

Cosmopolitanism as a Basis for International Market Segmentation

Abstract

The general idea that is explored in this paper is that the relationships between one's degree of cosmopolitanism and one's perceptions of a country are explained by the concept of country image. A survey was conducted among a sample of 148 Canadian adult consumers. The results reveal that consumers who display a high level of cosmopolitanism see countries in a more favorable way in general. Depending upon their relative weight in the image formation, certain country image dimensions have a different impact on the degree to which a country is perceived as providing various benefits. Implications for governmental agencies, firms, and tour operators are derived from these results.

Key words: Cosmopolitanism, country image, country perceptions, tourism, quality of life.

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Introduction

Cosmopolitanism – an individual disposition that represents a conscious openness to the world and to cultural differences (Skrbis, Kendall, & Woodward, 2004) – is no longer a privilege of the elite, as it was the case in previous centuries. It has democratized thanks to several phenomena linked to globalization, such as the growth of exchanges between countries, the increased mobility of people, goods and information, and the omnipresence of the mass and social medias. The access to, and consumption of other cultures has indeed never been so easy. The number of cosmopolitan consumers is thus growing over the world, establishing a class of individuals who are highly relevant to global companies as well as to the governments of countries.

Because cosmopolitans like to express their lifestyle through their consumption (Riefler, Diamantopoulos, & Siguaw, 2012), cosmopolitanism has been recognized as a useful basis for segmentation (Cannon & Yaprak, 2002). International marketing researchers have thus shown a great interest in the development of valid measuring instruments that can be used to position consumers on this trait. Riefler, Diamantopoulos, and Siguaw (2012), for instance, define cosmopolitan consumers as (1) individuals who are open-minded as regards other people and cultures, (2) who appreciate the diversity of products and services coming from different countries, and (3) who consume foreign products and services. Their definition is, as it can be seen, very much centered on the consumption side of cosmopolitanism, and it is therefore not surprising that they found that cosmopolitans tend to pay attention to the national origin of products and services. However, consuming foreign products does not in and of itself make a person cosmopolitan. For instance, some consumers are constrained to buy foreign products and brands because they do not find their equivalent in their local market. Thus, it seems more appropriate to consider the consumption of foreign products as a consequence of cosmopolitanism, than as a part of the concept.

A perspective that is consistent with this view has been put forward by Cleveland, Laroche, and Papadopoulos (2009) who stipulate that cosmopolitanism refers to a “specific set of beliefs, attitudes, and qualities held by certain people”, based on a conscious openness to the world and to cultural differences (Skrbis, Kendall, & Woodward, 2004). In other words, cosmopolitans are open-minded individuals who are eager to engage in different cultural experiences (Hannerz, 1990); they have an appetite for what is different, for what comes from elsewhere. This perspective is useful to specify who is cosmopolitan and who is not. Tourists who travel to different sun destinations to enjoy the beaches and the good life, with no intent or desire to blend into the local population, cannot be considered as cosmopolitans, although they are likely to consume foreign products and services during their stay. Similarly, expatriates who do not open up to others and lock themselves into their own culture are not automatically cosmopolitans, although of necessity they will buy goods produced in the foreign country in which they live.

Cosmopolitanism as a segmentation basis

For cosmopolitanism to be used as a segmentation basis, it is necessary to understand the process by which this disposition leads to favorable country perceptions. Although it is interesting to learn that cosmopolitanism is positively associated with attitude toward foreign products, toward countries as travel destinations, or toward countries as places to live, it does not serve much purpose unless one knows how these favorable tendencies come about. For instance, cosmopolitanism may correlate positively with the perceived quality of products made in France primarily because of this country's bon vivant image. In contrast, a positive correlation with the perceived quality of German products might rather be explained by Germany's image of assiduousness. Hence, while emphasizing the bon vivant image might be an effective marketing communication strategy to target cosmopolitans when promoting French products, it might not be the case for German products.

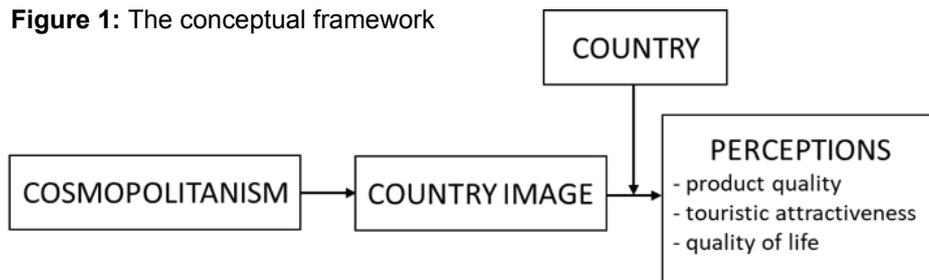
Country image is a key concept to comprehend how cosmopolitanism induces favorable country perceptions. Riefler, Diamantopoulos, and Siguaw (2012) report that cosmopolitans pay attention to the national origin of products and services that they buy. This knowledge is likely to activate a mental representation of the country of origin in consumers' minds which, in turn, should lead to specific perceptions as regards the products and services originating from this country. When shopping for say a kitchen knife, a consumer who sees a specific model made in France may presumably form mental images related to the bon vivant spirit and infer, consciously or not, that using this product should be a pleasant experience. Country image should play a similar role when consumers are shopping for a travel destination or looking for a place to live.

Moreover, because cosmopolitans like to know about different cultures, they are more likely to gather information about countries in general, becoming more familiar with them. This greater familiarity in turn will lead to more favorable mental images (see e.g., Rindfleisch & Inman, 1998). Therefore, in general, a greater degree of cosmopolitanism should produce a more positive country image, whatever the country that is considered.

Conceptual development

The conceptual framework of this research is presented in Figure 1. First, it is proposed that cosmopolitanism has a general positive effect on the image of countries. As discussed above, this is because cosmopolitans display a great openness to the world and appreciate the differences between cultures (Skrbis, Kendall, & Woodward, 2004; Thompson & Tambyah, 1999). Therefore, when thinking about any country, cosmopolitans are likely to activate mental representations that are more favorable than those activated by consumers in general, whether these representations concern cognitive (e.g., economic development, resources, political stability, quality of workers) or affective elements (e.g., hospitality, values, folklore, scenery).

Figure 1: The conceptual framework



In this conceptual framework, country image acts as a mediating variable between consumers' degree of cosmopolitanism and specific country perceptions (i.e., product quality, touristic attractiveness, quality of life). As argued before, the concept of country image allows one to understand why cosmopolitanism may or may be related to country perceptions. For instance, a positive relationship between cosmopolitanism and, say, the perceived quality of products manufactured by a country, may be explained by some elements of the country's image (e.g., quality of workers) but not by others (e.g., hospitality). Therefore, country image permits to understand the nature of the relationship that is observed between one's degree of cosmopolitanism and one's country perceptions.

Finally, the relationship between country image and country perceptions is hypothesized to be moderated by country. Countries differs with respect to a host of attributes and consequently the impact of a country's image on specific attributes is likely to change depending on which country is considered. For instance, the cognitive attributes of a country's image may have a greater impact on the perceived quality of products in countries whose image basically rests on cognitive elements.

Method

Data collection

A survey was conducted among a sample of 148 Canadian adult consumers using a drop-off delivery data collection procedure. Streets were randomly selected from residential areas of a major city and two interviewers knocked on the door of every other dwelling on these streets in order to secure the residents' participation. The questionnaire was picked up later by the interviewer at a convenient time. From a total of 801 dwellings that were visited, 430 contacts were made (contact rate = 53.7%), 195 people accepted to participate (acceptance rate = 45.4%), 152 questionnaires were picked up, from which four questionnaires had to be eliminated because they were invalid (final response rate = 75.9%).

Measures

The measure of *cosmopolitanism* was composed of six items adapted from a scale developed by Cleveland,

Laroche, and Papadopoulos (2009) (e.g., “I enjoy exchanging ideas with people from other cultures or countries”). The items for this scale were associated with seven-point bipolar numerical scales with endpoints *totally disagree/totally agree*.

Country perceptions and country image measures were obtained for three countries: France, Austria, and Spain. These countries were selected because (1) Canadian consumers would generally be familiar with them, (2) they have a priori different images, (3) are culturally different (e.g., language), (4) represent economies of different sizes (GDP per capita in US\$ – France: 41,463, Austria: 51,513, Spain: 30,524; The World Bank, 2018), and (5) are part of the same continent.

As regards *country perceptions*, three dimensions were considered: the country as a producer of consumer goods (two items, e.g., “A country which makes quality products”), the country as a travel destination (two items, e.g., “An interesting travel destination”), and the country as a place to live (two items, e.g., “A country with a great quality of life”). The items were taken from d’Astous and Boujbel (2007) and rated by means of seven-point bipolar numerical scales with endpoints *totally disagree/totally agree*.

Country image was operationalized through the concept of country personality. Each country was positioned with respect to the five country personality dimensions uncovered by d’Astous and Boujbel (2007): agreeableness, wickedness, snobbism, assiduousness, conformity, and unobtrusiveness. For each personality dimension, the participant had to indicate on a seven-point bipolar numerical scale whether the term was descriptive of the country (*not at all descriptive/totally descriptive*). The questionnaire ended with sociodemographic questions (gender, age, education, occupation, annual household income before taxes).

Results

Sample description

The sample comprises a slightly greater number of male respondents (52.7%). The mean age of the participants is 50.9 years with a standard deviation of 14.4 (range: 19-79). They are well educated (55.5% of them have had some university education) and financially comfortable (56.2% indicated an annual household income of 100,000\$CAN or more).

Development and psychometric quality of the measures

The six items of the cosmopolitanism scale were factor analyzed using principal components analysis. A single factor emerged explaining 80.8% of the total variance (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.95). The mean of the items served as an indicator for the concept. Several results suggest that the scale is appropriate. Thus, consistent with previous research conducted in several countries (Cleveland, Laroche, & Papadopoulos, 2009), female consumers are more cosmopolitan (mean = 6.05) than male consumers (mean = 5.58) ($t(87) = 1.83, p < 0.05$, one-tailed test), cosmopolitanism is negatively correlated with age ($r = -0.24, t(85) = -2.24, p < 0.05$), and cosmopolitanism is higher among consumers with some university education (mean = 6.03) than among those with less education (mean = 5.53) ($t(88) = 1.99, p < 0.05$).

The correlations between the items serving to assess the three countries’ perceptions as regards the quality of their products, their attractiveness as a travel destination, and their quality of life were all positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.01$): France: 0.80, 0.79, and 0.78, respectively; Austria: 0.73, 0.93, and 0.82, respectively; Spain: 0.87, 0.86, and 0.70, respectively. The mean of the items served as an indicator for the concepts.

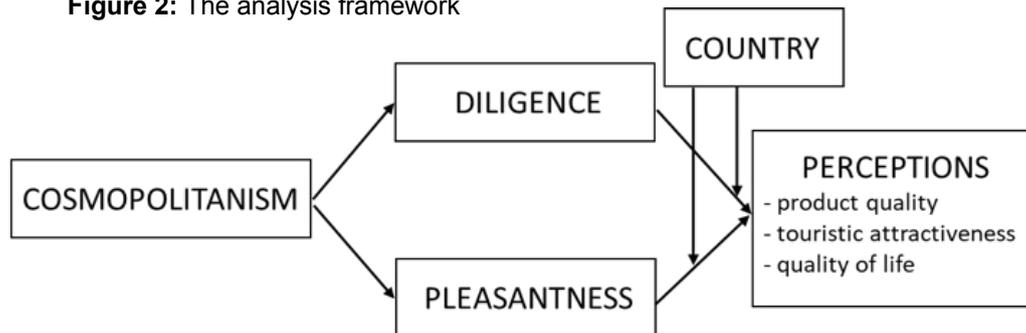
The six country personality items were factor analysed using principal components analysis. A first run revealed that the unobtrusiveness item had a very low communality (0.15) and it was therefore removed. A second run conducted on the five remaining items led to a two-factor solution explaining 63% of the total variance. Because the snobbism item loaded strongly on both factors, it was removed. The final run led to a two-factor solution explaining 68.6% of the total variance with the items assiduousness and conformity loading strongly on the first factor (0.83 and 0.82, respectively) and the items agreeableness and wickedness loading strongly on the second factor (0.81 and -0.78, respectively). The first factor was interpreted as corresponding to *diligence whereas the second factor was interpreted as corresponding to pleasantness*. The means of the items (after inverting the wickedness item) served as an indicator of both country personality traits. The correlations between the items were statistically significant (at least $p < .05$): France (0.30 and 0.27), Austria (0.21 and 0.46), Spain (0.39 and 0.38), as regards pleasantness and diligence, respectively.

As expected, Austria was perceived as the most diligent country (mean = 4.20), followed by France (4.11), and Spain (3.69) ($F(1.93, 273.27) = 14.16, p < 0.001$). Unsurprisingly, Spain was perceived as the most pleasant country (mean = 5.68), followed by France (5.39), and Austria (5.31) ($F(2, 279.75) = 8.63, p < 0.001$).

Test of the conceptual model

Figure 2 is a representation of the conceptual framework where country image is now shown as being formed of two personality dimensions: diligence and pleasantness. It is proposed first that cosmopolitanism has a positive impact on the degree to which a country is perceived as diligent and pleasant. These two country personality dimensions then are expected to have an impact on consumer perceptions as it relates to product quality, touristic attractiveness, and quality of life. These effects are hypothesized to be moderated by country (i.e., France, Austria, and Spain). Finally, country personality is assumed to act as a mediator of the relationship between cosmopolitanism and consumer perceptions.

Figure 2: The analysis framework



The test of this mediation model necessitates two steps (MacKinnon, 2008). First, it must be shown that the effect of cosmopolitanism on both country personality dimensions is statistically significant. Second, it must be shown that both country personality dimensions have a statistically significant impact on consumer perceptions when the effect of cosmopolitanism is included.

A multivariate regression model using diligence and pleasantness as dependent variables and cosmopolitanism as independent variable resulted as expected in a statistically significant multivariate impact of cosmopolitanism (Wilks' lambda = 0.44, $F(2, 423) = 264.73, p < .001$). Follow-up univariate regressions confirmed that this impact was positive and statistically significant for each dependent variable (diligence: $b = 0.08, t(424) = 1.81, p < 0.05$, one-tailed test; pleasantness: $b = 0.13, t(426) = 3.13, p < 0.01$, one-tailed test). These results confirm that the first step of the procedure is achieved.

The second step of the procedure must be accomplished for each country perception variable, that is product quality, touristic attractiveness, and quality of life. The statistical analyses are the same for each dependent variable.

Product quality

An ANOVA model using product quality perceptions as the dependent variable and country (three levels), diligence, pleasantness, the interaction of country with each personality dimension, and cosmopolitanism was estimated. The results revealed that diligence ($F(1, 425) = 24.73, p < 0.001$), pleasantness ($F(1, 425) = 44.14, p < 0.001$), cosmopolitanism ($F(1, 425) = 12.12, p < 0.001$), and the interaction between country and diligence ($F(2, 425) = 3.97, p < 0.05$) were statistically significant. No other effect was significant. Overall, these results indicate that diligence acts as a mediator through its interaction with country and that pleasantness acts a main effect mediator in the relationship between cosmopolitanism and country perceptions as regards the quality of products. Because the effect of cosmopolitanism is statistically significant, these are partial mediation effects.

Follow-up regression analyses showed that in the case of France, both country personality dimensions had a positive and statistically significant effect on product-country perceptions (diligence: $b = 0.17, t(146) = 2.0, p < 0.05$; pleasantness: $b = 0.42, t(146) = 5.07, p < 0.001$). Similar results were observed in the case of Austria, except that for this country the magnitude of the diligence effect was greater than that of pleasantness (diligence: $b = 0.42, t(139) = 5.59, p < 0.001$; pleasantness: $b = 0.33, t(130) = 3.64, p < 0.001$). The results concerning Spain had a pattern similar to those of France (diligence: $b = 0.15, t(144) = 1.85, p < 0.05$, one-tailed test; pleasantness: $b = 0.34, t(146) = 3.88, p < 0.001$). In a

nutshell, the statistically significant country \times diligence interaction is explained by the greater importance of diligence as a country dimension in Austria than in the two other countries.

Touristic attractiveness

The estimation of an ANOVA model using as dependent variable touristic attractiveness resulted in statistically significant effects of all independent variables: country ($F(1, 416) = 43.36, p < 0.001$), diligence ($F(1, 416) = 22.23, p < 0.001$), pleasantness ($F(1, 416) = 105.97, p < 0.001$), country \times diligence ($F(1, 416) = 3.94, p < 0.05$), country \times pleasantness ($F(1, 416) = 5.06, p < 0.01$), and cosmopolitanism ($F(1, 416) = 9.91, p < 0.01$). For this dependent variable therefore, the mediation effects are partial and concentrated in the interactive effects of country and personality.

Follow-up regression analyses were conducted to understand how the impact of country personality varied depending on the country. In the case of France, the effects of diligence ($b = 0.15, t(144) = 2.47, p < 0.05$) and pleasantness ($b = 0.31, t(144) = 5.26, p < 0.001$) were positive and statistically significant. A similar pattern was observed as regards Austria (diligence: $b = 0.35, t(138) = 4.40, p < 0.001$; pleasantness: $b = 0.63, t(138) = 6.53, p < 0.001$). With respect to Spain however, pleasantness was the only statistically significant country personality variable ($b = 0.46, t(142) = 6.76, p < 0.001$). Therefore, the statistically significant country \times personality interactions are explained mainly by the fact that consumers' positive perceptions of Spain as a tourist destination are a function of the country's pleasantness, whereas for the other countries both diligence and pleasantness are significant predictors.

Quality of life

The estimation of an ANOVA model using quality of life as the dependent variable resulted in statistically significant effects for all independent variables, except cosmopolitanism: country ($F(1, 416) = 9.49, p < 0.001$), diligence ($F(1, 416) = 23.32, p < 0.001$), pleasantness ($F(1, 416) = 102.36, p < 0.001$), country \times diligence ($F(1, 416) = 4.09, p < 0.01$), and country \times pleasantness ($F(1, 416) = 2.36, p < 0.05$). Thus, concerning this dependent variable, the mediation effects are total (because the effect of cosmopolitanism is not significant) and concentrated in the interactive effects of country and personality.

The results of follow-up regression analyses show that in France only pleasantness had a statistically significant impact on perceived quality of life ($b = 0.31, t(142) = 4.32, p < 0.001$), whereas in the case of Austria (diligence: $b = 0.42, t(138) = 5.80, p < 0.001$; pleasantness: $b = 0.59, t(138) = 6.92, p < 0.001$) and Spain (diligence: $b = 0.20, t(142) = 2.69, p < 0.01$; pleasantness: $b = 0.55, t(142) = 6.84, p < 0.001$), both country personality variables had positive and statistically significant effects. Therefore, the interactive mediating effects observed with respect to perceived quality of life are concentrated in the difference between France and the two other countries.

Synthesis

Overall, the results the statistical analyses are consistent with the conceptual framework. As hypothesized, country image as operationalized through the concept of country personality acts as a general mediating variable in the relationship between cosmopolitanism and consumers' perceptions of a country as regards the products that it makes, its attractiveness as a travel destination, and its quality of life. The results show however that these mediating effects depend on the dependent variable considered and the country that it concerns. More precisely, in the case of France and Spain, Canadian consumers' perceptions of these countries as manufacturers of products, travel destinations, and places to live are principally a function of the extent to which they are perceived as pleasant. In contrast, Canadian consumers' perceptions of Austria seem to be funded on both country personality dimensions (i.e., pleasantness and diligence).

Discussion

This research offers pertinent contributions to the international marketing literature. First, it is the first research that attempts to conceptually explain the relationships that have been observed between cosmopolitanism and various attitudinal and behavioral variables related to foreign countries (e.g., willingness to buy foreign products). The results of this research have shown that these relationships are explained by the mediating impact of country image. That is, consumers who display a high level of cosmopolitanism tend to see countries in a more favorable way, a process that impacts positively the cognitive and affective image mental dimensions that compose the image of a given country. In turn, depending on their relative weight in the country image formation, the influence of these dimensions on the degree to which

a country is seen as providing various benefits (i.e., products, tourism, quality of life) varies. For instance, although one can observe positive and statistically significant relationships between cosmopolitanism and the perceived quality of products made in France ($r = 0.23$), made in Spain ($r = 0.32$), and made in Austria ($r = 0.30$), in the case of France and Spain that relationship depends more on the country's pleasant personality ($b = 0.42$ and $b = 0.34$, respectively) than on its diligence ($b = 0.17$ and $b = 0.15$, respectively) whereas in the case of Austria it is the reverse (diligence: $b = 0.42$; pleasantness: $b = 0.33$).

As a second contribution, while the bulk of country image research has focused on the perceptions of countries as manufacturers and designers of products (see e.g., Peterson & Jolibert, 1995; Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999), this research has looked at three different aspects of country perceptions: products, tourism, and quality of life. In a world that witnesses significant increases in migration flows (Czaika & de Haas, 2015; Vertovec, 2007) and an overall rise in tourism (Blackall, 2019), it is important for country image research to expand its horizons by considering, in addition to products and brands, other perceptual elements that are affected by country image. Obviously, there are specific literatures on countries as producers of goods, countries as touristic destinations (see Pike, 2002), and countries as places to live (e.g., Papadopoulos, 2004). However, studies like the present one where the effects of different variables on distinct country perception dimensions are contrasted are rare.

A third contribution of this research has been to examine the role that country image plays in the relationship between cosmopolitanism and country perceptions in the context of specific countries. Although it is certainly relevant to study relationships that concern general aspects related to how individuals develop their preferences and make decisions in the global marketplace (e.g., Riefler, Diamantopoulos, & Sigauw, 2012: examining the relationship between cosmopolitanism and one's level of attention to country-of-origin information in general), the results of this study have shown that country may be a significant moderator in many theoretical relationships. Future research in this domain should therefore attempt to contextualize such relationships by referring to specific countries, instead of assuming that these relationships may be relevant to countries in general. These countries should be selected based on appropriate factors, such as cultural differences (e.g., Hofstede, 1984) or psychic distance (Ghemawat, 2001).

Conclusion

This study should be replicated using different country stimuli and data collection sites. Cosmopolitanism is a universal disposition (Cleveland, Laroche, & Papadopoulos, 2009) and should therefore be studied in different countries. Depending on the data collection site chosen, appropriate country stimuli should be defined in order to test the generalizability of the findings presented in this study.

It would also be important to replicate this study by incorporating an important variable that has been ignored: product category. Many studies in the country-of-origin domain have reported that consumers' product quality judgements depend on which specific product categories are considered (see e.g., Manrai, Lascu, & Manrai, 1998). For instance, although France is a very well perceived country of origin as regards wine, fashion clothing, and luxury goods, it is perhaps less so as a manufacturer of automobiles. Germany, on the other hand, gets high scores for industrial goods, but probably less favorable consumer evaluations when it comes to the purchase of perfumes. Including product category as an additional variable in the conceptual framework presented in this paper should enrich significantly our understanding of the processes that operate in the formation of country perceptions by consumers with different levels of cosmopolitanism. This observation extends to tourism and quality of life as well. Thus, tourism activities should be considered instead of tourism in general and features of a country's quality of life (e.g., education, health) should be explored to refine the market segmentation process.

The results of this study are of interest to governmental agencies, firms, and tour operators. The conceptual framework suggests a simple procedure to define ways of promoting their benefits among cosmopolitan consumers. First, using good samples of consumers, the country should be positioned as regards its image. Personality traits may be useful for that purpose (d'Astous & Boujbel, 2007), but other approaches may be considered (see Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). Perceptions of the country with respect to the production of various product categories (quality, purchase intention), its touristic offerings (e.g., attractions, activities, services; see Buhalis, 1997), and its quality of life (e.g., degree of urbanization, education, security, health; see Diener & Suh, 1997) should be obtained with these samples using valid measuring instruments. The mediating role of country image should then be tested in order to define relevant country image features that have a positive impact on the country perceptions of interest. Communication strategies in the context of traditional and social medias should then be conceived to activate these country image features in cosmopolitan consumers' minds in order to enhance their perceptions of the country as regards the benefits that they are looking for.

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