

Country Image and Product Evaluations: Impact of a Personal Contact with a Country

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In the context of globalization, consumers in majority of countries are increasingly exposed to products from foreign countries as well as have direct experience of visiting these countries. Personal experience with a country influences one's perception about a country as well as its products. The mechanism of this influence is complex and still evolving, presenting a research problem of this study.

On the basis of previous studies, the authors of this article suggest a different model of research. This model segregates conative and cognitive aspects of the country image, and argues that conative ones may be interpreted as one's psychic closeness to a country. The aim of the article is to test the model, analyzing how personal experience with a country and demographic parameters impact on psychic closeness, image of a country and general evaluations of products from that country.

The study is performed in Lithuania, on the basis of mail survey, developed on the judgemental sampling approach. Germany was used as a target country for measuring respondents' psychic closeness, country image and general evaluations of products from this country. The main constructs were measured on the basis of modified scale proposed by R. Parameswaran & M. Pisharodi (1994). Personal experience with a country was measured by registering visits to the country or temporary living in it. In total, 539 questionnaires were included in the analysis.

The analysis revealed appropriateness of the study approach and allows us to highlight some differences, occurring on the basis of personal experience. It was confirmed that the country image depends on personal experience from the country and that general evaluation of products also depends on personal experience from the country. However, the link between personal experience and psychic distance requires further analysis and testing.

In addition, some differences were observed on the basis of various demographic parameters of respondents.

More general interpretation of findings is difficult due to the scope of the study, since the major parameters are measured on the basis of just two countries. This complicates segregation of country-specific observations from the general ones. Despite this limitation, the study suggests further steps in researching the issue, since the overall model has proved its appropriateness.

Keywords: *country of origin, country image, conative elements, cognitive elements, psychic closeness, general product evaluations.*

Introduction

The modern world is characterized by numerous contacts of people with foreign countries and/or their products. Among other influences, this generates new aspects of personal experience regarding specific countries. It is assumed that personal experience has impact on the country image and general evaluations of product from that country, though the mechanism of this influence is rather complicated (Balabanis, et al., 2002).

Some additional complexity on the issue is generated by diverse and rather complicated ways of measurement of a country image. Rooting from the concept of the country of origin, this construct remains not easy for researchers and continues to experience improvements of its measurement (Pereira, Hsu, Kundu, 2005).

One of the ways of measuring the country image is based on the type of image components. Parameswaran & Pisharodi (1994) and their followers suggested a country image measurement as a combination of cognitive, affective and *conative* elements. The measurement instrument included checking characteristics of products from a country, thus enhancing the research scope.

Typically, cognitive and conative elements of the country image are studied together, as the two parts of a single unit. However, by their nature, the conative elements may be linked with constructs that typically belong to other areas of studies. The closest concept seems to be psychic distance with a country, which is sometimes mixed up with or used as synonymous to the "cultural distance" (Swift, 1999). More often all these aspects are analyzed in the context of internationalization, and only rarely are related with the point of view of a consumer, who may evaluate countries and their products. These concepts get closer because of the interpretation of a construct of a country of origin (Fletcher, 2005).

Nevertheless, it is logical to expect that personal experience from a country has an impact on psychic distance from a country, which, in turn, may influence the image of a country and its products. This assumption defines the **scientific problem**: personal experience with the country in the studies of the country images is often neglected or undervalued, though direct contacts with foreign countries and exposure to foreign products are dramatically growing in the modern world. Therefore the **aim of this research** is to suggest and test a model that would integrate personal experience into the analysis of country image and evaluation of general characteristics of products from a foreign country.

The research method is a survey, followed by the statistical analysis of findings.

Scientific novelty of the study includes the use of the segregated country image construct, arguing that conative elements stand for the concept of psychic closeness with a country, while cognitive elements of the country image closely interrelate with evaluations of general characteristics of products.

Literature analysis

Country of origin and country image

The numerous effects of country of origin (COO) is one of the most widely studied phenomena since the initial research of Schooler (1965), who has summarized previously fragmented studies on the issue. Later years yield a vast number of studies that defined COO as one of the product attributes or product selection criteria, many of which have been summarized in the later studies (Bilkey, & Nes, 1982; Peterson, & Jolibert, 1995; Al-Sulaiti, & Baker, 1998; Pharr, 2005; Bhaskaran & Sukumaran, 2007). These studies have been performed in numerous countries including Lithuania, and to some extent – with the participation of the authors of the current study (see Urbonavicius, Dikcius, Casas, 2007; Urbonavicius, Dikcius, Gineikiene, Degutis, 2010; Dikcius, Stankeviciene, 2010, etc).

One of the COO research streams has concentrated on the issue of product/category familiarity, and Han (1989) concluded that COO of a product could serve as a stereotype measure (surrogate) for other product attributes for individuals unfamiliar with it, while individuals that were familiar with the product could use COO as a summary index or heuristics that reduces the amount of information required in making a decision. This was an important generalization regarding a COO as a stereotype or an integrated measure of perception about a product. Stereotyping remains one of the psychological processes that are commonly used to explain how consumers react to COO information (Maheswaran, 1994). The important systematization of COO research by Julie M. Pharr has resulted into a holistic model of COO influence (Pharr, 2005). One of the outcomes from this model and several other studies was the understanding that consumers' product-specific COO evaluations are being displaced by a more holistic perception – a 'country image' – in the form of a multidimensional attitudinal construct (Chlivickas, & Smaliukiene, 2009). That means that consumers hold stereotyped images about countries, and these images are used as information cues in judging products from different origins (Lotz & Hu, 2001). Though many studies concentrate on brand images (Janonis et al., 2007; Janonis, & Virvilaite, 2007), this finding calls us for a sharper attention to the interrelationship between the perceptions regarding images of countries and their interrelation with the evaluations of general attributes of products that are associated with these countries.

The concept of a country image first appeared in a paper written by Nagashima in 1970. He defines the term as a particular picture, reputation, and stereotype towards products of a specific country. The author stated that the image is formed by the country's representative product,

political and economic background, and historic tradition variables, which means overall country image (Nagashima, 1970). Other authors later added additional image components or studied the reasons of its change. (Auruskeviciene, et al., 2010).

Measuring of a country image to some extent remains to be a challenge for the researchers (Han, 1989), though numerous authors suggested and clarified several methodologies. Han and Terpstra (1988), with reference to Nagashima's (1970) research, refined four factors through the factor analysis. On the basis of literature review, Agarwal and Sikri (1996) indicated 24 items and suggested narrowing this number to 14. However, in majority of instances, the measurement tools were developed on the basis of exploratory factor analyses and could not represent a really psychometrically sound measurement tool (Balabanis, et al., 2002).

Cultural and psychic distance

Different type of an approach and a country image measurement tool was developed by R. Parameswaran and M. Pisharodi (1994). These authors suggested a country image measurement approach, related with the type of image components. As such, a country's image is a combination of cognitive and affective as well as conative ones that reflect perceived similarity and desired level of interaction with the country. Kaynak and Kucukemiroglu (1992) suggested that the cognitive components may be defined as the attributes by which the person understands the characteristics of a country in an intellectual way and includes perception of socio-economic, cultural, and political attributes.

Conative components are different, since they represent more emotional perceptions. They may be developed throughout direct or indirect factors, such as contacts, associations, or past experience with the country and its products. In the model the conative elements measure the aspect of "liking" a country, or one's personal association with it. This makes the scope of conative elements to be an integrative measure of the cultural closeness (psychological closeness) and cultural affinity. This is rather possible, since the two are closely related and demonstrate correlation when measured (Swift, 1999).

Such consideration brings the discussion to the concept of psychic distance. It became well known in the 1970s after the studies by Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul (1975) and Johanson and Vahlne (1977) mainly in the context of the Uppsala internationalization model. Psychic distance typically refers to the interaction between the buyer and seller, represented by either companies or individuals. (Hallen, & Wiedersheim-Paul, 1984; Ojala, & Tyrvaainen, 2009; Zitkus, & Junevicius, 2007). Individual level of the psychic distance in this context is more often related with the attempt to measure perceived psychic distance of managers or employees, engaged in the internationalization process. For instance, Sousa and Bradley (2006) indicate that "psychic distance captures the manager's individual perception of the differences between the home and the host country and is a highly subjective interpretation of reality." Authors also argue that the term "psychic distance" is not synonymous to the "cultural

distance”, since the first exists at an individual level, while the second should be applied at a national level.

However, current use of the concept of the psychic distance may be broadened, reflecting psychic interrelationship of a person with a foreign country outside the working relationship, i.e. include the analysis from the position of a consumer. Then the concept of the psychic distance can be discussed in conjunction with a traditional concept of the country of origin (Fletcher, 2005). Just in order to avoid unnecessary linkage with the context of internationalization, we prefer using the term ‘psychic closeness’, well explored by J. S. Swift (1999).

Personal experience and demographics

Both cognitive and conative elements of a country image are being accumulated and developed throughout numerous sources. The main building blocks include getting information about a country (a) directly, by physical presence there, (b) by observing and/or using products that are originated from a country, and (c) through various channels of mass media, the so-called transmitting mechanisms as suggested by Bar-Tall (1997). These three types of interaction significantly vary in terms of the received personal experience.

Being in a country, people may observe realities, interact with local population and get vast access to products that are originated from this country. Depending on the frequency and duration of visits, one is able to develop extensive personal experience (Yuksel, 2004).

As it is disclosed in numerous studies, the country of origin influences overall evaluation of products. In addition to this, products themselves serve as ‘ambassadors’ of their country, thus indirectly adding to the image of a country (Peterson, & Jolibert, 1995). Therefore observation or use of the products is an experience that is to some extent applied to evaluations of their country of origin. In this case experience with a country is indirect, throughout its products.

Influence throughout the so-called transmitting mechanisms (many types of media) is increasingly important in gaining information about foreign countries in the modern world. However, this type of influence is not related with either direct or indirect personal experience, and therefore falls outside of the scope of this study.

In addition to the factor of personal experience, even the earliest studies on the issue emphasized importance of demographic factors in evaluations of countries (Scholer, 1971) and their products (Han, & Terpstra, 1988). Typically, the influence of gender (Good & Huddleston, 1995), age and education (Wall, & Heslop, 1986) is observed.

Research Methodology

Model and hypotheses

Based on the analysis of literature, relationship of one’s personal experience with the psychic closeness, country image (cognitive) and general product evaluations may be tested. On the other hand, the role of demographic factors on the same constructs may be examined. These options are summarized in the research model:

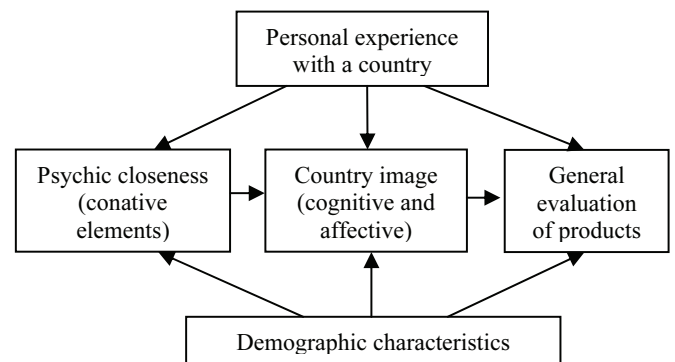


Figure 1. Research model

The main hypotheses include:

- H1: psychic closeness (conative elements of country image) depends on personal experience with the country;
- H2: country image depends on personal experience with the country;
- H3: general evaluation of products depends on personal experience with the country;
- H4: demographic factors influence psychic closeness, country image, and general evaluation of products;
- H5: conative (psychic closeness) and cognitive elements of a country image are positively related;
- H6: cognitive elements of a country image are positively related with general evaluation of products.

Research instrument

Previous studies showed that COO image evaluations depended on demographic characteristics, direct contact with the country, its intensity and psychic closeness.

Personal experience with a country was measured by the number of visits to the country, and the time of living in the country. The measurement was performed on the basis of adapted G. Balabanis et al. (2002) questionnaire with nominal and ratio scales.

Image of the country was measured on the basis of a country image scale, proposed by R. Parameswaran and M. Pisharodi (1994), and later modified by Pereira, Hsu and Kundu (Pereira, et al., 2005). It includes measurement of general country attributes (cognitive and conative) and general product attributes (positive and negative). The difference with the above mentioned study is that we preferred to make research not product-specific. Therefore our set of questions measures four (not 5) dimensions and includes 12 (not 17) statements, measured on 7 point rating scale ranging from 1=“totally disagree” to 7=“totally agree”.

Conative and cognitive elements of a country image are measured separately. As discussed above, three statements referring to conative elements in the proposed scale integrate elements of cultural closeness and cultural affinity, which can be integrated into the construct of psychic closeness. Cronbach’s alpha of the statements showed satisfactory level $\alpha=0.602$. Country image was measured with four statements, referring to cognitive and affective elements of the country image. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for these statements was 0.779. Finally, we used five statements for measuring general evaluations of

products. Scales of negative statements were reverted, Cronbach's alpha was 0.794.

Germany was used as the example of a foreign country and its products. This was done on the assumption that majority of respondents would have a rather well-developed image of this country either from direct experience of visiting Germany or by using German products.

The questionnaire included typical demographic characteristics (gender, age and income).

Sample

Respondents were selected using method of judgmental sampling, the survey was performed by sending the questionnaires by e-mail. In total, 539 questionnaires were included in the analysis.

Distribution of respondents according to the gender was uneven, men made up only the fifth part of the sample.

According to the income, respondents were divided into four groups. Two largest groups (less than 1000 litas per month and 1001-2000 litas per month) were almost equal and together accounted for almost 80 percent of the sample. According to the age, respondents were distributed almost equally into three groups, and only the group 55+ was smaller.

Regarding personal experience with the country, almost two thirds of respondents have visited Germany at least once. The intensity of the respondents personal experience is rather different, though the majority of them have visited Germany 1-9 times. Just one out of ten respondents stated that he (she) had lived in Germany; 4% of respondents stayed in Germany for less than 1 month or for 1-6 months, only 2% lived there longer.

Findings and discussion

Personal experience provides additional information and creates differences between the ones with that experience, and those without it. However, the direction of this influence may be different, since the direct impressions may fascinate or disappoint. Based on this, psychic closeness may become higher or lower, depending on how its initial aspect was formed and what expectations a person held prior to the visit.

Minimum level of personal experience, measured in this survey, was the fact of visiting the country. The research showed that respondents who had never been to Germany had higher levels of perceived closeness to the country than the respondents who had visited Germany ($m_{\text{visited}}=2.9962$, $m_{\text{No visits}}=3.2158$, $t=2.693$, $p<0.01$).

It was expected that personal experience would have positive impact on the cognitive evaluation of a country image. We found that respondents who had been to Germany evaluated the image better than those who had never been there ($m_{\text{visited}}=5.9728$, $m_{\text{No visits}}=5.8171$, $t=2.243$, $p<0.05$). In addition, visits to the country had positive impact on general evaluation of its products ($m_{\text{visited}}=5.3072$, $m_{\text{No visits}}=5.1432$, $t=2.243$, $p<0.05$).

Based on this measurement of the minimal contact with a country, it seems that personal experience enhances evaluations of the country image and general evaluations of products. However, experience somehow reduces psychic closeness to the country. Though all these

observations may be important, they may also be country-specific and requires studying in a broader context.

The intensity of the personal experience with a country was analyzed on the basis of the number of visits to the country. Analysis of variance showed differences only in case of the cognitive image of a country: one's who visited Germany very often had better image of the country. This leads to a conclusion that infrequent visits do not have impact on any of the three analyzed constructs. Frequent visiting of a country is different, and in terms of experience can be compared with living in the country.

Analysis on the basis of living in the country disclosed bigger variations between those who have such an experience and others, who do not. Respondents who have lived in Germany evaluated the country's image much better than those who had no such experience: $m_{\text{Lived}}=6.2545$, $m_{\text{Have not}}=5.8789$, $t=4.532$, $p<0.001$.

Similarly, a significant difference was observed in the case of general evaluation of products ($m_{\text{Lived}}=5.5607$, $m_{\text{Have not}}=5.2133$, $t=2.986$, $p<0.01$). This enables us to reinforce the conclusion that personal experience related with the country has impact on evaluation of a country's image and general evaluation of products.

However, the comparison regarding the psychic closeness did not show significant difference between those who had lived in the country and those who had not. In a sense, this is in contradiction with the analysis on the basis of visits to the country. Again, further analysis is required to see whether these differences occur due to the different intensity of the interaction with a country (visit versus living), or it is a subject of different demographic or other characteristics of respondents.

Deeper analysis on the basis of living duration did not disclose any significant differences among groups regarding psychic closeness, cognitive country image and general evaluation of products.

These findings confirm H2 (country image depends on personal experience with the country) and H3 (general evaluation of products depends on personal experience with the country). However, H1 can be confirmed just on the basis of analysis of the visits, and cannot be confirmed on the basis of living experience. Therefore this hypothesis requires further analysis and testing.

The second part of research was related with an impact of demographic data on the evaluations of the analyzed constructs. Here, some differences were observed on the basis of gender. Male and female showed different levels of physic distance to the country: $m_{\text{Male}}=2.9072$, $m_{\text{Female}}=3.1187$, $t=2.219$, $p<0.05$. Male respondents evaluated German products better than female ones ($m_{\text{Male}}=5.4713$, $m_{\text{Female}}=5.1892$, $t=3.260$, $p<0.01$). In terms of cognitive image of a country, no differences according to the gender were observed.

Interpretation of these findings is rather difficult and can be country-specific. Germany is often related with technical products of higher quality. Men typically tend to have more contact with such products and are more interested in their technical aspects. This might influence higher general evaluations of German products within the male group. However, there is no interpretation why psychic closeness is higher in the female group.

Analysis of variance showed no impact of personal income on any of the three analyzed constructs. However, there were differences on the basis of age: psychic closeness with the country increases with the age of

respondents. Image of a country also is better among the elder respondents. At the same time general evaluation of products is similarly high in all age groups.

Table 1

Differences of psychic closeness, country image and general product evaluations depending on the age group

Age groups (years)	Psychic closeness			Country image (cognitive)		General evaluation of products
	Subset for alpha = 0.05			Subset for alpha = 0.05		Subset for alpha = 0.05
	1	2	3	1	2	1
Up to 29	3.0307	3.0307		5.7500		5.1485
30-44	2.8713			5.8276		5.2566
45-54		3.1830	3.1830		6.1062	5.3150
55 and more			3.3248		6.0673	5.3179
Sig.	0.164	0.184	0.216	0.403	0.675	0.146

Again, some interpretations may lie within the historical context of the two specific countries. Elderly respondents may not remember facts from World War II and German occupation, but they definitely remember the sad period of history of Lithuania immediately after the war. When comparing the two periods, one might feel personally exceedingly closer to Germany. Similar effects of the attitudes about the past have been found also in other studies (Holbrook & Schindler, 1996). It is rather obvious that the differences among age groups have conative and emotional backgrounds, since it is strongly reflected on psychic closeness, moderately – on country image, and not at all – on rather rational evaluation of products.

In general, the analysis on the basis of demographic criteria disclosed some differences. It confirms H4 (demographic factors influence psychic closeness, a country image, and the evaluation of products) on the basis of the current data, but does not provide for drawing any broader conclusions, since the findings may be country-specific.

The analyzed three major constructs have logical relationship among themselves, though it is not that easy to identify its direction and disclose all aspects of rationale. Studying all the aspects was not the objective of current research, as we limited the analysis of this question to measuring relationships among the three constructs. It disclosed something that we did not expect.

In H5, we assumed that psychic closeness has positive relation with the country image. However, this was not confirmed by the analysis of the current data (Table 2).

Table 2

Correlation between constructs of psychic closeness, country image and general product evaluations

		Psychic closeness	General evaluation of products
Psychic closeness	Pearson Correlation		-0.074
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.087
Country image (cognitive)	Pearson Correlation	-0.011	0.525
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.799	0.000

In a sense, this confirms the argument that cognitive elements of a country image measure information-based aspects that one does not interpret personally. Therefore even a positive image of a country may be interpreted as ‘this is not for me’, thus getting low psychic closeness with a country.

Findings of this research have proved quite expected positive correlation between the image of a country and general evaluation of products from that country ($r=0.525$, $p<0.001$). That well confirms H6.

Conclusions

Current study attempted to analyze the impact of personal experience on psychic closeness to the country, country image and general evaluations of the country products. All three constructs were measured with consistent and well tested instrument. The novel part was the idea to segregate the three, and consider conative elements as personal psychic closeness to a country.

The study showed an overall relevancy of the approach. It occurs that personal experience with a country differently influences psychic closeness and country image, if the latter is measured on the basis of cognitive aspects. Partially, the approach is supported also by the analysis on the basis of demographic criteria.

Though limitations of the study scope hardly allow conclusions, it well serves for outlining directions for further research. The analysis on the basis of just the two countries generates too many country-specific results, and makes generalizations hardly possible. Therefore any further study has to cover more countries, which would allow segregation of general and country-specific observations. Another limitation of the study is related with the scales used for personal experience with a country. It has to be developed, since the current form does not provide sufficiently deep analysis.

At the same time, the overall model of this study seems to be appropriate. Therefore above mentioned limitations outline directions and suggestions for new studies.

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Šalies įvaizdis ir prekių vertinimai: asmeninio kontakto su šalimi poveikis

Santrauka

Globalizacijos kontekste vartotojai vis dažniau vertina kitų šalių prekes, kontaktuoja su pačiomis šalimis. Remiantis tokia patirtimi, susidaro ar yra tikslinamas atitinkamos šalies įvaizdis, keičiasi jos prekių vertinimai. Nors ryšys tarp šalies įvaizdžio ir bendro jos prekių vertinimo pripažįstamas beveik vieningai, pačius to ryšio mechanizmus ir netgi šalies įvaizdžio elementus bei jų matavimo metodus būtina toliau nagrinėti. Kadangi didėja žmonių mobilumas ir galimybės lankytis įvairiose šalyse, tiesioginio kontakto su šalimi veiksnys dar labiau komplikuoja nagrinėjamą klausimą. Tyrimuose nėra nagrinėta asmeninio kontakto su šalimi veiksnio įtaka šalies įvaizdžiui bei bendram jos prekių vertinimui, kuri ir sudaro šio darbo mokslinę problemą.

Vartotojų suvokiamo šalies įvaizdžio samprata sietina su keletu teorinių konstrukčių. Pirmąją gimininga sąvoka laikytinas prekių kilmės šalies veiksnys, pirmą kartą Schooler apibrėžtas dar 1965. Nuo to laiko kilmės šalies veiksnio tyrimai tapo viena iš labiausiai marketingo tyrimuose nagrinėjamų sričių, kuri tam tikru mastu buvo plėtojama ir Lietuvoje. Ilgainiui šiuose tyrimuose išryškėjo keletas apibendrinimų, kuriais remiantis atsirado naujos minėto klausimo tyrimo kryptys. Viena iš jų teigia, kad kilmės šalis yra apibendrintas parametras, kuris palengvina sprendimus apie tos šalies prekes. Vėliau tuo remiantis buvo išplėtotas apibendrinto (holistinio) pačios šalies įvaizdžio idėja, kurią pirmasis 1970suformulavo Nagashima.

Daugelis autorių siūlė įvairius šalies įvaizdžio matavimo būdus. Parameswaran ir Pisharodi (1994) sukūrė, o vėliau Pereira, Hsub ir Kundu (2005) patobulino įdomų ir savitą įvaizdžio matavimo variantą, apimančią konatyvinius ir kognityvinius įvaizdžio elementus bei galimybę lygiagrečiai vertinti ir atitinkamos šalies prekių savybes. Kitas šiam tyrimui svarbus konstruktas išplaukia iš R. Parameswaran ir M. Pisharodi pasiūlytos šalies įvaizdžio matavimo metodikos. Remiantis šia metodika nustatomi konatyviniai įvaizdžio elementai labai panašūs į kultūrinio artumo bei psichologinės distancijos sampratas. Kadangi psichologinė distancija dažniausiai nagrinėjama internacionalizacijos teorijų kontekste, ji paprastai nustatoma ne iš vartotojo, o iš įmonės vadovo ar darbuotojo pozicijų. Tačiau J. S. Swift 1999 suformulavo kol kas nedaug vartojamą psichologinio artumo sąvoką, kuri šiame straipsnyje siejama su konatyviniais įvaizdžio matavimo elementais.

Tiek kognityviniai, tiek konatyviniai šalies įvaizdžio elementai susidaro remiantis įvairiais informacijos šaliniais. Svarbiausi iš jų šie: (a) tiesioginiai kontaktuojant su šalimi (remiantis asmenine patirtimi); (b) stebint arba vartojant tos šalies prekes; c) per Bar-Tall 1997 apibrėžtus informacijos perdavimo mechanizmus. Pirmaisiais dviem atvejais svarbi asmens kontaktavimo su šalimi patirtis, kuri ir yra šio tyrimo pagrindas.

Tyrimu siekiama nustatyti, kaip asmeninė kontaktavimo su šalimi patirtis sietina su psichologiniu artumu, šalies įvaizdžiu ir bendru tos šalies prekių vertinimu. Papildomai nustatoma demografinių veiksnių įtaka bei minėtų trijų konstrukčių tarpusavio ryšys. Tyrimo instrumentas pagrįstas modifikuotu Parameswaran ir Pisharodi įvaizdžio matavimo skalių variantu. Konatyvinių elementų lygis laikomas asmens psichologiniu artumu su šalimi, o šalies įvaizdis vertinamas tik naudojant kognityvinius elementus. Tiesioginio kontakto su šalimi veiksnys nagrinėtas vien kontakto būdais: lankantis šalyje ir gyvenimu joje. Abiem atvejais papildomai nustatomas kontakto intensyvumas (vizitų skaičius ir gyvenimo šalyje trukmė). Tyrimas atliktas Lietuvoje, pavyzdžiui pasirinkta šalis – Vokietija. Analizė atlikta 539 naudojant apklausos anketas.

Duomenų analizė parodė, kad asmeninis tiesioginis kontaktas su šalimi sukuria šalies įvaizdžio bei bendro prekių vertinimo skirtumus. Psichologinio artumo skirtumai pastebėti nagrinėjant vizitų į šalį aspektu (apsilankiusių asmenų Vokietijoje psichologinis artumas mažesnis), tačiau jie neišryškėjo remiantis duomenimis apie gyvenimą Vokietijoje. Atlikus papildomą analizę kontakto intensyvumo požiūriu, šie pastebėjimai nedaug buvo patikslinti, nebuvo visapusiškai atskleistas tiesioginio kontakto poveikis psichologiniam artumui su šalimi. Tai gali būti nepakankamai tikslaus tiesioginio kontakto (vizitų ir gyvenimo šalyje) veiksnio matavimo rezultatas, tačiau net ir dabartiniai pastebėjimai yra įdomūs ir kelia naujų klausimų. Svarbiausias iš jų – kiek šie pastebėjimai sietini su Lietuva ir Vokietija ir kiek jie gali būti apibendrinti kaip platesnio masto moksliniai rezultatai?

Kita tyrimo dalis buvo siejama su trim pagrindiniais konstruktais (psichologiniu artumu, šalies įvaizdžiu ir bendru tos šalies prekių vertinimu) naudojant demografinius kriterijus. Vyrų ir moterų psichologinio artumo su Vokietija lygis pasirodė skirtingas (moterų reikšmingai aukštesnis). Vyrų aukščiau vertino Vokietijos prekių bendrąsias savybes. Jei pirmąjį skirtumą interpretuoti sunku, tai antrasis tikriausiai gali būti siejamas su aukštai

vertinamomis Vokietijos prekėmis, kurių daugelis yra mechaninės ar techniškai sudėtingos. Kadangi mechaninėmis ir techninėmis prekių savybėmis tradiciškai labiau domisi vyrai, todėl ir galėjo atsirasti šis vertinimo skirtumas.

Įdomūs skirtumai išryškėjo analizuojant duomenis pagal amžiaus grupes. Psichologinis artumas su šalimi kiekvienoje vyresnėje amžiaus grupėje buvo vis didesnis. Kognityviniais elementais nustatytą šalies įvaizdį vyresnieji respondentai taip pat vertino geriau. Bendras prekių vertinimas buvo vienodas visose amžiaus grupėse. Apibendrintai galima teigti, kad tie skirtumai pasireiškia labiau, kai vertinamas abstraktesnis konstruktas. Gali būti, kad stipresnį emocinį ryšį su Vokietija vyresnėse amžiaus grupėse lėmė tam tikri šių dviejų šalių istorijos tarpiniai ar jų emocinis palyginimas su kitais laikotarpiais. Keltinas klausimas, kiek šie tyrimo pastebėjimai būdingi dviem nagrinėtoms šalims ir kiek gali būti taikomi plačiau.

Apibendrinant tyrimo rezultatus, buvo nustatytas trijų pagrindinių konstrukto (psichologinio artumo šaliai, kognityviniais elementais nustatyto šalies įvaizdžio ir bendro tos šalies prekių vertinimo) tarpusavio ryšys. Nustatyta, kad psichologinis artumas šaliai nekoreliuoja nei su tos šalies įvaizdžiu, nei su bendru jos prekių vertinimu. Kitaip tariant, asmuo gali neįvertinti asmeninio psichologinio artumo su šalimi (pvz., nenorėti joje gyventi), tačiau gerai vertinti tiek šalį, tiek ir jos prekes. Kiti du rodikliai (kognityviniais elementais nustatytas šalies įvaizdis ir bendras tos šalies prekių vertinimas), kaip ir tikėtasi, koreliavo tarpusavyje. Tačiau ryšys gali būti aptartas tolimesniame tyrime, siekiančiame nustatyti šio ryšio kryptį ir mechanizmą.

Šiame straipsnyje pasiūlytas naujas modelis, apimantis tiesioginio kontakto su šalimi veiksnį ir tris konstrukto (psichologinį artumą šaliai, šalies įvaizdį ir bendrą tos šalies prekių vertinimą). Nauja ir tai, kad konatyvinių elementų visuma prilyginta psichologiniam artumui su šalimi, o įvaizdis nustatytas vien naudojant kognityvinius elementus. Tyrimas parodė, kad toks modelis gali būti taikomas ir naudingas, atskleidžiant tiesioginio kontakto su šalimi veiksnio reikšmę.

Kita vertus, tyrimas iškėlė daug klausimų. Svarbiausias iš jų – kiek atskleisti dėsningumai būdingi tik dviem nagrinėtoms šalims, ir kiek gali būti traktuojami apibendrintai? Šis klausimas savaime nurodo tolimesnio tyrimo kryptį: taikant dabartinę metodiką būtų tikslinga aprėpti ir iširti daugiau šalių. Jei jos tarpusavyje ženkliai skirtingi psichologinio artumo požiūriu, šiame straipsnyje pristatoma medžiaga būtų gerokai platesnė.

Raktažodžiai: *prekių kilmės šalis, šalies įvaizdis, konatyviniai elementai, kognityviniai elementai, psichologinis artumas, bendras prekių vertinimas.*

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