Effects of Cognitive and Affective Country Image in the Full Service Restaurant Sector

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between cognitive and affective country image and consumer evaluations in the full service restaurant setting. The study conducts a quantitative survey of 370 Thai consumers to verify the proposed hypotheses. Japanese, Italian, and Chinese full service restaurants are chosen as they are ranked in the top three in terms of consumer preference. Structural equation modeling (SEM) provides evidence that affective influence plays a major role in consumer evaluations in the restaurant setting. Specifically, consumers' positive emotions toward the selected countries i.e. likability, friendliness, peace-lovingness and ideals of a country dominate the cognitive or fact-based component on restaurant choice. The results contribute theoretically in that different aspects of country image studies in the service context, especially in the restaurant industry, have rarely been addressed. The proposed model would enable multinational marketers to better manage and communicate country image as a positive affective element to their customers.

Keywords : Affective Country Image; Cognitive Country Image; Country of Origin; Country Image; Restaurant Industry

Introduction

The effect of a product's country of origin (COO) on consumer responses has received increased attention in the fields of international marketing and consumer behavior (Visbal, Ketty, Orozco-Acosta, & Herzberg, 2017). Country-of-origin image refers to "the consumers' overall perceptions, pictures or impressions of the country regardless of the accuracy of these

perceptions" (Carter & Maher, 2015, p.37). The impact of country-of-origin image on consumers' evaluations have been explored in many countries (Visbal *et al.*, 2017). Many previous studies have found that consumers make product evaluation and purchase decisions based on the perceptions of the country (Visbal *et al.,* 2017). Notably, COO image perceptions and effects are likely to vary across product categories and countries. Consequently, research on the effects of COO continues to evolve in search of a more rigorous understanding.

While country-of-origin image is comprised of an affective or emotional component and a cognitive or fact-based component (Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011), most research on the effects of COO on consumer responses focuses on the cognitive dimension (Li, Wang, Jiang, Barnes, & Zhang, 2014; Martinelli & De Canio, 2015). However, some scholars have indicated that the affective component dominates in evaluation of a foreign product (Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011). Accordingly, more studies of country-of-origin image are needed that explore both aspects on consumers' responses and the contributing roles of each. Put differently, affective and cognitive country image could each have different roles and contributing influence on consumer evaluations (Li *et al.*, 2014). Although some studies have highlighted this notion (Li *et al.*, 2014; Maher & Carter, 2011; Vijaranakorn & Shannon, 2017), the selected objects in their studies were physical products. The current study purposely differentiates between the two components of country-of-origin image within the service context.

It is interesting to note that studies examining COO in the restaurant industry are rare. Instead, most studies of COO image in the service setting involve tourism and airline industries (e.g. Cheng, Chen, Lai, & Li, 2014; Dedeoğlu, 2019). To fill this gap, this study examines and provides evidence that COO image contributes to restaurant evaluations as one type of informational cue.

This study focuses on examining the influence of country image on consumer evaluations of full service restaurants. Full service restaurants have the highest growth in the Thai restaurant industry, representing about a 10 percent market share of the overall industry. Its market value has been estimated at more than US$500 million (USDA Foreign Agricultural Service, 2016). Therefore, this sector was chosen in the current study. According to USDA Foreign Agricultural Service (2016), the top three full service restaurants in Thailand are Japanese restaurants, Italian restaurants and Chinese restaurants, respectively. The current

study suggests that cognitive and affective country image of these countries influence consumer evaluations of full service restaurants differently.

Research objective and question

The purpose of this study is to examine the affective and cognitive aspects of country-of-origin images on Thai consumer evaluations of Japanese, Italian, and Chinese restaurants.

In this regard, the following research question is addressed.

RQ1: How do affective and cognitive country images differ in their impact on restaurant evaluations?

Literature review

Country image

Country image consists of consumers' overall perceptions, pictures or impressions of a country (Roth & Romeo, 1992) regardless of the accuracy of these perceptions (Carter & Maher, 2015). Country image is one extrinsic cue that can become part of the total image of a product (Laroche, Papalopoulos, Heslop, & Mourali, 2005). Previous study suggests that favorable or unfavorable country image can facilitate or constrain the acceptance of products or services in host countries (Leonidou, Palihawadana, & Talias, 2007).

Country image consists of an affective component and a cognitive component (Verlegh, 2001; Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2003; Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009; Li *et al.*, 2014). Schooler and Sunoo (1969) were the first to propose that COO is comprised of these two dimensions (Nebenzahl, Jafffe, & Usunier, 2003). Subsequently, some scholars added normative (Laroche *et al.*, 2005) and risk elements (Leonidou *et al.*, 2007) into the COO construct. The general perception of a country is represented by cognitive evaluation (fact-based) and affective evaluation (feelings or emotions) of the country (Li *et al.*, 2014) that influence country conations (Maher & Carter, 2011).

Cognitive country image

Cognitive country image refers to "consumers' beliefs about a country's industrial development and its technological advancement" (Li *et al.*, 2014, p.2155). The cognitive dimension is perceived by consumers at an intellectual level (Licsandru *et al.*, 2013). Prior research (Laroche *et al.*, 2005) has indicated that consumers tend to use COO information

when product familiarity increases. However, these studies normally refer to COO effects in terms of the cognitive dimension.

Affective country image

In addition to a cognitive aspect, country-of-origin also has symbolic and emotional meanings involving consumer identity, pride and memory (Leonidou *et al.*, 2007). Affective country image is defined as "consumers' affective response to a country including its government, policies, culture and people" (Li *et al.*, 2014, p.2155). According to Kinra (2006), the affective component of country image dominates the cognitive component in evaluations of a foreign product.

Given these two distinct dimensions of country image, the current study anticipates that cognitive and affective country image will influence consumer choices differently as Thai consumers have different thoughts and feelings toward particular countries.

Country image and consumer responses

Country image can play the role of a halo view and a summary view in influencing consumer response (Laroche *et al.*, 2005). According to the halo view, consumers use country image to infer product quality if they are unfamiliar or have limited knowledge about a foreign product. In this regard, country image influences consumer choices of specific product attributes. Therefore, it affects overall product evaluation indirectly (Ahmed Johnson, Ling, Fang, & Hui, 2002). When consumers become more knowledgeable about a product, country image becomes less important as an extrinsic cue in forming product evaluations. Conversely, some studies reported that when consumers become more familiar with a product, they tend to rely more on COO information (Laroche *et al.*, 2005). The summary view suggests that the country image is a summary construct and consumers use it to summarize information about a product (Laroche *et al.*, 2005). In other words, country image affects their overall evaluation of the product. The effects of COO on consumer responses are likely to vary from country to country and are caused by differences in economic, political, legal, social, cultural and other factors (Leonidou *et al.*, 2007).

Country image studies in the food service sector

The majority of COO research has examined the effects of COO on consumer responses to tangible products. Although COO knowledge in the service setting is increasingly investigated, studies of COO image in the restaurant industry are limited. Studies of COO image in the service context involve tourism (Dedeoğlu, 2019; Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011;

Zeugner-Roth & Zabkar, 2015), food services (Martinelli & De Canio, 2015; Zeugner-Roth, Diamantopoulos, & Montesinos, 2008) and airline services (Cheng *et al*., 2014; Zeugner-Roth *et al.*, 2008). Although Zeugner-Roth *et al.* (2008) explored the influence of COO on consumer response in the food service context,   research does not differentiate between specific COO image components. Likewise, Martinelli and De Canio (2015) investigated the country image effects in dining services. However, the measure used examined only the cognitive dimension. Authors even suggest that further research should embrace both affective and cognitive measures of country image.

The full service restaurant sector in Thailand

The food service business is one of the most competitive industries in Thailand. It can be divided into sub-groups as follows: quick service restaurants (QSR), full service restaurants, and small restaurants (USDA Foreign Agricultural Service, 2016).   In this study, a full service restaurant means "a sit down eatery where food is served directly to the customers' table" (Franchise Direct, 2010). The most popular restaurant cuisines among global cuisines are Italian, Japanese, Chinese, Indian, and American (Waldfogel, 2019). Japanese restaurants are number one in the full service restaurant ranking in Thailand, followed by Italian and Chinese restaurants (USDA Foreign Agricultural Service, 2016).   As such, they were selected to study the influence of affective and cognitive country image on restaurant evaluations.

Given prior work**,** the current study proposes research hypotheses involving the effects of both cognitive and affective country image in the restaurant context for the following reasons. There are few studies exploring both affective and cognitive aspects of country image in the service context. In addition, researches encompassing both dimensions in the restaurant industry have rarely been addressed. Finally, findings on COO image perceptions and effects tend to vary across service categories.

Research Hypotheses

Based on cue utilization theory, consumers infer product quality from many cues such as color, packaging, price, and country of origin (Visbal *et al.*, 2017). Consumers tend to associate products with positive attributes of their country-of-origin symbols (Dagger & Racit, 2011). Prior research has found that a favorable perception of a country enhances consumers' evaluations of a product or service (Ahmed *et al.*, 2002). Notably, however,

some studies show that country image influences product evaluation and choices rather than purchase intention (Li *et al.*, 2014).

The results of previous research also indicates that COO encourages country specific stereotypes which present cognitive and affective influences creating a halo-effect over a product (Herz & Damantopoulis, 2012; Visbal *et al.,* 2017). Past studies have also shown that cognitive evaluation of country image affects consumer responses (Li *et al.,* 2014; Martinelli & De Canio, 2015). However, other studies find that consumers do not exercise a strong cognitive component (Alex & Abraham, 2015; Visbal *et al.,* 2017).

Regarding the affective aspect of country image, previous study has found that a consumer's positive emotions toward a country, such as pleasure become associated with perceptions of product quality (Visbal *et al.,* 2017). Some scholars have indicated that the affective component predominates in evaluation of a foreign product (Kinra, 2006; Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011). This study embraces both aspects: affective and cognitive measures of country image and investigates their effects on consumer evaluations in the full service restaurant sector as follows.

H1a: Affective country image has a positive effect upon consumer evaluations of full service restaurants.

H1b: Cognitive country image has a positive effect upon consumer evaluations of full service restaurants.

H1c: Affective and cognitive COO images differ in their impact on restaurant evaluations.

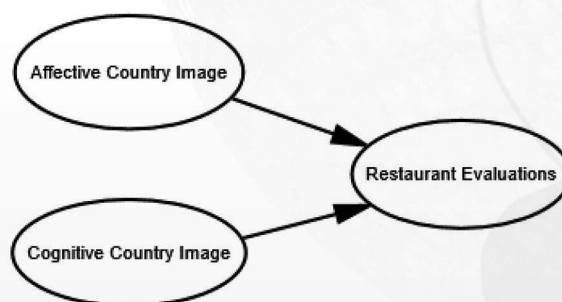Consequently, the present study proposes the following research framework (Figure 1)

Figure 1 The research framework

Research methodology

The current study conducts a quantitative survey to verify the proposed model and test the relationships between affective and cognitive country image and consumers' evaluations in the context of full service restaurant settings. Specifically, full service restaurants in this study involve restaurants that offer cuisines that originate in a country other than the home country (i.e. Thailand).

Measurement of Variables

Based on prior literature (Li *et al.*, 2014; Vijaranakorn & Shannon, 2017), four items of affective country image (AC) were measured. Cognitive country image (CC) was also measured by four items (Li *et al.*, 2014). Restaurant evaluations (RE) was adapted and measured by three items (Laroche *et al.*, 2005). These measurement items were assessed by a five-point Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. To assess face validity of the measures, these items were submitted to three marketing scholars and two full service restaurant owners. Based on their comments, items were modified slightly.

Research instruments, sample and data collection

The instrument used in this survey was a questionnaire consisting of two parts: Part I – describing respondents' demographic profiles, and Part II - asking for respondents' evaluation of their perceptions of affective and cognitive country image as well as their evaluation of Japanese/Italian/Chinese full service restaurants. The definition of a full service restaurant was also explained in Part II. The back translation method was used to translate the instrument from English to Thai for Thai consumers. Accordingly, two experts of both languages in a university were requested to employ the back translation method.

The research sample was determined on the basis of the ratio of observations per variable. According to Bentler and Chou (1987), such a ratio should be 10 to 1. Based on the model consisting of 11 observed variables, the sample size should be a minimum of 110 consumers. The questionnaires were distributed to 500 consumers at three shopping malls in Bangkok to accommodate refusals and unusable questionnaires. These major shopping centers were selected as they are centers for international cuisine, from Asian to European cuisine. The sampling technique was convenience sampling. Upon agreeing to participate in the study, respondents were asked to complete a self-administered survey with a screening question based on their perceptions of Japan, Italy, and China. The screening question involves

consumer awareness of all three countries. To obtain consent from respondents, the researchers informed them about the purpose of the study, expected duration of completing a questionnaire, number of pages and items, and confidentiality of personal demographic information so that they could make a voluntary decision to participate in the research study. In this regard, some consumers refused to take part in the study. Moreover, some returned questionnaires were incomplete. Consequently, the remaining usable questionnaires for further analysis were 370, resulting in a response rate of 67.3%.

Data analysis and findings of the study

Based on a sample size of 370, most of the respondents were female (60.3%), had a Bachelor's degree (55.9%), had an income per month ranging from 15,001 to 20,000 baht (36.2%), and a mean age of 26.01 years. Descriptive statistics of country image and restaurant evaluations perceived by Thai consumers are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Average scores of country image and restaurant evaluations perceived by Thai consumers

Factors	$\bar{x}$		
	Japan	Italy	China
Affective country image (AC)	**3.88**	**3.32**	**2.56**
AC1 Friendly country	3.79	3.21	2.64
AC2 Likable country	4.10	3.59	2.70
AC3 Peace-loving country	3.88	3.28	2.46
AC4 Ideal country	3.76	3.21	2.43
Cognitive country image (CC)	**4.26**	**3.58**	**3.34**
CC1 Affluent county	3.98	3.52	3.65
CC2 High living standards	4.24	3.59	2.76
CC3 State-of-the-art country	4.38	3.63	3.37
CC4 Advanced technology	4.44	3.57	3.57
Restaurant evaluations (RE)	**3.60**	**3.09**	**3.03**
RE1 I am willing to visit Japanese/Italian/Chinese restaurants.	3.86	3.21	3.17

Table 1 Average scores of country image and restaurant evaluations perceived by Thai consumers (continued)

Factors	$\bar{x}$		
	Japan	Italy	China
RE2 I would be proud to use food services at Japanese/Italian/Chinese restaurants.	3.51	3.09	2.99
RE3 Japanese/Italian/Chinese restaurants are for people like me.	3.44	2.96	2.95

Note: Mean scores based on a five point scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree

From Table 1, Japan has the most favorable country image and China has the least favorable country image. With respect to the two components of country image, Japan, Italy and China were perceived by Thai consumers better on the cognitive dimensions compared to the affective ones. Regarding the country image of Japan, the item "Japan has advanced technology." had the highest mean score on the cognitive dimension (4.44) and the item "Japan is a likable country." had the highest mean value on the affective dimension (4.10). The items "Italy is a state-of-the-art country" (3.63) and "Italy is a likable country" (3.59) were perceived the greatest in each country image aspect. Regarding country image for China, the item "China is an affluent country." had the highest mean score on the cognitive dimension (3.65) and the item "China is a likable country." had the highest average score on the affective dimension (2.70). Among all three countries, Japanese restaurants were more highly preferred.

Measurement model analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted on the sample via AMOS version 22.0. The combined country model demonstrated adequate fit, χ^2 = 146.003, df = 36, p < .05, GFI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.09, CFI = 0.97, TLI = 0.96. Accordingly, GFI, CFI, and TLI values were above the threshold of 0.90 (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). The value of RMSEA was acceptably found to be within the range between 0.50 and 1.00 (Awang, 2012). Table 2 represents the factor loadings of the measures as well as the validity and reliability analysis. To establish reliability, Composite Reliability (CR) should be greater than 0.70 (Hair *et al.*, 2006), which was clearly the case. Cronbach's alpha of affective country image, cognitive country image, and consumer evaluation of restaurants was 0.91, 0.93 and 0.94, respectively,

also indicating good reliability (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012). The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values of all factors were greater than 0.50 (Hair *et al.*, 2006), establishing convergent validity. Regarding discriminant validity, the squared correlations between factors were less than the AVE values (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) as shown in Table 3. Further, employing the same tests, the study found that each measurement model of a specific country was also valid and reliable. Finally, the validity and reliability analysis of all measures confirmed the proposed scales.

Table 2 Data analysis results (Combined countries)

Construct	Measure	Standardized Factor Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Affective country image (AC)	AC1	.81***	.91	.91	.71
	AC2	.89***			
	AC3	.81***			
	AC4	.87***			
Cognitive country image (CC)	CC1	.80***	.93	.93	.76
	CC2	.80***			
	CC3	.95***			
	CC4	.92***			
Restaurant evaluations (RE)	RE1	.90***	.94	.94	.83
	RE2	.93***			
	RE3	.91***			

Notes : *** p-value < .001

Table 3 Discriminant analysis (Combined countries)

Factor	AC	CC	RE
Affective country image (AC)	**0.71**		
Cognitive country image (CC)	0.55	**0.76**	
Restaurant evaluations (RE)	0.48	0.27	**0.83**

Notes : the AVE values are on the diagonal in bold. Below diagonal values are square of correlation estimates.

Structural equation model analysis

For hypotheses testing, structural equation modeling (SEM) was done using AMOS version 22.0. SEM can test all relationships between variables of the hypothesized model simultaneously and be more precise in model specification (Hair *et al*., 2006). According to the SEM results, the structural model of combined countries had a good fit. The overall model χ^2 was 116.972 with 40 degrees of freedom. The p-value was significant using a Type I error of .05. The model fit measures were GFI = 0.95, CFI = 0.98, TLI = 0.97, exceeding the guideline of 0.90 (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012; Hair *et al.*, 2006). The value of RMSEA of 0.07 was acceptable (Awang, 2012).

Table 4 represents the comparison model results of three countries of origin. The findings are consistent with those of the structural models of combined countries. Notably, favorable affective country images of Japan and Italy had a stronger effect on restaurant evaluations than that of China. The study confirms that the importance of COO cues varies across countries (Leonidou *et al.*, 2007).

Table 4 The model results of combined countries and three countries of origin

Country of origin	Path coefficient		Model fit results
	AC -> RE	CC -> RE	
Combined countries	.71***	-.02	χ^2 = 116.972 , df = 40, p = .000, GFI = 0.95, RMSEA = .07, CFI = 0.98, TLI = 0.97
Japan	.65***	.00	χ^2 = 93.572 , df = 38, p = .000, GFI = 0.95, RMSEA = .06, CFI = 0.98, TLI = 0.97
Italy	.65***	-.12	χ^2 = 89.708 , df = 40, p = .000, GFI = .96, RMSEA = .06, CFI = 0.98, TLI = 0.98
China	.52***	.04	χ^2 = 145.112 , df = 37, p = .000, GFI = 0.94, RMSEA = .09, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.94

Notes: AC = Affective Country Image; CC = Cognitive Country Image; RE = Restaurant Evaluations; *** p-value < .001

Hypotheses testing

SEM results presented significant support for hypothesis H1a. The affective cognitive country image positively affected consumer evaluations of restaurants (β = .71, p =.000). For H1b, the cognitive country image did not significantly impact restaurants' evaluations (β = -.02, p > .05). It was observed that Thai consumers perceived Japan, Italy, and China positively in terms of cognitive country image. However, the affective influences (i.e. favorable feelings toward the selected countries) are more influential than cognitive evaluations in the food service sector. For H1c, the model results of combined countries and three countries of origin (Table 4) provided evidence that affective and cognitive COO images had different effects on restaurant choices. The SEM results of combined countries are shown in Figure 2. Table 8 summarizes hypotheses testing results.
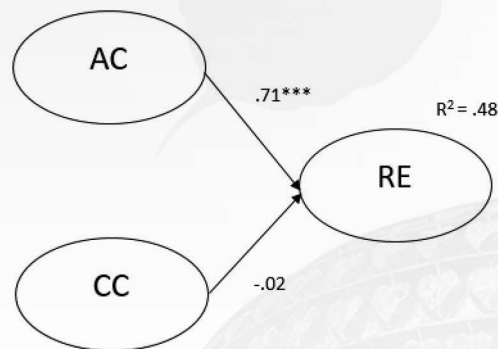

Figure 2 The structural model results

Notes: AC = Affective Country Image; CC = Cognitive Country Image; RE = Restaurant Evaluations; *** p-value < .001; R^2 = Explained variance

Table 8 The hypotheses testing results

No	Hypotheses	Results
H1a	Affective country image has a positive effect upon consumer evaluations of full service restaurants.	Supported
H1b	Cognitive country image has a positive effect upon consumer evaluations of full service restaurants.	Rejected
H1c	Affective and cognitive COO images differ in their impact on restaurant evaluations.	Supported

Discussion

According to SEM results, the research model has a good fit and proposed hypothesis (H1a) is significantly supported indicating the positive effect of affective country image on restaurant evaluations. The results are consistent in all three countries.

The evidence is in line with past research showing the positive relationship between affective dimension of country of origin and consumer choices (Visbal *et al.*, 2017). It is likely that consumers' positive emotions toward the country are associated with restaurant service offerings, thus enabling them to infer COO as an information cue for their evaluations. Accordingly, the "likable country" item within the affective dimension has the highest average score in all three countries (Japan = 4.10, Italy = 3.59, China = 2.70).

Among the three countries, Japan's affective country image and Japanese restaurants had the highest rating, followed by Italy, and then China. The results are consistent with prior work (Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011) indicating that if a consumer has positive feelings toward a specific object such as a country, he or she will show an interest in the product or service originating from that country (e.g. dining services). Therefore, this study indicates that restaurant evaluations vary among countries due to different levels of emotional attachment to a country.

The findings of this study confirm that the favorable perception of a country enhance consumers' evaluations of that product or service (Ahmed *et al.*, 2002; Poddar, Ozcan, & Madupalli, 2015). They also reflect the summary role of country image in consumer evaluations (Laroche *et al.*, 2005) as Thai consumers use affective country image to summarize overall information about restaurants given that they are familiar with this product category.

Regarding H1b, cognitive country image does not significantly affect restaurant choices. While the effects of country image on consumer responses normally focus on the cognitive element (Li *et al.*, 2014), this study reveals that, in the food service sector, the cognitive aspect of country image does not influence consumer choices. Notably, from Table 2, the cognitive component dominates the affective component in evaluation of country image. The average scores of the cognitive dimension of three countries are greater than those of the affective ones. However, in the restaurant sector, consumers do not use a cognitive perception of the country as an extrinsic information cue in forming their evaluations (Alex & Abraham, 2015; Visbal *et al.*, 2017). In particular, the COO image of technological advancement or high living standard or affluent country is not associated with food service assessment. The possible

explanation is that services in the restaurant industry involves more emotional and aesthetic perceptions.

For H1c, SEM results of three countries of origin also support that affective and cognitive COO images differ in their impact on restaurant choices. While Martinelli and De Canio (2015) found that country image affected consumers' willingness to patronize a dining service, they employed only cognitive items to measure the overall country image. Embracing both dimensions, cognitive and affective, this study reveals that the affective influences, i.e. favorable feelings toward particular countries are more influential than cognitive evaluations in restaurant assessment. Particularly noteworthy, in this context is the dominant effect of affective factors on restaurant choice.

The findings empirically support the prior study indicating that affective and cognitive evaluations of countries vary depending on the specific case or referent (Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011). The affective component of country image dominates the cognitive component in evaluations of restaurants. According to emotional attachment theory, if consumers have strong emotions towards an object (e.g. a specific country), their emotions will affect their response to it (Lu, Heslop, Thomas, & Kwan, 2016). This theory helps to explain Thai consumers' emotional bonds with the selected countries, thus resulting in their observed responses and preferences. Furthermore, findings are in line with prior studies (Kinra, 2006; Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011) indicating that the affective component dominates the fact-based component in the evaluation of a foreign product.

Conclusions

Although prior research has addressed the impact of country image on consumer response to foreign or imported products, studies including both affective and cognitive components of country image in the service setting have not been highlighted. Specifically, studies of country image in the restaurant industry have rarely been addressed. To address this gap, the current study proposes that, two aspects of COO image, cognitive and affective are distinct in their influence over consumer choices in full service restaurants. Structural equation modeling (SEM) provides evidence that affective influence plays an important role in consumer evaluations in the food service sector.   Specifically, consumers' positive emotions regarding likability, friendliness, peace-lovingness and ideals of a country dominate the cognitive component on restaurant choice.

Theoretical and managerial implications

Regarding contributions of this research, the current study contributes to international business, international marketing and consumer behavior literature in that it provides a better understanding of the influence of country image on consumers' evaluations in the food service sector. It extends the country-of-origin literature by differentiating between cognitive and affective country image in the service context.

Since country of origin has a significant role in consumer evaluation, the findings of the study have strategic implications for restaurants engaged in both domestic and international business. Restaurant managers could apply this model by communicating their positive brand origin in a particular country to improve consumers' feelings and evaluations of their offerings. Specifically, multinational practitioners and restaurant businesses that originate from Japan, Italy, and China should emphasize affective COO in their service offerings and communications as this component is influential in Thailand and impacts consumer choices. According to Kincaid, Baloglu, Mao and Busser (2010), a competitive advantage for restaurants is to meet and satisfy the tangible expectations of consumers. They found that affect was a strong mediator between tangible quality and repatronage intentions. Three tangible factors (servicescape) include ambient conditions (e.g. temperature, odors), layout (e.g. arrangement of furnishing), and signs, symbols and artifacts that facilitates a desired mood (Kincaid *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, restaurant practitioners should encourage positive feelings toward their restaurants by manipulating intangible attributes i.e. friendliness and peace-lovingness of their countries into tangible offerings. For example, Italian restaurants might cultivate consumers' favorable feelings by communicating country's attractiveness and likability through dining room design, Italian style furniture, floor decorations, menu, tableware, service personnel uniforms, signs, atmosphere and ambiance.

For communication strategies, restaurants might promote positive affective elements of the countries and their tangible quality to their customers via various communication channels. Consumers' first exposure is usually through a restaurant's website; therefore, a well-designed website can enhance consumers' positive perceptions of the country and tangible elements of restaurants' offerings. Social media such as Instagram, Facebook Pages, YouTube can be excellent sources to enhance positive feelings towards restaurants. Restaurant marketers can deliver consistent messages and contents of countries' likability and restaurant design across channels. Overall, the proposed framework and findings on country-

of-origin image should help food service practitioners better understand consumer perceptions and devise product and promotion plans more effectively.

Limitations and future recommendations

Finally, this study has some limitations that should be noted. First, the unit of analysis in this study was country level. Future studies might explore whether the findings in this study extend to brand level. Secondly, to gain more insight into the effects of demographic differences on COO image and restaurant evaluations, additional techniques like experimental studies and qualitative interviews should be included in future studies. Thirdly, to extend the understanding of the affective aspect of COO image, further research might expand constructs involving affect that could hamper or enhance service consumption, for example, consumer animosity and consumer affinity (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2011). Since this study investigates the influence of COO image only on consumer evaluations, its effects on actual behavior in the food service sector should also be addressed in further explorations. Finally, other restaurant settings (e.g., quick service restaurants, small restaurants) and other industries in the service sector could be further examined as country-of-origin effects are likely to vary among service categories (Berentzen, Backhaus, Michaelis, Blut, & Ahlert, 2008).

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