional origin cues within the brand, expressing that consumers in addition to perceiving the country of origin, may also have perceptions about the region a brand comes from. Moreover, the reason why some brands are more easily associated with their countries of origin lies in the typicality of the brand (Diamantopoulos, Szőcs, Florack, Kolbl and Egger, 2021), where the more typical a brand is of its country of origin, the strength between them will be greater.

On the other hand, Leclerc, Schmitt and Dube (1994) linked the pronunciation of the brand name with the brand's cultural background, implying that culture of brand origin cues are more differentiated than the ones represented by the country of brand origin. When addressing brand origin, Thakor (1996) pointed out that brand origin cues sometimes indicate an origin going beyond mentioning the country. He explains the inextricable bound between brand heritage and brand origin, meaning that a brand can create associations with the brand's cultural background. In their paper, Phau and Prendergast (2000) also stated that brands signal, sometimes the country, and sometimes the culture of brand origin, noting that many brands clearly represent their countries of origin without the need to emphasize it. Authors Lim and O'Cass (2001) looked into the culture of brand origin further claiming that when a country of brand origin is not familiar, consumers attach cultural features to a brand, where the relevance of culture of brand origin prevails over the one of country of brand origin. Thakor and Lavack (2003) also pointed out that a brand could have greater benefits from the heritage consumers associate it with, than those brand's country of origin would bring. When looking into the causes of the brand's culture of origin cues occurrence, Vranešević (2007) explained that globalization processes are those which have replaced the country of origin as a criterion for assessing the value of the brand with a cultural dimension. Authors Wu and Fu (2007) argued that country of brand origin actually reflects a particular culture and affects consumers' behavior, since every country cultivates specific heritage, market structure, history and cues into their brands. Brands designed to highlight the heritage of emerging economies have been called *cultural brands* by Guzmán and Paswan (2009), and are aimed at consumers who are open to experiencing brands belonging to cultures different from those they are already familiar with. The culture of brand origin is according to Kipnis, Broderick and Demangeot (2013), defined as the perceived culture to which the brand belongs to, where the authors explained the glocalization strategy as evidence of global meanings and local norms translated into a single local brand. The relationship between perceived brand globalness and localness is also considered by Diamantopoulos (2013), who believed that the high globality of the brand does not imply the impossibility of rooting in local culture. In addition to recognizing that brands

benefit from having a global touch, Halkias, Davvetas and Diamantopoulos (2016) and Hoskins, Verhaal and Griffin (2020) implied that brands perceived as icons of local consumers' culture can also be highly ranked among consumers. Sichtmann, Davvetas and Diamantopoulos (2018) reminded that, according to consumer culture theory, brands are considered to be cultural meaning carriers and culture entities, while Mandler (2020) claimed that the whole product category can be led by the level of preferences and traditions of the locals, consequently making this a culture branding strategy.

3. THE REVIEW OF REVERSE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN EFFECT STUDIES

It has already been mentioned that COO (*Country of origin*) effect studies (including those related to brands) have a regular sequence that implies the influence of product or brand origin on the evaluation of product or brand itself. As a matter of fact, in 1999 Hulland linked the deployment of country stereotypes with consumers' experiences with them, alongside with a remark that a country can build its own reputation by creating products. The paper of Paswan and Sharm (2004) considered the previous thought more concretely and argued that the consumer's residual feelings about a brand, affect his perception of the brand origin, while authors Jun and Cho (2006) showed that the attitude toward a country's brand is influenced by the consumption of that country's products. In 2011, authors Lee and Lockshin (2011) observed the reverse COO effect in the context of a travel destination, pointing out that when consumers are familiar with a country's products, but not with the country itself, their beliefs about those products will construct perceptions about the products' country of origin. In addition, research by Sun and Paswan (2011) has shown that perceived product quality is a key variable in shaping a country's image. The reverse COO effect was also observed by White (2012) who hypothesized that brand attitude would have an impact on a product's country image when the country of product origin is known. This increasingly present point of view within COO studies was also studied by Ryu, L'Espeir Decosta and Andéhn (2016) who found a link between positive product evaluation and country image. A recent study of Zheng, Wang, Cheng, Chen and Zhuang (2022) found that the reverse COO effect exists, meaning consumers' evaluation of products and services affects country image. In other words, depending on the consumer's experience with a product (which can be positive or negative), he starts the process of seeking information about the product, where the first one imposed on him is the brand under which the product is placed on the market. If the consumer starts gaining knowledge about the brand, he will find out about brand's origin, which

may result in his evaluation of that origin - be it brand's country, culture or it seems both simultaneously.

4. METHODOLOGY

Given that this research is an exploratory one by nature, since it builds on the existing knowledge and theoretical framework regarding COO studies and brand origin concept, by examining under-researched sequences of links between already known variables (product attitude, brand attitude and country image) and a relatively newer variable (culture of brand origin), it is decided to employ PLS-SEM methodology (*Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling*) via SmartPLS software that will process the research data collected. In addition to allowing a relatively small sample, non-normal distribution and looking into model's predictive power, PLS-SEM allows both reflective and formative specification of measurement models, where both specifications will be present here.

4.1. Structural model development

In order for this paper to contribute to the further development of alternative studies within the COO effect area, a model (Figure 1) containing *Product attitude* as an independent variable, *Brand attitude* as a mediator variable, and lastly *Country of brand origin image* together with *Culture of brand origin* as dependent variables was defined. Choosing the variables mentioned (and their roles in the model) resulted from the literature review on the brand origin topic, followed by a review of studies that looked at the reverse direction of relationships when it comes to the country of origin effect. Following the above, it was concluded that the most representative dimensions of the brand origin (so far), are related to the country of brand origin, i.e. its image, which is interpreted as the sum of beliefs, attitudes and impressions of a country (Martin & Eroglu, 1993) as well as to the brand's cultural origin whose conceptual definitions were presented earlier. Regarding the far left and center part of the model, it was decided to observe attitudes (product attitude and brand attitude), since consumers' attitudes influence their intentions which results in real consumer's behavior (Tulipa & Muljani, 2015; Šapić, Kocić and Filipović, 2018). Recalling how this paper views the brand's product as a means by which the brand creates bonds with consumers, product attitude was taken as an

antecedent to the brand attitude, latter presumed to be a mediator between product attitude and brand origin. Croatian brand KONČAR (specifically, the tram of that brand as its product), which has been rooted in Croatian culture for over a hundred years with its name binding to Croatian culture, was chosen to represent the brand in this study.

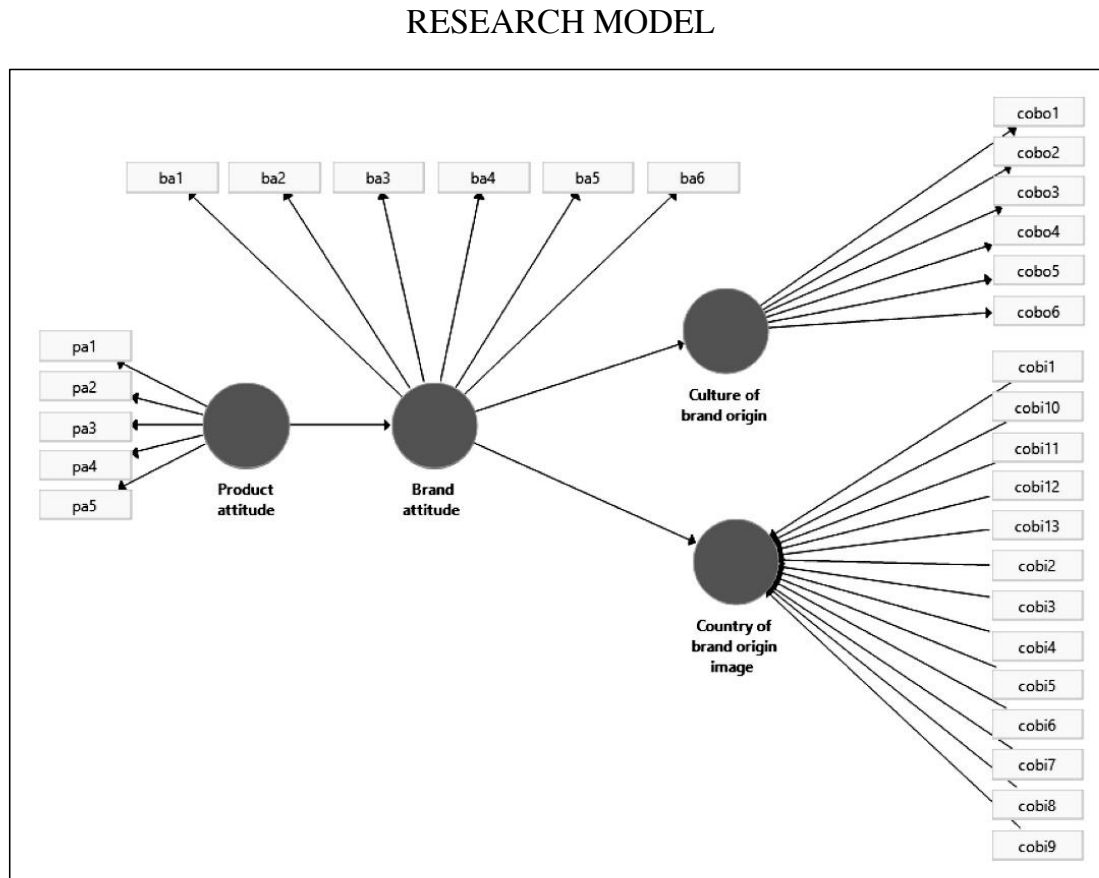
4.2. Measurement models development

The reflective specification of variables' measurement models¹ in this paper refers to: *Product attitude (PA)*, *Brand attitude (BA)* and *Culture of brand origin (COBO)*. The reason for specifying the measurement models of these variables as reflective, is in studying their nature within previous studies that observed them (from which the statements were drawn), which indicate that these variables should be reflectively specified.² Along with other variables, this paper observes brand's country of origin image, noting that a debate whether a country's image should be viewed through a reflective or a formative model specification exists (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009; Buhmann, 2016). However, for the purposes of this study, the variable *Country of brand origin image (COBI)* was observed through a formatively specified measurement model. It should be emphasized that the scale used in this paper includes statements aimed at both micro and macro country image in order to obtain a comprehensive image of the country, which resulted in a formatively specified country image variable measurement model.

¹ The statements used to measure all the variables in the model together with statements sources can be found in the Appendix.

² In addition to the fact that indicators belonging to reflective measurement models can be replaced by each other, where removing one of them does not change the essence of the variable. The above does not apply to formative measurement models where indicators (statements) are not interchangeable and should not be strongly correlated.

Figure 1.



Source: Authors' research.

4.3. Generation Z sample

When considering the population of interest to collect the data on attitudes toward the KONČAR brand and its origin, Generation Z emerged as a reasonable choice for several reasons: first, Generation Z currently represents the student population that in a few years (and some perhaps already) will actively participate in the marketplace, earn and contribute to the economy of their countries. Following that the choice of students as the population from which the research sample is selected is already justified in literature (Maguire, Taylor and Gurmu, 2003), another reason for choosing them is the fact that students are among the most frequent users of public transport, including trams. Authors Singh and Dangmei (2016) explained that this generation is a unique one, accentuating that it is crucial for organizations to uncover what is important to the generation Z since it carries specific requirements and motivating factors when comparing it with the former generations. Data col-

lection was done through a questionnaire, where following the G*Power³ program calculations when referring the sample size in PLS-SEM, the minimum required sample size of 68 was calculated. After completing the collection of responses and removing outliers, it was found that 154 students belonging to generation Z successfully completed the questionnaire. Specifically, the students of two Croatian universities (University of Dubrovnik and University of Zagreb) that live in very distinct Croatian regions: Adriatic and Continental Croatia belonging to Generation Z entered the research sample. Questionnaire responses were collected via the Qualtrics platform while the survey was conducted from March to May 2021.

4.4. Research hypotheses

Following the presented definitions of the brand origin, its stakeholders, strategies for their use and the target population on which data will be collected, this paper sets out three main hypotheses and their sub-hypotheses as follows:

H1: Brand attitude mediates the impact of Product attitude on Brand origin:

H1a: Brand attitude mediates the impact of Product attitude on Country of brand origin image

H1b: Brand attitude mediates the impact of Product attitude on Culture of brand origin

H2: Brand attitude impacts the evaluation of Brand origin:

H2a: Brand attitude impacts the Country of brand origin image

H2b: Brand attitude impacts the Culture of brand origin

In order for the brand attitude to influence the evaluation of its origin, this paper assumes that since a product is one of the most important brand's elements, the consumers starts the process of brand evaluation by forming an attitude about the product, which later on culminates in evaluating brand's origin, so therefore the following hypothesis is being set:

H3: Product attitude impacts Brand attitude

The first hypothesis (H1) will check whether *Brand attitude* explains the relationship between *Product attitude* and brand origin as follows: the first sub-hy-

³ The calculation of the sample size using G * Power was done according to the instructions of Memon, Ting, Cheah, Ramayah, Chuah and Cham (2020).

pothesis (H1a) will check whether *Product attitude* impacts *Country of brand origin image* through *Brand attitude*, whereas the second sub-hypothesis (H1b) addresses the mediating effect of *Brand attitude*, but this time between *Product attitude* and *Culture of brand origin*. On the other hand, the second hypothesis (H2) will be examined by testing two sub-hypotheses, where the first one (H2a) is testing the direct impact of *Brand attitude* on *Country of brand origin image*, with the other one (H2b) looking at the direct impact of *Brand attitude* on *Culture of brand origin*. Finally, a direct impact of *Product attitude* on *Brand attitude* (H3) will be examined.

In order to test the main hypotheses in full, within the PLS-SEM method, a mediator analysis will be conducted for the first hypothesis (H1) after which it will be possible to determine whether the hypothesis can be fully or only partially accepted. That is, for the second hypothesis (H2), a direct relationship between the variables will be tested, as well as in the third hypothesis (H3). As far as the procedures needed to gain insight into the hypotheses' significance, a non-parametric procedure will be used that allows testing the statistical significance of the connections expressed in the sub-hypotheses, i.e. the *Bootstrapping* procedure on a significance level of 5%.

5. RESULTS

5.1. Measurement models assessment

The assessment of reflective measurement models (*Product attitude* (PA), *Brand attitude* (BA) and *Culture of brand origin* (COBO)) is carried out according to Hair, Hult, Ringle and Sarstedt (2017) and Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle and Gudergan (2018). As presented in Table 1, it can be seen that the criteria of *Internal consistency reliability*, *Convergent validity* and *Discriminant validity* are satisfied. According to the above paper, if the values of composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha⁴ are greater than 0.70, then the criterion of internal consistency reliability

⁴ Despite the fact that the values of Cronbach's α are higher than the ones usually recommended, and without a deeper insight into the items it could be concluded that those values are due to the redundancy of items, Relling (et al., 2016) argue that if the items of a construct showing high Cronbach's α values are sufficiently different (meaning, they do not examine the same phenomenon in the same way literally, e.g. *I like this*, *I like this a lot*, *I like this very much*, etc.), it is justified to keep the items with higher levels of Cronbach's α values. In addition, the items used to measure all variables in this paper are presented in the appendix part, where it is possible to see that the items used are different.

is met, which leads to the verification of convergent validity by AVE (Average variance extracted) indicator, whose satisfactory threshold of 0.50 in this case is accomplished. Guided by the HTMT (Heterotrait-monotrait ratio) values for verifying discriminant validity, the results in Table 2 show that this criterion is also met when addressing reflective measurement models in this study.

Table 1.

CONSTRUCTS RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
BA	0.951	0.952	0.961	0.804
COBO	0.948	0.950	0.958	0.794
COBI		1.000		
PA	0.948	0.954	0.960	0.827

Source: Authors' research.

Table 2.

DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY USING HTMT CRITERION

	BA	COBO	PA
BA			
COBO	0.688		
PA	0.710	0.433	

Source: Authors' research.

The starting point of the formative measurement models assessment in PLS-SEM is checking the convergent validity of a measurement model through redundancy analysis, which involves formatively specified variable as an exogenous one predicting a single global statement (or reflective statements of the same variable) set as an endogenous latent variable. For the purposes of this paper, after looking into the statements used for establishing *Country of brand origin image* construct,

global statement “Overall, I believe that Croatia has a good image” was constructed in order to conduct an assessment of one formatively specified variable in the model- *Country of brand origin image* (COBI). Although Hair et al. (2017) recommend that the path coefficient between the two variables should be 0.70 or higher, it is argued that although the path coefficient may be lower than recommended, convergent validity can be achieved if bootstrapping results within redundancy analysis show that the value of path coefficient is not significantly different from 0.70 threshold, when observing confidence intervals.⁵ Table 3 shows that path coefficient obtained between the formative construct and its global item is 0.674, however it is also evident that this same coefficient, when starting the bootstrapping procedure, falls into the upper boundary of 0.725 for the 95% percentile confidence interval, which means that convergent validity has been achieved for this formative according to Sarstedt et al. (2019).

Table 3.

REDUNDANCY ANALYSIS: BOOTSTRAPPING RESULTS

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Bias	2.5%	97.5%
COBI -> COBI global	0.674	0.706	0.032	0.555	0.725

Source: Authors' research.

The next step is to check the existence of collinearity problem between the indicators of that construct using VIF values, where those values in Table 4 do not indicate a collinearity problem within this measurement model.

⁵ According to Sarstedt, Hair, Cheah, Becker and Ringle (2019).

Table 4.

FORMATIVE MODEL COLLINEARITY ASSESSMENT

	VIF
COBI_global	1.000
cobi1	2.105
cobi2	1.272
cobi3	1.477
cobi4	2.035
cobi5	1.957
cobi6	1.622
cobi7	1.570
cobi8	2.795
cobi9	3.155
cobi10	3.338
cobi11	1.708
cobi12	3.037
cobi13	1.463

Source: Authors' research.

Furthermore, it is necessary to establish the significance of the indicators through bootstrapping analysis, and by doing so in this paper, the results obtained are presented in Table 5. According to Hair et al. (2017), if the formative measurement model contains many formative indicators, their significance is more likely to decrease when observing the outer weights values, which was the case in this study and thus resulted in insignificance of most outer weights values. However, the same authors point out that one should then look at the outer loadings of these same indicators, and see if they meet the condition of outer loading having a value of 0.50 at least. However, they state that one should be careful when it comes to the formative construct, because if the indicator's value of the outer loading in such construct did not meet the specified limit, it should still not be rejected if the value of the loading is not significantly different than the 0.50 threshold. In this case, it can be seen that most indicators met the recommended value of outer loading, but those that did not are still valid for keeping them for two reasons: first, it is seen that loadings of indicators cobi2, cobi3, cobi7 and cobi13 are less than 0.50, but also that the outer loadings values of the mentioned indicators fell into the following upper boundaries of the 95% percentile confidence interval: 0.667, 0.609, 0.615

and 0.635 respectively, when starting the bootstrapping procedure. That means that the outer loadings of all indicators belonging to this formative construct are not significantly different from the 0.50 threshold in this model, and are therefore significant and retained.

Table 5.

SIGNIFICANCE OF FORMATIVE INDICATORS' OUTER LOADINGS

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Bias	2.5%	97.5%
COBI_G <- COBI global	1.000	1.000	-0.000	1.000	1.000
cobi1 -> COBI	0.701	0.667	-0.034	0.561	0.848
cobi2 -> COBI	0.453	0.430	-0.022	0.240	0.667
cobi3 -> COBI	0.436	0.414	-0.023	0.251	0.609
cobi4 -> COBI	0.552	0.527	-0.026	0.354	0.731
cobi5 -> COBI	0.733	0.694	-0.039	0.587	0.877
cobi6 -> COBI	0.518	0.498	-0.019	0.332	0.706
cobi7 -> COBI	0.403	0.386	-0.017	0.179	0.615
cobi8 -> COBI	0.688	0.652	-0.036	0.551	0.844
cobi9 -> COBI	0.726	0.687	-0.039	0.593	0.864
cobi10 -> COBI	0.708	0.673	-0.034	0.564	0.850
cobi11 -> COBI	0.575	0.550	-0.024	0.414	0.756
cobi12 -> COBI	0.665	0.632	-0.033	0.545	0.800
cobi13 -> COBI	0.399	0.373	-0.026	0.181	0.635

Source: Authors' research.

5.2. Structural model assessment

The assessment of the structural model began by checking the existence of collinearity problem between the variables of the structural model via VIF values, so looking at Table 6 it becomes clear that the mentioned problem does not exist in this structural model. This was followed by examining the significance of relationships in the model via the bootstrapping procedure, where Complete Bootstrapping along with Bca (Bias- Corrected and Accelerated Bootstrap) was selected as confidence interval method as recommended by Hair et al. (2017). Table 7 shows that all relationships in this model are significant, according to both p values at the significance level of 5% and the fact that the confidence intervals of the estimated path coefficients do not contain zero, which is an additional argument for accepting the hypotheses of this paper as true. Thus, hypothesis H1, which assumes that *Brand attitude* mediates the impact of *Product attitude* on brand origin through two sub-hypotheses (H1a and H1b) that specify these influences and which are also accepted according to p values and confidence intervals, is fully accepted. The same conclusion applies to hypothesis H2, which observed the impact of *Brand attitude* on brand origin evaluation through two also accepted (under the same criteria as in the first hypothesis) sub-hypotheses (H2a and H2b), so it is concluded that the second main assumption of this model is accepted. Lastly, the assumption of *Product attitude* influencing *Brand attitude* directly (H3) is also confirmed.

Table 6.

STRUCTURAL MODEL COLLINEARITY ASSESSMENT

	BA	COBO	COBI	PA
BA		1.000	1.000	
COBO				
COBI				
PA	1.000			

Source: Authors' research.

Table 7.

BOOTSTRAPPING RESULTS

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	P Values		Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Bias	2.5%	97.5%
BA -> COBO	0.654	0.657	0.047	0.000	BA -> COBO	0.654	0.657	0.003	0.542	0.731
BA -> COBI	0.531	0.583	0.056	0.000	BA -> COBI	0.531	0.583	0.051	0.383	0.591
PA -> BA	0.678	0.679	0.047	0.000	PA -> BA	0.678	0.679	0.001	0.568	0.757
	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	P Values		Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Bias	2.5%	97.5%
PA -> BA -> COBI	0.360	0.396	0.053	0.000	PA -> BA -> COBI	0.360	0.396	0.036	0.230	0.430
PA -> BA -> COBO	0.444	0.447	0.051	0.000	PA -> BA -> COBO	0.444	0.447	0.003	0.336	0.537

The coefficient of determination (R^2 value) is presented in Table 8, the latter being the representative of the variance explained in the endogenous variable by exogenous model variables. Considering that this is an exploratory study involving relatively unexplored relationships between certain variables, according to Hair et al. (2017) R^2 values shown are more than acceptable. In addition to checking the coefficient of determination, Table 9 shows the f^2 effect size pointing the change in R^2 value when a particular exogenous construct is removed from the model, indicating whether the removed construct has a significant effect on endogenous variables. Given the explanation of the possible outcome values regarding this effect in Hair et al. (2017), it is evident that there is a significant effect of exogenous constructs on endogenous variables in this model.

Table 8.

R SQUARE VALUES - INSERT HERE

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
COBI	0,282	0,277
COBO	0,428	0,424
BA	0,46	0,456

Source: Authors' research.

Table 9.

EFFECT SIZE F²

	BA	COBO	COBI	PA
BA		0.749	0.393	
COBO				
COBI				
PA	0.852			

Source: Authors' research.

In order to assess the predictive relevance of the model, the Blindfold procedure together with the PLSpredict procedure was conducted. As 154 observations were used in this study, the number 6 was taken as the omission distance (D) for the Blindfold procedure, where the results in Table 10 indicate that the values of $Q^2 (= 1 - SSE/SSO)$ significantly exceed the value of zero, meaning the model carries predictive relevance for endogenous constructs. Regarding the *out-of-sample* predictive power of the model via PLSpredict procedure, verification of which is advocated and explained in PLS-SEM literature⁶, where not only the data point is deleted (as is the case with Blindfold) but the entire case. After starting the PLS-SEM procedure, it is necessary to compare the RMSE⁷ values derived from the PLS-SEM model with those derived from the alternative linear model. If the PLS-SEM model produced lower RMSE values compared to those of the linear model

⁶ The PLS predict procedure in this paper was performed according to Shmueli, Sarstedt, Hair, Cheah, Ting, Vaithilingam and Ringle (2019)

⁷ Root mean square error

(LM), then the PLS-SEM model has a significant predictive power. In addition, it is necessary to verify that the Q^2 values derived from this analysis are also greater than zero for each observed indicator of the last endogenous reflective variable. Table 11 shows the results of the PLS predict procedure for the *COBO* variable, where the RMSE values of the PLS-SEM are less than those of the LM model in most cases, while Table 12 indicates the results of the same procedure, but for the formative variable *COBI* (for which the LV summary result is relevant), and since the Q^2 value exceeds zero, the predictive power of the model is valid for this formative construct as well.

Table 10.

BLINDFOLD PROCEDURE RESULTS

	SSO	SSE	$Q^2 (=1-SSE/SSO)$
BA	924.000	590.802	0.361
COBO	924.000	618.244	0.331
COBI	2.002.000	1.889.918	0.056
PA	770.000	770.000	

Source: Authors' research.

Table 11.

MV SUMMARY_PLSPREDICT

PLS	RMSE	MAE	$Q^2_{predict}$	LM	RMSE	MAE	$Q^2_{predict}$	RMSE difference
cobo1	1.397	1.102	0,073	cobo1	1.411	1.109	0,054	-14
cobo2	1.341	1.067	0,095	cobo2	1.344	1.075	0,090	-3
cobo3	1.292	0,982	0,155	cobo3	1.280	0,994	0,171	12
cobo4	1.208	0,957	0,112	cobo4	1.216	0,961	0,099	-8
cobo5	1.310	1.028	0,157	cobo5	1.314	1.031	0,153	-4
cobo6	1.089	0,875	0,189	cobo6	1.071	0,846	0,215	18

Source: Authors' research.

Table 12.

LV SUMMARY PLS PREDICT

	RMSE	MAE	Q²_predict
BA	0.751	0.591	0.451
COBO	0.927	0.720	0.165
COBI	0.934	0.745	0.167

Source: Authors' research.

5.3. Multigroup analysis

As the sample of this research carries observable distinctive characteristics such as gender and the region of Croatia from which the participants come from, in order to answer whether there is a difference in the relationships of a model caused by these categorical moderators, a multigroup analysis was conducted. Multigroup analysis procedure was performed according to the instructions of Hair et al. (2018) who explain that prior to a multigroup analysis, it is necessary to perform the assessment of the MICOM (Measurement invariance of the composite model) procedure.⁸ In order to check the second step of MICOM (composite invariance), without which it is not possible to proceed with multigroup analysis, it is necessary to start a permutation process that will show whether there is a significant difference in composite scores across all groups at a significance level of 5%. Table 13 indicates that the permutation p values are higher than the given level of significance, which means that the composite invariance is achieved and that the results of the relationships in the model between the groups can be observed together, i.e. they should not be separated.⁹

⁸ Since each measurement model employs the same indicators and scales, the same model treatment and the same optimization algorithms or optimization across each group within the sample, the first step of MICOM (configural invariance) is achieved.

⁹ As second MICOM step has been achieved, Hair et al. (2018) argue that although the third step of MICOM (equality of composite mean values and variances) might not be achieved, a multigroup analysis can be conducted nevertheless.

Table 13.

MICOM STEP 2

REGIONS	Original Correlation	Correlation Permutation Mean	5.0%	Permutation p-Values
COBI	0,642	0,588	0,363	0,647
COBO	1,000	1,000	0,999	0,492
BA	1,000	1,000	1,000	0,899
PA	1,000	1,000	0,999	0,337
GENDER	Original Correlation	Correlation Permutation Mean	5.0%	Permutation p-Values
COBI	0,758	0,557	0,291	0,941
COBO	1,000	1,000	0,999	0,301
BA	1,000	1,000	1,000	0,407
PA	0,999	1,000	0,999	0,061

Source: Authors' research.

Finally, in order to determine whether the pre-defined groups have significant differences in the path coefficients estimates, a multigroup analysis was performed. Table 14 shows that the p values across several multigroup analysis methods (PLS-MGA, Parametric test and Welch-Satterthwaite t test) are greater than the significance level of 5%, indicating that there is no difference in path coefficients of the relationships between constructs (nor in direct nor in specific effects) in the model when referring to the observation of groups' distinct characteristics in the sample. These findings point out that, when referring to generation Z across Croatia, regardless of gender, the effect observed here is equal.

Table 14.

MULTIGROUP ANALYSIS

PLS-MGA	p-Value new (Adriatic Croatia vs Continental Croatia)	Parametric test	p-Value (Adriatic Croatia vs Continental Croatia)	Welch- Satterthwaite t test	p-Value (Adriatic Croatia vs Continental Croatia)
BA -> COBO	0.527	BA -> COBO	0.512	BA -> COBO	0.523
BA -> COBI	0.917	BA -> COBI	0.915	BA -> COBI	0.915
PA -> BA	0.981	PA -> BA	0.972	PA -> BA	0.972
PLS-MGA	p-Value new (Adriatic Croatia vs Continental Croatia)	Parametric test	p-Value (Adriatic Croatia vs Continental Croatia)	Welch- Satterthwaite t test	p-Value (Adriatic Croatia vs Continental Croatia)
PA -> BA -> COBI	0.930	PA -> BA -> COBI	0.926	PA -> BA -> COBI	0.927
PA -> BA -> COBO	0.680	PA -> BA -> COBO	0.669	PA -> BA -> COBO	0.675
PLS-MGA	p-Value new (Men vs Women)	Parametric test	p-Value (Men vs Women)	Welch- Satterthwaite t test	p-Value (Men vs Women)
BA -> COBO	0.217	BA -> COBO	0.190	BA -> COBO	0.228
BA -> COBI	0.702	BA -> COBI	0.931	BA -> COBI	0.945
PA -> BA	0.698	PA -> BA	0.707	PA -> BA	0.698
PLS-MGA	p-Value new (Men vs Women)	Parametric test	p-Value (Men vs Women)	Welch- Satterthwaite t test	p-Value (Men vs Women)
PA -> BA -> COBI	0.983	PA -> BA -> COBI	0.848	PA -> BA -> COBI	0.875
PA -> BA -> COBO	0.286	PA -> BA -> COBO	0.287	PA -> BA -> COBO	0.283

Source: Authors' research.

6. CONCLUSION

Matters regarding product and brand origin have probably never been as emphasized as it is today, latter being reflected in the vast amount of COO effect studies. This paper shed light on a different perspective within these studies by further examining the reverse COO effect. It has shown that attitude towards the brand's product influences the assessment of brand origin by attitude towards the brand when it comes to Generation Z in Croatia. More specifically, this research found that brand attitude mediates the impact of product attitude on the image of the brand's country of origin, as well as the impact of product attitude on the culture of brand origin. In addition, the results made it clear that consumer brand attitude influences the evaluation of brand origin, as it was found that brand attitude influences both the country and culture of brand origin. Naturally, this paper carries certain limitations and recommendations for future research, such as observing the attitudes of other generations among different countries as well as applying this paper's model sequence in reference to other components of product or service origin. In addition, this research focused on one brand only, so it is recommended to expand the knowledge regarding the effect observed by testing it on a variety of brands. Finally, due to complexity of defining brand origin, an understandable recommendation for further research is to deepen the clarity of brand origin dimensions by constructing a brand origin "categorical apparatus". As shown in the theoretical part of this paper, there is no clear consensus regarding country of brand origin definition, nor when defining the culture of brand origin. More precisely, it is necessary to take into the account all that previous studies, theoretical concepts and today's business environment in which brands coexist, have formed in terms of brand origin in order to clarify it to both consumers and brand managers, as they both deal with the same notions of brand origin. The matter of defining brand origin is getting more complex when consumers are dealing with brands that identify with cultures that are not necessarily related to just one country, but to a group of countries characterized by the same culture, or to a specific region. The last mentioned is challenging to comprehend, since placing such geographical/cultural terms in the context of defining brand origin requires much effort and attention. On the other hand, individual cultures began to differ broadly, which again leads to the possible general division of brands according to their dominant Western or Eastern cultural characteristics, which gives a lot of space for guessing brand origin if there is no clear brand origin categorization.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire

Gender:

- a) male
- b) female

Age:

Region you come from:

- a) Continental Croatia
- b) Adriatic Croatia

All following statements will be measured with the 7-point Likert scale:

- 1 - "I completely disagree",
- 2 - "I do not agree"
- 3 - "I somewhat disagree"
- 4 - "Neither I agree nor I disagree"
- 5 - "I somewhat agree"
- 6 - "I agree"
- 7 - "I completely agree":

Country of brand origin image (measured with 13 statements adapted from Mohd Yasin et al. (2007) Pappu et al. (2007) and Hien et al. (2020),

- 1. "Croatia has a high level of economic development."
- 2. "Croatia has a good health system."
- 3. "Croatia has a high standard of living."
- 4. "Croatia has a high degree of industrialization."
- 5. "Croatia has a high level of technological research."
- 6. "Croatia has a free market economy."
- 7. "Croatia is a country of democracy."
- 8. "Croatian products are innovative."
- 9. "Croatian products are technically advanced."

10. "Croatian products are reliable."
11. "Croatian products evoke a sense of pride."
12. "Croatian products are excellently made."
13. "Croatian products tend to have higher prices."
14. "Overall, I think that Croatia has a good image." (self-constructed global item)

Culture of brand origin (measured with 6 statements adapted from Swoboda et al. (2012), Harun et al. (2015), Halkias et al. (2016) and Mandler et al. (2020))

1. "Brand Končar embodies Croatian culture."
2. "Brand Končar is a very good symbol of Croatian culture."
3. "I connect the brand Končar with Croatian culture."
4. "Brand Končar is a part of Croatian culture."
5. "Brand name "KONČAR" reflects Croatian culture."
6. "Brand name "KONČAR" is appropriate for a product/brand from Croatian culture."

Brand attitude (measured with 6 statements adapted from Häubl (1996), Wu & Wang (2011), Khan & Fatma (2017) and Kim et al. (2019))

1. "Brand Končar takes care of the safety of tram passengers."
2. "Brand Končar strives to satisfy its customers."
3. "Brand Končar is a reliable brand."
4. "Brand Končar guarantees satisfaction."
5. "Brand Končar meets the expectations of its customers."
6. "Brand Končar is a likable brand."

Product attitude (measured with 5 statements adapted from Häubl (1996), Chinen et al. (2000) and Le et al. (2017))

1. "TMK 2200¹⁰ tram is a reliable tram."
2. "TMK 2200 tram is a technologically advanced tram."
3. "TMK 2200 tram is characterized by careful workmanship."
4. "TMK 2200 tram is a good means of transport."
5. "Overall, my attitude toward the TMK 2200 tram is positive."

¹⁰ Respondents were shown a picture of Končar's tram TMK 2200 within the questionnaire in order to make clear to which tram the statements refer.

UNAPREĐENJE KONCEPTA PODRIJETLA MARKE PUTEM OBRNUTOG UČINKA ZEMLJE PODRIJETLA: SLUČAJ GENERACIJE Z

Sažetak

Raspršenost podrijetla proizvoda diljem svijeta na današnjem globaliziranom tržištu pobudila je zanimanje za detaljnijim razrađivanjem podrijetla marke, pri čemu se ono smatra razlikovnim znakom podrijetla proizvoda. S obzirom na činjenicu da je utjecaj lokacije podrijetla proizvoda na ocjenjivanje proizvoda već mnogo puta utvrđen, svrha ovog rada je ponuditi nove uvide u manje istraženi, obrnuti učinak zemlje podrijetla. Konkretnije, ovaj se rad bavi utjecajem stava o proizvodu na ocjenu podrijetla marke, gdje se posljednje promatra kroz imidž zemlje i kulturnu pozadinu marke. Budući da je ovo istraživanje eksplorativnog karaktera, korištena je PLS-SEM metodologija, dok je prikupljanje podataka obavljeno putem anketnog upitnika kojeg su uspješno ispunila 154 studenta dvaju hrvatskih sveučilišta, a koji pripadaju generaciji Z. Rezultati pokazuju da stav o marki posreduje utjecaj stava o proizvodu na podrijetlo marke, što implicira da vodstvo marke u današnje vrijeme mora još više pozornosti posvetiti strategijama razvoja proizvoda, obzirom da povoljni stavovi potrošača o proizvodu i marki mogu imati učinak prelijevanja na imidž cijele zemlje. Rezultati ovog istraživanja ukazuju na nekoliko praktičnih implikacija za vodstvo marke. Prva je činjenica da svaki proizvod u portfelju marke mora biti optimalan, iz razloga što su ispitanici pokazali da stavovi o proizvodu izravno utječu na stavove o marki. Vodstvo marke treba imati na umu da stavovi potrošača o proizvodu mogu predstavljati čitav niz okidača za razmišljanje o podrijetlu određene marke i formiranje stavova o podrijetlu te marke na temelju vlastitih iskustava ili percepcije o proizvodu. Konačno, rezultati sugeriraju ne samo da stav o proizvodu utječe na komponente podrijetla marke, već i da proizvodi koji odražavaju vrijednosti svog podrijetla pomažu u izgradnji povoljnog imidža podrijetla marke. Ovaj rad daje širu perspektivu studijama učinka zemlje podrijetla, ali i doprinosi daljnjoj konceptualizaciji podrijetla marke promatrajući okvir podrijetla marke kroz zemlju i kulturu podrijetla marke.

Ključne riječi: stav o marki, podrijetlo marke, zemlja podrijetla marke, kulturno podrijetlo marke, generacija Z, stav o proizvodu, obrnuti učinak zemlje podrijetla