

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN, ANIMOSITY AND BRAND PERCEPTION

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Abstract

The consumers' perception regarding a product's country of origin, which may sometimes include negative feelings towards that country, may influence their decision to choose or reject that product. The current research aims to identify the extent to which the country of origin affects the purchasing behaviour of the fuels distributed by the various foreign networks present on the local market in Iasi, Romania. We chose to look at this issue because no research has been done on this topic locally, although this issue of perceiving the brand in terms of a possible animosity towards its home country is of utmost importance. The research method is a quantitative one, conducted by online survey based on a questionnaire. The sample targeted for research is represented by Romanian persons located in Iasi who own a motor vehicle fuelled on a regular basis by themselves.

Keywords: country of origin, animosity, brand perception, Iasi

Introduction

Many impulsive consumers may choose to buy foreign products, but they will choose to avoid or even boycott products from a particular foreign country for which they feel animosity or anger, as was the case for Australian consumers who refused French products due to nuclear tests conducted in the South Pacific.

The existence of literature on animosity has shown that its sources are many and diverse. They vary between causes like wars (World War II, Vietnam War), economic causes (unfair commercial practices, fear of economic dominance), political causes (political disputes, territorial disputes, opposition to a foreign country's policy) or caused by people or religion. The purpose of this research is to analyse the incidence of animosity as a country of origin effect between the reasons to buy or not a car fuel from petrol stations present on the Iasi city market. The main objective of the research is to determine the preferences in the choice of the fuel distribution network by consumers on the Iasi market considering the

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degree of knowledge of the country of origin and the possibility of animosity towards it.

The research issue starts from the following questions:

- To what extent are the fuel distribution networks present on the Iasi market, namely their countries of origin (Russia, Hungary, and Austria) known?
- What is the main perception about these countries (Russia, Hungary, and Austria)?
- What is the overall perception regarding the products of those certain origins (Russia, Hungary, and Austria)?
- What is the perception of the service level offered by the fuel distribution networks present on the Iasi market?
- What is the perception of consumer animosity towards the origin country of the gas stations present on the Iasi market (Russia, Hungary, and Austria)?

The results of this research can be used to generate ideas and assumptions that link two most important concepts in the context of global economy: the products country of origin, as well as the animosity towards it.

Literature review

Globalization has increased opportunities for companies to distribute their products to consumers around the world. At the same time, consumers are able to choose from a wide range of products and services in almost all categories. Therefore, the concept of the country of origin is an important variable to be taken into account when studying the consumption behaviour of foreign products. It is associated with various marketing factors that affect consumer behaviour, including animosity towards a country.

In marketing research, the country of origin is defined as the country where the product is made. The effects of this concept are directed at how consumers perceive products from different countries. Brigham (1971, p. 34) conceptualized the effects of the country of origin as a kind of stereotypes that can be used to explain “how consumers react to information, as consumers are known to develop stereotypes towards their social environment and acculturation towards consumption”.

Samiee (1997) defined the effect of the country of origin as „any positive or negative influence that the country of manufacture might have on consumer choice processes or their subsequent behaviour.” For example, many people think English tea, Chinese silk, French perfume and Japanese electronics as the best in their product categories, even though these perceptions or prejudices are not always supported by concrete evidence.

Zhang (1996, p. 51) defined the effects of the country of origin as the totality of the information on where the products are made. Orbaiz and Papadopoulos (2003) have discovered a key factor that they have called the image of the country of the product that represents buyers’ beliefs and attitudes towards a product originating in a particular country. They have discovered many implications of the country’s



product image, including animosity and ethnocentrism, which create unfavourable perceptions of foreign products. The term ethnocentrism expresses the tendency to put cultural values and models above those of other groups. Orbaiz and Papadopoulos (2003) have warned international marketers of having to carefully choose between standardized or local marketing strategies in full knowledge of how consumers on the target market first perceive and then process product information. The construction of the country of origin is routinely operationalized and communicated to the consumer through the “Made in _____” construction and the name of the country. The perceptions of the country of origin elements are usually measured and classified as favourable, neutral or negative. The more perceived the effect is, the more responsive the customer response will be.

The country of origin is not limited to the „made in...” label because this concept may be associated with the country of origin of the producing company, the country of origin of the brand or the place where the product is actually assembled. So the question arises as consumers understand their country of origin because Sony assembles often in Malaysia, Honda produces cars in the US and Chevrolet in Japan. In addition, some companies like Nestle have foreign brands such as Poiana in Romania and Cadbury in the UK. Such companies have been able to understand that brand association with a particular country depends on consumers’ perceptions of the country. So if customers have a positive perception of the producing country, companies will associate the brand with the place of production and if they prefer the country of origin of the brand they will opt for this association. For example, not many Germans know that the wood inside the Mercedes comes from Sibiu, or that the Audi TT is assembled in Hungary. This information could change consumer choices.

The concept of consumer animosity was introduced in Klein’s marketing literature in 1998 and is defined as „traces of antipathy due to ongoing or previous economic or political military events.” Animosity to another country can be based on different backgrounds, some of which are relatively benign, for example, two neighbouring countries share a common border, while others are more serious, such as previous military events or recent economic and diplomatic disputes. The authors argue that consumer animosity has a negative impact on the attitude of consumers towards a foreign product, especially in their attitude to the willingness to buy and in the current possession of foreign goods.

By measuring brand perceptions, the extent to which animosity towards a country is felt by consumers and how it influences its purchasing decisions can be identified. The concept of consumer animosity was introduced in Klein’s marketing literature in 1998 and is defined as „traces of antipathy due to ongoing or previous economic, political or military events.” Klein makes the difference between the animosities as an effect of war, or as an impact on the economy. Subsequent studies have investigated recent responses to past events. For example, Podoshen and Hunt (2009) conclude that the effects of the Holocaust still persist in the memory of many Jews living in the US, resulting in animosity towards Germany by refusing to buy German cars. Economic animosity is based on the perception that foreign countries are a dishonest trading partner that you can’t trust.



Klein makes the difference between animosity related to war, economy and general animosity. He studied war-related animosity by focusing on historical military events (the 1937 Nanjing massacre during the Second Chinese-Japanese War). Some studies later investigated historical and more recent war related events. For example, Podoshen and Hunt 2009 conclude that the effects of the Holocaust still persist in the memory of many Jews living in the US, resulting in animosity towards Germany by refusing to buy German cars. Economic animosity is based on the perception that foreign countries are a dishonest trading partner that you cannot trust.

At macro level, national animosity refers to how much a country has been affected and suffered as a result of the actions of another country. At the micro level, personal animosity refers to resentment to a particular country due to negative experiences.

Oil is currently the world's largest source of energy. Its importance to the contemporary economy is not limited to the fact that it has become the main energy resource, it is also the raw material in other industrial branches such as petro-chemistry, plastics or the pharmaceutical industry. In this context, the fuel sector is of particular importance to the economy, with their cost being reflected throughout the national economy in the prices of any product. Sources on the fuel marketing market estimate a consumption in Romania of 290 litres / year / per capita, compared to an average of 550 litres / year / per capita in Central Europe. The Romanian fuel market has faced a lot of difficulties in recent years, registering overall sales volumes from year to year. As for 2014, the market shows a slight contraction of 1-2 percentage points in volume. The structure of the local market has not changed significantly over the past years and follows European trends where diesel consumption is predominant, with over two thirds of the total.

Methodology

Purpose: The consumer's perception of the country of origin of the product, as well as the negative feelings towards a country, may influence its decision to choose among several products. In view of the numerous studies on the two concepts, we will conduct a local research to see how the choosing a power station can be influenced regarding people who drive.

Due to the increased globalization of markets, the Romanian fuel market is represented by many companies that originate in foreign countries. At present, the leader in the fuel market in Romania is the Omv-Petrom group controlled by the Austrian OMV (51.01%) with 544 filling stations; are the Russians from Lukoil with a distribution network consisting of 305 stations, and on the 4th place are the Hungarians at Mol with 159 stations. In addition to these companies, Romania is also expanding Gazprom and Socar. Taking into account the information presented above, the study aims to research the behaviour of fuel buyers from the perspective of animosity as the effect of the country of origin.



The purpose of this research is to analyse the incidence of animosity as the effect of the country of origin between the reasons to buy or not to buy fuel from gas stations from 3 countries (Russia, Hungary and Austria).

Hypotheses:

H1. The level of knowledge of the respondent regarding the country of origin of the fuel distribution network brand is high (Josiassen and Harzing, 2008; Pappu *et al.*, 2007; Usunier and Cestre, 2008). Josiassen and Harzing (2008) said that from a competing perspective, country-of-origin effect is based on product familiarity and product involvement. So did Pappu *et al.* (2007) when they found out that there is a relationship between consumer-based brand-equity and country-of-origin effect. Finally, Usunier and Cestre (2008) stipulated that the level of knowledge regarding the country of origin for a product/service of interest is high.

H2. Consumers perceive products made in a developed country to be superior to those produced in developing countries (Josiassen and Harzing, 2008; Pappu *et al.*, 2007). Because the consumer perceive differently the quality based on their own brand-equity (Pappu *et al.*, 2007), they also find a relationship between the quality and the country-of-origin effect (Josiassen and Harzing, 2008). So, the developed countries and their products are perceived as being high in scale in comparison to developing countries and their products (Usunier and Cestre, 2008).

H3. Consumers of a developing market prefer imported products from a developed country (Josiassen and Harzing, 2008; Pappu *et al.*, 2006; Usunier, 2006; Chattalas *et al.*, 2008). Chattalas, M., Kramer, T., Takada, H. (2008) stated that the national stereotypes have an impact on the country of origin effect. Josiassen and Harzing, (2008) included among those national stereotypes the difference between developing and developed countries perceptions, arguing that the future of the country-of-origin effect depends on this perceived difference. Therefore, Pappu *et al.* (2006) said that the international commerce is helped by the consumer brand-equity and Usunier (2006) found it as being relevant.

H4. Consumers are avoiding to buy products from countries that engage in hostile, military, political or economic acts directed against their country (Amine *et al.* 2005). Based on a study case which analysed the situation between Taiwan and China for Acer Computers, Amine *et al.* (2005) stated that consumers tend to avoid buying products countries engaged in hostile, military, political or economic acts directed against their country.

H5. The higher the perceived animosity of a consumer towards a country, the more adverse its decision to buy products made from that country (Leong, *et al.*, 2008). Leong *et al.* (2008) explained the nature, antecedents, and consequences of the animosity of the consumers in international crisis. As an effect of it, they stated that there is the refuse to buy products with that specific country-of origin.



Given the 5 proposed hypotheses, we want to investigate whether they are valid for car fuel consumers.

Research objectives

The main objective of the research is to determine the preferences in the choice of the fuel distribution network by the consumers on the Iasi market considering the degree of knowledge of the country of origin and the animosity towards it.

The secondary endpoints of the study are as follows:

1. Finding the proportion that the car is being supplied to by its owners.
2. Identifying the degree of knowledge of the fuel networks in the domestic market and the corresponding countries of origin.
3. Determining the perception of the countries of origin of gas stations present in the domestic market.
4. Determining the perception of general products originating in the respective countries (Russia, Hungary and Austria).
5. Determining the perception of the level of services offered by the existing fuel distribution networks on the domestic market.
6. Measuring the consumer's animosity towards the countries of origin of gas stations present on the domestic market (Russia, Hungary, Austria).

Defining the reference population and the sample

To determine the collectivity we studied, we chose the random sampling method. We chose this option because each member of the collectivity can participate in the survey, the data being representative. The survey took place in Iași, and the chosen population is represented by Romanians living in Iași who own a car and which often refuel their personal or family cars. Given that the minimum age at which a category B driver in Romania can be obtained is 18 years old, the persons questioned will have to meet this age condition. According to the census conducted in 2011, the total population of Iasi Municipality was 290,000 inhabitants, of which 240,000 were equal or over 18 years of age.

For this study, we took into account a sample of 150 people meeting the specified criteria, representing 0.0006 of the total population of the municipality being a representative sample for the research to be carried out.

Research design

In order to meet the objectives, we have chosen as a method of collecting data, the online survey based on the questionnaire. The questionnaire was conducted on the Qualtrics platform and then distributed online to various groups ("Radar Iasi", "Official radar Iasi", "You are from Iasi" or "Iasi News"), representative of the studied population, on the networks socialization. A characteristic of the questionnaire to be mentioned is that the data collected is



confidential in the sense that the anonymity of the respondents is guaranteed, thus ensuring the quality of the answers received.

The research tool has been built in such a way as to meet the objectives pursued. To make the questionnaire we used two scales to determine the existence of the two concepts of animosity and the effect of the country of origin with consideration in the analysis of food decisions.

Thus, for animosity, we opted for a scale developed by Jung *et al.* in 2002, used in most researches in this field with a number of 8 items through which participants manifest their agreement or disagreement. This scale measures the stable, situational and personal animosity shown by customers in the fuel distribution networks.

The second scale that measures the second concept researched in this study, namely the effect of the country of origin, was conceived by Pisharodi and Parameswaran (1994) as being a common scale in other research. This scale examines consumers' perceptions of the country in general, general products and specific products in this case the services offered by local fuel distributors.

We chose to study the concepts on the fuel distribution networks present on the Iasi city market. So we have opted for the main foreign gas stations that control the fuel market in Romania, namely OMV, which is currently the market leader with 51.01% of the country of origin in Austria; LUKOIL occupying the third position with the country of origin in Russia and MOL, which currently occupies the fourth position with the country of origin in Hungary.

Analysis and interpretation of research results

The country of origin of the brands of gas station networks present on the local market is 63% known by the respondents to the questionnaire.

To observe the frequency of responses by gender, we can see the following important issues. Men know 55% of the country of origin of the fuel stations, due to the fact that men account for 67,45% of the total number of Romanian auto licenses according to promotor.ro¹ and from here we can deduce that they fuel the car at a higher proportion.

Regarding the proportion of women who know the country of origin of the networks they choose to fuel the car, it is 10%. According to the same study, the percentage of Romanian auto licenses is 29.7%, and we can conclude that females refuel less in comparison with males and that the percentage of those who know the country of origin is also less than 10%.

Thus, the first hypothesis (H1) that the level of knowledge of the country of origin is high is confirmed.

H2 is confirmed

¹ Promotor.ro (2017), <https://www.promotor.ro/masini-noi/news/statistica-politiei-despre-situatia-actuala-a-permiselor-16254980>.

Table 1. The general product perceptions of the three countries (Likert scale)

Statements	Averages		
	Russia	Hungary	Austria
Products in this country are unreasonably expensive	-0,33	-0,03	0,12
They are considered luxury products	-0,36	-0,68	0,01
They are manufactured with meticulousness	-0,43	-0,69	0,17
The products manufactured by these countries are imitations	0,15	-0,09	0,93
The manufactured goods are mainly industrial	-0,13	-0,48	-0,15
Products in this country are marketed in many countries	-0,05	-0,25	0,81
Products in that country are generally unattractive	0,24	0,17	0,71
Products are promoted intensively	0,45	-0,5	0,39
Products often require repairs	0,24	0,09	0,73
This country offers a wide range of products	0,02	-0,35	0,71
The products have a long service life	-0,21	-0,5	0,51
It is difficult to get possession of these goods	0,59	0,73	0,55
The country uses high technology for manufacturing	-0,59	-0,28	1,03
Products have a high value	-0,19	-0,35	0,71
The products in this country are available in Romania	-0,28	0,15	0,24
These are prestigious products	-0,04	-0,78	0,1
Per total, they are cheap products	-0,46	-0,85	-1
The average of the means	-0,13	-0,31	0,38

Data collected in table 1 are based on the Pisharodi and Parameswaran scale developed in 1994, measured on a 5 steps Likert scale (-2 Strongly Disagree; +2 Strongly Agree). The finding come from our own research.

In order to compare the general perceptions of products in the three countries concerned, we chose to calculate the averages for each claim, according to the authors of the scale elaborated by Pisharodi and Parameswaran (1994). An average of the means was of -0.13 for Russia, -0.31 for Hungary and 0.38 for Austria. According to these environments that reflect the answers of the people questioned, we can draw more conclusions:

- Firstly, there is a significant difference between consumer perceptions of general products in the three countries. Austria recorded the highest average of 0.38, which shows that respondents have a high perception of products originating in this country. If we look at the assertions we can see that they associate Austrian products with a high level of technology used for manufacturing (1.03), of high value (0.71), with a high diversity of them and a high degree of availability. The smallest value was recorded for the price variable (-1), the respondents opting for the disagreement. These high values can be taken into account regarding the fact that Austria is a developed European country and consumers associate products with the image of the country of origin.



- Secondly, developing countries such as Hungary and Russia do not enjoy a favourable perception of manufactured products, resulting from negative averages (-0.13 for Russia and -0.31 for Hungary). Interestingly, Hungary has an average under Russia, and this can be explained by the animosity felt by consumers, but this will be analysed in the following hypotheses. The smallest records recorded by Russia were for the high technology variables in the manufacturing process, the association with luxury products and the meticulous manufacturing process, the respondents disagreeing with these statements. Regarding the last ranked Hungary, the smallest mediums were for the association with luxury products, prestige and meticulous manufacturing.

Taking into account the averages registered by the three countries, we can conclude that respondents perceive products manufactured in developed countries (Austria) higher than those produced in developing countries (Hungary, Russia). Thus, given this data, hypothesis number 2 (H2) is confirmed.

H3 is confirmed.

Table no. 2 Country of origin perception averages (Likert Scale)

Statements	Averages		
	Russia	Hungary	Austria
People are friendly.	-0,65	-0,91	0,29
People are beautiful.	-0,15	-0,68	-0,21
People are well educated.	-0,63	-0,49	1,26
People work hard.	0,08	-0,01	0,24
People have technical skills.	0,10	-0,19	0,87
The country offers high standards of living.	-0,27	-0,27	1,43
The country has a political orientation similar to Romania.	-0,80	-0,57	-1,09
The country is economically similar to Romania.	-0,93	-0,59	-1,44
The country is culturally similar to Romania.	-0,51	-0,66	-1,17
The country is actively present in international affairs.	0,15	-0,34	0,93
The country has high living conditions.	-0,13	-0,17	1,26
The average of the means	-0,34	-0,44	0,21

First of all, in order to test this hypothesis, we determined the perception of the respondents about the country of origin of the three gas stations in question. As can be seen in the table above, Austria dominates this ranking with an average of 0.21. This means that respondents have a positive perception about Austria, associating the country with high living standards (1.43), well educated (1.26) and active in international affairs (0.93). The opposite was Hungary with an average of -0.44, indicating a negative perception of the respondents towards the neighbouring country. Respondents have a negative opinion about the friendliness of the people in this country, which results from the average of -0.91 or the level of education -0.49. The middle position is Russia with a negative average of -0.34, hence

concluding that the perception of the people questioned about this country is negative. In conclusion, according to the registered media, respondents have positive perceptions of Austria due to their developed country status and negative perceptions towards Hungary and Russia probably due to the latest events committed by these countries (political conflicts with Hungary and military conflicts between Russia and Ukraine).

Secondly, we investigated the frequency of occurrence for fuel networks to see consumer preferences. The Austrian-based Omv-Petrom has a 72.7% rise, with Mol being followed by Mol (9.3%) and Lukoil (8.7%).

In conclusion, the consumers of a developing market represented by the respondents prefer the services offered by a gas station originating in a developed country (Austria). This hypothesis was confirmed in two stages: first, by establishing perceptions of the country of origin where Austria had the highest average (0.21) and the second stage by observing the frequency of occurrence of fuel distribution networks where the Austrian group Omv -Petrom had the highest frequency of 72.7%. Therefore, hypothesis number 3 is confirmed.

H4 is confirmed

Table 3. Averages regarding the experienced animosity (Likert Scale)

Statements	Averages	
	Russia	Hungary
That country is not trustworthy.	-0,56	-0,41
This country has never been fair to my country.	-0,63	-0,47
The corresponding country is working with my country following its own interest.	-0,69	-0,48
The people of these countries have invaded my country	-0,13	-0,66
The commercial activities carried out by these countries in Romania are detrimental to the domestic economy.	0,19	0,19
I do not like the people in those countries	-0,13	-0,42
I feel angry when I have to do business with people with nationality in the countries mentioned	0,07	0,09
I do not want to be friends with the people who belong to these countries	0,29	0,21
The average of the means	-0,19	-0,24

To analyse this hypothesis, we used the Kwon Jung's scale of animosity that has a very high applicability. By this scale we measured the animosity felt by consumers towards the countries under consideration. After calculating the averages, we made the table above, which shows that the respondents feel animosity towards both countries, with Hungary being the worst (-0.24). Respondents feel animosity for Russia, especially by saying number 3 (-0.69), associating Russia's collaboration with Romania as damaging to the domestic economy. In relation to the frequency of occurrence of fuel networks, the number four hypothesis is confirmed because consumers prefer the services offered by a



country not involved in conflicts of any kind, influencing the purchasing decision and, in conclusion, avoiding the purchase of products originating in such countries.

H5 is not confirmed.

Table 4. Scale averages regarding stable animosity/ situational animosity/ personal animosity

Statements	Averages		
	Russia	Hungary	Austria
That country is not trustworthy.	-0,56	-0,41	0,3
This country has never been fair to my country.	-0,63	-0,47	0,5
The corresponding country is working with my country following its own interest.	-0,69	-0,48	0,1
Stable animosity average	-0,62	-0,45	0,3
The people of these countries have invaded my country	-0,13	-0,66	1,1
The commercial activities carried out by these countries in Romania are detrimental to the domestic economy.	0,19	0,19	0,7
Situational animosity average	0,03	-0,23	0,9
I do not like the people in those countries	-0,13	-0,42	1,1
I feel angry when I have to do business with people with nationality in the mentioned countries	0,07	0,09	1,2
I do not want to be friends with the people who belong to these countries	0,29	0,21	1,3
Personal animosity average	0,07	-0,04	1,2
Total	-0,19	-0,24	0,78

Taking into account the results obtained from the averages calculations for each statement, we determined the extent to which animosity is felt by consumers. As we have seen in the first chapter, animosity is a negative concept due to certain events between countries that may have negative effects on consumer behaviour. Thus the animosity is directly proportional to the average, the higher the value, the less animosity feeling is felt. As can be seen in the table above, Austria recorded an average of (0.78) and this shows that there is no animosity felt towards this country. For the other two countries the feeling of animosity is felt at a high level (-0.19 for Russia and -0.24 for Hungary). If we break down the animosity on the three components (stable, situational and personal animosity) we can see that the highest share in the animosity as a whole is the stable animosity that represents 81% of the animosity towards Russia and 69% the animosity towards Hungary. This percentage shows that the predominant form of animosity experienced by the consumers involved in this study is the stable animosity that arose from historical events, being the most serious form of this concept. Besides, we can see that animosity is felt in Hungary in all three forms, while for Russia there is only one form of it, namely stable animosity. Regarding the choices of the networks of gas stations originating in the two countries we saw that the frequency of their occurrence was approximately equal, so the purchasing decision was for both unfavourable.

In conclusion, animosity influences the purchasing decision of consumers by pointing to the services of another company, but the consequence is the same regardless of the level of animosity felt. Thus, if consumers feel animosity for a particular country, they will redirect their purchases to the services offered by brands originating in countries for which they do not feel that. So the animosity level does not determine a certain degree of consumption as the action is the same, the straightening to other companies. Finally, hypothesis number 5 is denied, the animosity experienced by the consumer leads to the same consequence, namely loss of the client for the company.

To analyse in detail whether there are links between the two concepts (country effect and animosity), we have made correlations for each country. We can say that there is a connection between the two variables analysed (-0.565, sig. 0). In this case, there is a significant but inverse link between the animosity towards Russia and the perception of this country. There is also a mean power link between animosity towards Russia and the perception of general products (-0.316, sig. 0.08).

Regarding Hungary, there is an average power link between the animosity towards Hungary and the country of origin perception (-0.393, sig. 0), as there is an average power link between the animosity towards Hungary and the perception of the specific products (-0.310, sig. 0.001), both so inversely. Concerning Austria, there are significant links between the perceived animosity and the perception of the country of origin (-0.314, sig. 0.001).

Conclusions

The main objective of this research is to determine the preferences in choosing the fuel distribution network by considering the two studied concepts. So we noticed that the respondents choose to refuel the 72.6% of the automobile in the Omv-Petrom group. This percentage is composed, however, of the incidence of the mother company Omv by 42.6% and the frequency of the Petrom distribution network by 30.1%. So we decomposed this percentage to see the share for each brand because some respondents could perceive the Petrom brand as still having its country of origin in Romania.

Given the scale of animosity, it was found that respondents feel this feeling rather towards Russia and Hungary, which is reflected in low averages (-0.19 for Russia and -0.24 for Hungary). Frequency of occurrence in consumer preference for choosing the fuel distribution brand in these two countries has been seen to be low, from which we can conclude that the manifestation of animosity towards the two countries determines the preference of choice.

Regarding the effect of the country of origin, the scale used was divided into three categories to study in detail this concept (country perception, perception of general products and perception of specific products). The results for this scale have shown negative perceptions of Russia and Hungary, negative perceptions for the general products in these countries, and positive perceptions of specific products in Russia. At this scale, respondents had positive perceptions for Austria



in all three categories. This confirms the idea that, just like animosity, the way the home country is perceived determines the preferences of the choice of the distribution network by the respondents.

We have found that there is a link between the extent to which animosity and the perception of the country of origin are felt. As the perceived animosity is greater, the perception of the country of origin is more negative. In conclusion, consumers choose 72.6% the services of a fuel distribution network originating in a country for which they do not feel animosity and the perception of it is positive.

The first secondary objective of the research was the proportion that the car is being fuelled by its own owners. The respondents are feeding 60% (90 respondents) on their own car. On average, respondents even feed their car in a proportion of 85.67%.

Another objective was to determine the perception of the countries of origin of gas stations present in the domestic market. To achieve this goal, the questionnaire contained a specific scale that measured this concept. Following the results, we were able to identify a negative perception towards Russia with an average of -0.34 and against Hungary with an average of -0.44. But we also found positive perceptions towards Austria, which recorded an average of 0.21.

The third secondary objective of the research was to determine the perception of general products originating in the respective countries. By the scale of the country of origin effect, we were able to achieve this goal. The data revealed an unfavourable perception for Russian products with an average of -0.13 and for products originating in Hungary with an average of -0.31. For products originating in Austria, positive perceptions were identified, resulting from the average of 0.38. This is also supported by the high number of respondents who prefer the services of the Omv-Petrom group (109 respondents).

The next objective is to determine the perception of the level of services offered by the existing fuel distribution networks on the internal market. For this analysis we calculated the average of the assertions corresponding to this scale, thus the positive value for Austria was averaged by 0.55 and for Russia 0.33. Thus, we can say that there is a positive perception of the services of the brands Omv-Petrom and Lukoil, yet consumers are loyal to the Austrian group. Hungary recorded a negative value (-0.09) from where we can conclude that respondents' perceptions are negative. These data can be found in Table 4.2 of the annexes.

At the last objective we had to measure the animosity of consumers towards the countries of origin of gas stations present on the domestic market (Russia, Hungary, and Austria). Thus, to achieve this goal, we used the scale of animosity consisting of 8 negative statements. After calculating the averages, there was an animosity for Russia (-0.19) and Hungary (-0.24). Looking further on, we can see that a cause for feeling this feeling is the stable animosity that arises from a historical event and has consequences at national level. Austria recorded an average of 0.78 where it was reported that there was no animosity towards this country.

In conclusion, how a brand is perceived can make a difference between success and failure for a company. Instead, it needs to fine-tune its promotion

strategy, more precise, whether it wants to associate the brand with the country of origin or the country of manufacture. We have come to the conclusion that the way consumers perceive the country of origin of the brand is an issue that can harm sales. They may associate certain strengths or weaknesses specific to a country with the brand in that country.

Another issue that should not be ignored is animosity. Animosity acts negatively, influencing consumer decisions. This study has identified animosity towards Hungary and Russia, and we have seen that this has influenced the preference of fuel distributors in these countries. For success, companies need to think about entry strategies in certain markets, also taking into account the animosity. As a distinct policy that a specific company can develop in this case is to dissociate the perceptions towards itself in comparison to the perceptions regarding the country of origin. Their strategies should include strong data or information related to their personal contribution to the country of destination, with respect to the culture, custom or particularities the destination consumers have. CSR strategies are welcome and active implication in society as being an involved actor.

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