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A MODEL FOR PREDICTING ATTITUDES TOWARDS SPANISH PRODUCTS, BRANDS AND COUNTRY IMAGE: AN EXPLORATORY INTERNATIONAL STUDY

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Abstract

This article aims to respond to recent demands for more in-depth study on how consumers use brand-associated images to shape their attitudes to buying. A multi-attribute design is used to analyze how certain variables among buyers (ethnocentrism and similarity) are related to brand images (country and product) in the formation of attitudes within an international context. This research is based on a sample of 215 international experts from 31 countries whose responses were analyzed with structural equation modeling. The results obtained have implications for academics, government officials and directors of international marketing. Among the contributions made by the present study is its attempt to clarify the existing literature regarding the causes and effects of brand images and, as well, the measures it develops to make certain key variables (as indicated in the literature) operational.

KEY WORDS:

Attitudes, brand image, country brand, product brand, ethnocentrism, similarity, Spanish image.

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1.-Introduction

Although the study of brand image has been recognized for some time as a topic which is fundamental to both international marketing and advertising research, it still contains at least four conceptual and empirical gaps. In the first place, the definitions and operationalization of brand image have been irregular (Hsieh et al., 2004) and, as such, there is no term generally accepted by authors (Stern et al., 2002). For the purposes of this article, we assume that brand image is a group of perceptions formed by the consumer as a result of the associations that the brand generates in his or her memory (Keller, 1993). In second place, the conceptual identity of certain key variables remains a controversial theme and has led to some authors to mix their definitions of concepts of “country image” and “product image”(see Cordell, 1992; Han and Terpstra, 1988; Nagashima, 1970). As demonstration of this, Narayana (1981) defines country image as “the global image of any of a country’s products....”.As such, much of the literature regarding country image (similar in effect to ‘made in’ or ‘country brand’) has used perceptions of products in order to evaluate this type of image (Thakor and Katsanis, 1997). Much research has consequently evaluated country image by using measures based on perception of products rather than perception of countries (Han, 1989). A third gap exists due to the fact that there are very few publications within the literature that have researched country image and product image in an interrelated way (Pappu, 2007)- a factor that has prevented multi-attribute studies capable of distinguishing between attributes of country image and of product image (Thakor, 1996). As a result, there is a fourth gap which makes it impossible to clearly answer the question “which of these variables has the most influence upon the purchase of international brands: product image or country image?” (Lee and Ganesh, 1999).

In other words, despite the abundance of literature indicating that the manufacturing country’s image does affect a product’s attributes, this influence has still not been sufficiently evaluated (Klein et al., 1998). Various reasons have been given to explain this conceptual panorama. For example: these variables are so closely related in the consumer’s mind that it is difficult to separate their effects (Thakor and Katsanis, 1997); their influence is less than that indicated by particular studies (Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999); and this relationship is moderated by various situations, such as that of

consumption (Aqueveque, 2006), the type of products evaluated (Ahmend et al., 1994) and personal feelings (Klein et al 1998).

In spite of these gaps, various attempts have been made over the last few decades to develop an integrative theory in order to explain how consumers use brand images to shape their buying attitudes (among them, Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2000). Whilst there is a view emerging within the literature that attempts to integrate individual variables with the process of forming brand images (see Elliot and Cameron, 1994; Samiee, 1994), this view still needs broad improvement and greater depth (Laroche et al., 2005). The study of how these individual consumer variables are related in the shaping of consumer buying attitudes is important for various reasons. In first place, globalization and the increase of international business have provided a country's consumers with access to brands originating from other countries (Hsieh, 2001). Globalization, as such, has increased competitive pressures from national and international businesses. In this context, brand managers are obliged to clearly understand the previously mentioned relationships before launching their products in countries which are different from their own (Pappu et al., 2007). At the same time- and in second place- the study of buying attitudes is important given that the attitude toward the brand is considered to be the universal aim of commercial communication; although consumers may be exposed to many brands in a buying situation, they will only choose the brand that has generated a positive attitude in them (Rossiter and Percy, 1997).

The present study has been carried out in a Spanish context for various reasons. One of them is that Spain has one of the most attractive domestic markets in Europe, with 47.2 million potential consumers, on top of the 56 million tourists who visit this country every year. Indeed, Spain is the world's 13th largest economy in terms of GDP and 5th largest in the European Union (Investinspain, 2014). Spain also has the world's second most spoken language- according to the number of native speakers (Gordon, 2005) - and maintains strong cultural ties with other regions in the world. However, in spite of the characteristics of this country, research into attitudinal dynamics related to brand buying is still scarce. Among publications there are only a very few which evaluate the image of this country and its products (see Bigne, 2000; Bigne et al., 1993).

Buying attitudes towards international brands were chosen for study because they contain all those perceptions that a consumer associates with images of country and product, including certain national attributes and individual characteristics. Any detailed research which aims to incorporate all these variables requires a model which is somewhat flexible: the present study allows for flexibility by integrating variables which are associated with buyers' specific national characteristics (ethnocentrism and similarity) and with brand images (country and product). Our choice of such variables is based on the fact that very little is known about the direct and indirect influence of ethnocentrism and similarity in buying attitudes, most particularly regarding their relationship to perceptions of the country image (Nguyen et al., 2008; Roth, 2006).

In order to fill the previously mentioned 'gaps', the present article has adopted the following structure. In first place, a theory is presented that supports the hypothesis behind our model. We then detail our methodological approach, as used for both the main characteristics of the sample and for the various questionnaires used in empirical research. After this, the hypothesis is evaluated and the results achieved are analyzed. Finally, in the last section, conclusions are drawn and indications are made as to possible future lines of research regarding buying attitudes within an international context.

2. Theoretical framework and research hypothesis

2.1 The influence of Country Brands upon Product Brands

A great amount of literature points out that the Country Brand is an extrinsic attribute of the product that affects consumer product evaluations (Cordell, 1992). However, the definition of Country Brand as construct and its influence upon Product Brand is still unclear. At the level of conceptual identity, there are various general definitions of Country Brand that do not include the image of Product Brand. As such, Country Brand has been defined as the image of a firm's country of residence, and also as the beliefs that consumers infer from a country, beginning with a brand name (Han and Terpstra, 1988). At the same time, Martin and Eroglu (1993) present the Country Brand as a construct that sums up the total of all informative beliefs a consumer may have concerning a particular country. Following this perspective, Srikanth and Gnoth (2002) suggest that this construct is made up of beliefs regarding a country's industrialization and standards of national quality, and Mrugank

(1996) indicates that it is the place, the region or country which the target segment associates with the brand. For other authors, the Country Brand is a group of positive perceptions and emotional ties that are developed around a country, through means of a series of experiences over a period of time (Anholt, 2002; Domeisen, 2003).

However, still at the level of conceptual identity, there are other definitions of the Country Brand that incorporate images of the Product Brand, such as the seminal definition developed by Nagashima (1970). From this perspective, the definition of Country Brand is associated with the level of categories of specific products (see Han, 1989). At the same time, some authors define Country Brand as being the global perceptions that consumers associate with the quality of products made in a particular country (see Crawford and Garland, 1988; Hong and Wyer, 1989). Along similar lines there are other studies that define it as a group of generalized beliefs regarding the attributes of a country's specific products (see Bilkey and Nes, 1982; Han, 1989). From an intermediate perspective, the Country Brand is created not only by products but also by other variables such as economic and political position, historic events, traditions and the level of technological progress (Lee and Ganesh, 1999).

As for the influence of the Country Brand upon Product Brand, the literature also offers different perspectives. From the point of view of information processing, some authors assert that the Country Brand acts as a significant attribute that conditions the way a consumer pays attention to and evaluates products (Hong and Wyer, 1989). This perspective assumes that consumers use the Country Brand as a product attribute in order to form beliefs and evaluations of the same, just as this attribute conditions buying behavior. In this case, the Country Brand acts as a summarizing construct that integrates various individual elements of information regarding the country (Jacoby et al., 1977). However, from a cognitive perspective, it is suggested that the Country Brand generates certain perceptual distortions that influence evaluations of the Product Brand. For example, a distortion might be the halo effect, through which everything is evaluated according to a specific characteristic. A halo effect may thus be generated when the Country Brand conditions those evaluations made of a product's other dimensions (Erickson et al., 1984; Han, 1989). Furthermore, the Country Brand may

be used by buyers as a stereotype in order to complete product evaluations that are missing or not available (Samiee, 1994). This perspective, as with that of information processing, also operationalizes the Country Brand as a summarizing concept or individual attribute. However, if we consider that consumer behavior in real life is associated with various attributes or multiple information elements (Cai et al., 2004; Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2000), this constitutes a conceptual limitation upon the internal validity (Chao, 1998; Johansson, 1993) given that the use of a single attribute increases the artificiality of the research.

In contrast with the majority of publications offered up by the literature, our research uses a general definition in which the Country Brand is considered to be made up of meaningful images that buyers have of a particular country (Martin and Eroglu, 1993; Srikananyoo and Gnoth, 2002). Continuing along similar lines, we also accept that the Country Brand is a spontaneous and uncontrolled factor that affects consumer behavior (Liu and Johnston, 2005); this is because it has the power to raise awareness of a product's attributes and to influence both the evaluation of these attributes and their brands (Srikatanyoo and Gnoth, 2002). This effect upon the Product Brand has been recognized in a great amount of the literature (Kaynak et al., 2000; Kim and Pysarchik, 2000; Maheswaran 1994; Teas and Agarwal, 2000) and is consistent throughout categories of products, organizations and buyers (Skytte and Blunch, 2005). As such, we developed the following hypothesis:

H1. The greater the level of awareness of Country Brand, the greater the level of awareness of Product Brand

2.2 The Influence of Product Brand in Buying Attitudes.

Much study has been carried out in the area of consumer behavior on the subject of the perceptual biases that influence product evaluation (Chen et al., 2006). One of the strongest biases originates in the place where the product is made; indeed, extensive literature associates Product Brand with the perceptions of the country that manufactures it. Yet in this type of literature there are

two perspectives to be observed. One of these holds that the Product Brand is like a summarizing image that appears through association with the global quality of a country (Narayana 1981; Shimp et al., 1993). On the other hand, the second perspective holds that the Product Brand is an image that the consumer himself forms from a category of particular country's products (Niss, 1996; Roth and Romeo, 1992; Zhang, 1996). One explanation of these various perspectives can be found in Johansson (1993), who suggests that various studies have only used the country of origin as a single attribute. Other authors assert that this attribute has been presented along with few of the other product attributes (D'Astous and Ahmend, 1994). Another point of view suggests that the country of origin represents just one of the many images formed by the product (Erickson et al., 1984) and that these images – though different attributes of the product- are strongly associated or identified with the same. Along similar lines, some authors point out that, along with the country of origin, there are other attributes or images that should also be considered, such as brand name, price and the support provided by people considered to be celebrities, etc. (Erickson et al., 1984; Jacoby, Olson, and Haddock, 1971). It is also pointed out that much research is biased; studies which try to show that consumer response to products mainly depends upon their perceptions of the Country Brand, have not sufficiently studied the role of Product Brand (Thakor, 1996). As such, there is a need for more research that accounts for the influence of the country of origin but which differentiates its effects from those of other attributes of the Product Brand (Thakor, 1996). As a result, in this article Product Brand is considered to be image made up of attributes which are important to buyers (such as price, name of the brand, packaging, and shop image- among others) and that this image is independent of the information that derives from the country of origin. Various authors support the choice of this perspective and present different meaningful attributes. For example, Papadopoulos et al. (1991) suggest four attributes that condition product evaluations of various origins: product integrity, price-value, market presence and market response. Another perspective can be seen in Roth and Romeo (1992) who suggest that Product Brand is made up of six attributes: quality of product-service, relationship between price–quality, design-style, innovation-technology, post-sales service, brand prestige, and general valuation. Yet, Shimp et al. (1993) propose product price and quality as two of the most meaningful dimensions that consumers mention when they think of imported products.

Our perspective is also supported by authors who have researched into how a product's attributes or elements of information influence their evaluation by consumers (see for example Thakor and Karsanis, 1997). These attributes may be both extrinsic or intrinsic (Gerstner, 1985) and research suggests that consumers tend to use both types of attributes when they evaluate the quality of a product (Richardson et al., 1994). This perspective, which regards the Product Brand as an image formed by a broad group of attributes independent of the Country Brand, offers various theoretical and empirical advantages. In first place, the multi-attribute perspective helps to study the multi-dimensional impact of the Country Brand upon the Product Brand and so to identify which attributes are strongest in determining shopping attitudes. This is an important aspect given that consumers do not value- despite coming from the same country- all of a product's attributes in the same way. For example, German automobiles are usually highly valued in terms of prestige but not in terms of economy (Han and Terpstra, 1988). In other words, attributes of choice change according to product category (D'Astous and Ahmed, 1992). In second place, this perspective also enables research on Product Brand to be extended to other conceptually related areas. Thus the literature suggests that the quality and fairness of a product brand (which, according to Aaker, 1991, are the group of brand-related assets and responsibilities), significantly influence buying but that both concepts are themselves influenced by product attributes (Tsiotsou, 2006). At the same time, the literature supports the view that shopping attitudes towards products and services are generated by the meaningful attributes that satisfy these services and products (Wang and Liu, 2007). It is along such lines- and by also considering the theory mentioned above that the following thesis was developed:

H2. The higher the brand quality of a country's products, the more positive the attitude towards the country's products, businesses, people and image.

2.3 The Influence of Ethnocentrism in the Product Brand

Although there are various definitions of ethnocentrism, this concept derives from a more general construct which is based on the belief that one group of individuals is superior to that of another group. It has also been defined as having appropriate rules of behavior that provide protection against threats from other groups (Brisling, 1993). In marketing literature, ethnocentrism is related to consumer attitudes towards markets or foreign products and enables some measure of the impact of a product's origins when carrying out evaluations of the product and attitudes regarding its purchase (Bilkey and Nes, 1982). Ethnocentrism has also been defined as those beliefs that decide whether buying foreign products is correct and morally acceptable (Shimp and Sharma, 1987). This concept implies that importing products from other countries is not an appropriate activity-since it is not patriotic- and is harmful to the economy and domestic employment (Supphellen and Gronhaug, 2003). On the other hand, ethnocentrism is distinct from international hostility which is related to the choices made between foreign products. Ethnocentrism is rather associated with the choices made between local and international products.

There is a considerable amount of literature that examines the influence of ethnocentrism upon Product Brand evaluations, yet these publications do not agree as to whether this influence is direct or indirect. Some authors propose that ethnocentrism is moderated by the Country Brand. Indeed, Bilkey and Nes (1982) are among those authors who argue that ethnocentrism acts as a stereotype or the biased image that buyers may have of a particular country. According to such authors, this biased image influences the perceptions that shoppers form of products from particular countries. Along the same lines, Han and Terpstra (1988) and Maheswaran (1994), suggest that ethnocentrism or a shopper's patriotic feelings, may act as an affective attribute that influences the evaluation of foreign products. Other works point out that the ethnocentrism has a direct influence upon the Product Brand. For example, Sharma et al., (1995) indicate that ethnocentrism leads shoppers to overestimate the attributes and overrate the quality of local products, as well as underrating the quality of foreign products. At the same time, Kaynak and Kara (1997) show that non-ethnocentric consumers significantly tend to hold more favourable beliefs, and more positive intentions, towards imported

products than ethnocentric consumers. In an intermediate position, Kaynak and Cavusgil (1983) suggest that ethnocentrism leads to positive evaluations of products made in the buyers' own country but that these evaluations may be moderated by certain product attributes (quality and price). Similarly, some authors have proposed that ethnocentrism's influence upon product evaluation may be moderated by different levels of consumer involvement (Herche, 1992) and by the perception of the product's importance (Sharma et al., 1995). The literature agrees in indicating that ethnocentrism does exist as an influence upon Product Brand evaluation, despite the fact that this effect has still not been completely articulated. The study of the influence of ethnocentrism upon the evaluation of foreign-made products is consequently still underdeveloped (Nguyen et al., 2008; Roth, 2006).

For the purposes of our research, we have followed a point of view that asserts the direct influence of ethnocentrism upon the Product Brand. As well as the previously cited authors, our choice is supported by recent results. Chrysochoidis et al., (2007) have found that ethnocentrism not only affects a consumer's beliefs but also affects their way of perceiving and evaluating the quality of national and foreign products. In line with this perspective, highly ethnocentric shoppers argue that it is wrong to buy imported products because this raises the commercial deficit of the domestic economy and increases levels of national unemployment. Accordingly, the following hypothesis has been developed:

H 3. A higher level of ethnocentrism leads to a lower level of appreciation for foreign-brand products.

2.4 The influence of Similarity upon the Product Brand

The construct of similarity is based upon the premise that individuals are more attracted to people perceived to be similar to themselves, particularly with respect to values, beliefs and attitudes (Segall et al., 1990). The influence of similarity can be explained by both the conceptual coherence theory and by the goal theory derived from categorization. The conceptual coherence theory argues that a similarity between two unrelated objects can be established

when coherent relationships are found to exist between both these objects (Murphy and Medin, 1985). According to this theory the level of previous knowledge favors assumptions that allow these objects to be grouped together and to thus form a category. In this case, the knowledge of a country's attributes (economic development, values, etc.) would serve to establish an association of similarity with this same country. On the other hand, goal theory derived from categorization suggests that similarity can be obtained when evaluating two objects if the 'decider' perceives that both objects can be used to secure a similar goal (Ratneshwar et al., 1996). In this case, countries will be perceived to be similar if they hold values and political preferences in common with the evaluator's country of origin; the 'decider' will perceive that he or she can achieve similar goals with both countries.

There are many publications within marketing literature that suggest that buyers' attitudes towards wealth and similarity of a country have a positive influence upon the product evaluations (Ahmed et al., 1997; Li et al., 1997). This similarity also can be generated by a country's different attributes, such as political hostility, nationalist attitudes, local customs, religion, food, or tourist attractions (Shimp et al., 1993; Papadopoulos et al., 2000). Other attributes of comparison might be the political, cultural or social factors of other countries (Klein et al., 1998). Therefore, the perception of similarity seems to influence the purchase of products from other countries when these countries are perceived to be culturally close or socially acceptable (Knight and Calantone, 2000). The previous argument leads us to the following hypothesis:

H4. The greater level of similarity, the greater the level of awareness of foreign products.

There is previous research (see Watson and Wright, 2000) that suggests individuals with ethnocentric tendencies prefer products from countries which they consider to be culturally similar to their own, as opposed to products from countries which they consider to be culturally different. As such, the following hypothesis could be postulated:

H5. The higher level of similarity, the higher the level of ethnocentrism

3. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

3.1 Sample description.

This research is based on a sample of 215 international experts, proceeding from 31 different countries, who were sent an email survey with an automatic resend format. A total of 1,225 surveys were sent and a response level of 17.55% was obtained. The population outline was established with the help of Spanish Commercial Offices (OFECOMES) which operate in various countries. The countries that make up the sample represent 95% of Spain's foreign investment and international trade. OFECOMES were requested to supply the electronic mail and contact details of "experts" in the area of trade and international investment (agents and importers of Spanish products, company managers with businesses and/or investments in Spain, managers and professionals of Chambers of Commerce). It is assumed that the experts under survey can be regarded as key informants, since they have a high level of knowledge concerning the valuations that buyers make in their respective countries about Spanish products. This procedure is in this case, different from previous research which has used samples composed of students or people with little experience in the area under study (see

criticisms made by Olsen and Olsson, 2002). Recipients of the survey who did not speak Spanish were sent an English version of the survey, which was translated by bilingual professors with educational experience in Spain and the USA. In addition, the survey was contrasted by an independent translator (back translation process).

3.2 Measurement of Variables

To the best of our knowledge, there is no precedent for some of the measures used in our study, and for this reason the development of new measures was based upon a revision of the literature. These variables were then reviewed with the assistance of professors of international marketing and managers of several companies, and were also pre-tested with managers from different countries, with the aim of ensuring validity of appearance and of content. The measures of the different variables under study were the following:

Country Brand. In order to measure perceptions of the Country Brand, the Nation Brand Index developed by Anholt (www.nationbrandindex.com) was used. This index was developed in 2005 by Anholt and is the first and best analytical ranking of country brands. This index measures the perceptions of a country with respect to its political situation, commercial competitiveness, quality of the human capital, potential to attract investment and tourism. Since its inception, this Index has been cited in several academic articles (D'Astous et al., 2007; Anholt, 2005-a), books (Anholt, 2005-b, 2007; Schroeder et al., 2005) and has registered 40.200 'hits' on the Internet (accessed September 2014). The replies to the survey were evaluated by means of a scale composed of 5 items graded from 1 to 5, where: (1) Very negative; (2) Negative; (3) Neither positive nor negative; (4) Positive, and (5) Very positive. This scale displays a Cronbach alpha of 0.78.

Product Brand. In order to evaluate the clients' perceptions of different attributes of Spanish products, the dimensions proposed by Roth and Romeo (1992) were used. Thus, seven items were examined: quality of the product/service, relation between quality-price (value for money), design/style, innovation and technology, service/maintenance, image and prestige of its brands and global valuation. The answers were evaluated with a scale from 1 to 5, where 1= very negative, 3= neither negative nor positive, 5= very positive. This scale displays a Cronbach alpha of 0.78.

Buyers' attitude. This variable was evaluated by a scale composed of 3 items. The first item measures the global valuation of Spain, attitudes towards Spanish products and companies. The second item evaluates attitudes towards Spaniards. The answers were measured on a scale from 1 to 5, where the categories were: (1) Not favorable; (2) Slightly favorable; (3) Neither very nor slightly favorable; (4) Favorable, and (5) Very favorable. The scale shows a reliability index, measured by a Cronbach alpha of 0.76. This can be considered to be somewhat expected, which is why the scale only has three items (that is to say, that reliability could be increased by the inclusion of more items).

The Ethnocentrism variable. This was evaluated by a scale composed of 7 items. The items were drawn up from a revision of the relevant bibliography (Supphellen and Gronhaug, 2003; Kleins, 2002) and are as follows: (a) It is better to buy local products than imported. (b) Country's good citizens must buy local products, (c) In general, local products are better than imports, and (d) foreign products should not be bought (because they harm the local economy and cause unemployment). For management positions, it is better to recruit local rather than foreign personnel, while entry of foreign companies and products should be restricted and the only foreign products that should be bought are those not produced locally. In order to evaluate the replies, a scale from 1 to 5 was used, where: (1) Strongly disagree; (2)

Slightly disagree; (3) Neither agree nor disagree; (4) Slightly agree, and (5) Strongly agree.

The scale shows a reliability index measured by a Cronbach alpha of 0.81.

The Similarity variable. This was evaluated by a scale made up of 5 items that were developed by using the proposals contained in the previously mentioned bibliography. These items are as follows: political preferences, customs and lifestyles, ethical and religious values, human friendships, and relations and the importance placed upon work and wealth. The replies were measured using a scale from 1 to 5, where: (1) Very different; (2) Quite different; (3) Slightly different; (4) Quite similar, and (5) Very similar. The scale shows a reliability index, measured by a Cronbach alpha of 0.80.

4. Analysis and results

4.1 Statistic analysis

In order to validate the hypotheses relevant to this research, a technique of structural equation modeling with latent variables was used, with the help of the statistical program LISREL. Following the recommendations of Anderson and Gerbin (1988), we developed the analysis in two stages. The first stage aimed to confirm the measurement models in order to analyze whether observed variables are related to latent variables. In this stage different types of measure validity were also analyzed. The second stage of the analysis attempted to validate the level of data adjustment to the structural model. In order to estimate the models, we used the matrix of product-moment Pearson correlation. This type of matrix was chosen because it is convenient when comparing coefficients with the interior of a model and because it is invariant before changes of scale. That is to say, this matrix does not place more weight upon variables of greater variability, and so results are not distorted. At the same time, the

interactive method of average square minimums was used, since this method does not require the assumption of normality. In order to evaluate both the measurement and structural models, we used the following indices: the SRMR (Standardised Root Mean Residual Square: Steiger, 1990); GFI and AGFI (Goodness-of-Fit Index, Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index: Jöreskog and Sörbom, 1993). We did not use the test Chi squared (χ^2) since according to some authors (Cheung and Rensvold, 2002) this test may be sensitive to large samples (> 200). Following the rule of widely accepted decision, a value greater than 0.90 and a SRMR of 0.08 or less, were considered as indicators of an adequate adjustment to the model (Hatcher, 1994; Tabachnick and Fidell, 1996).

4.2 Results

The presentation of the results is developed over three sections: descriptive measures and correlations, validity tests of the construct, and validation of the hypotheses.

Descriptive measures and correlations. Table 1 presents averages, standard deviations and correlations between the variables included in our model. The data indicates that the dependent and independent variables are not highly correlated, which explains why no problems with multicollinearity were found.

TABLE 1.- Averages, standard deviations and correlations between the variables

Variable	Mean	Std Dev	M. Product	M. Country	Similarity	Ethnocentrism	Attitude
Product B.	3.6857	.5347	1.0000				
Country B.	3.2786	.9757	.2732**	1.0000			
Similarity	2.4067	.9046	.1924**	.2506**	1.0000		
Ethnocentrism	3.9902	.5446	-.2626**	-.1931*	.2947**	1.0000	
Attitude	2.8760	.9167	.4167**	.1704*	.2159**	-.1787*	1.0000

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.000$

Validity tests of the construct. A confirmatory factorial analysis was used to examine the dimensionality and content validity of the constructs. The convergent validity was analyzed according to the significance of the regression coefficients (as proposed by Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). According to the results displayed in table 2, both types of validity were found in the constructs used in the model. In order to determine the discriminating validity or empirical identity of the EMM, the criteria proposed by Bohrnstedt (1977) was used. According to this author, in order to know if a construct's measurements accord with assumed measurements, its association with other constructs must be compared. Although other methods exist to evaluate the discriminant validity (Podsakoff and MacKenzie, 1994), we have used Bohrnstedt's criteria because it is that which is most cited in psychometric literature; as well as this, it shows the conceptual identity of the evaluated constructs with clarity and simplicity. The correlations previously presented in table 1 do not appear to suggest problems of discriminant validity.

TABLE 2. - Content and Convergent Validity

<i>Latent Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>t-Student</i>	<i>Variance of Error</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>GFI</i>
PRODUCT BRAND					0.97
1. <i>Quality of product/service</i>	0.66	10.02	0.56	0.44	
2. <i>Relationship between price-quality(value for money)</i>	0.69	10.94	0.51	0.48	
3. <i>Design/style</i>	0.62	9.18	0.62	0.38	
4. <i>Innovation and Technology</i>	0.82	13.07	0.33	0.67	
5. <i>Service/maintenance</i>	0.71	11.62	0.39	0.51	
6. <i>Image and prestige of its brands</i>	0.79	12.58	0.37	0.63	
COUNTRY BRAND					0.98
1. <i>Management and responsibility of its government and public institutions</i>	0.63	7.45	0.60	0.40	
2. <i>Exports and international trade</i>	0.83	12.28	0.31	0.69	
3. <i>Tourism</i>	0.69	10.13	0.52	0.48	
4. <i>Culture and history</i>	0.61	7.18	0.63	0.37	
5. <i>Management of immigration and human development</i>	0.50	6.47	0.75	0.25	
6. <i>Its people</i>	0.60	8.49	0.64	0.36	
ETHNOCENTRISM					0.98
1. <i>It is better to buy local rather than imported products</i>	0.58	8.62	0.66	0.34	
2. <i>A country's good citizens must buy local products</i>	0.81	13.85	0.34	0.66	
3. <i>Local products are better than imported products</i>	0.56	6.66	0.69	0.31	
4. <i>Buying foreign products harms the local economy and causes unemployment</i>	0.73	11.93	0.47	0.53	
5. <i>For management positions, it is better to recruit local rather than foreign personnel</i>	0.54	6.28	0.71	0.29	

6. <i>Entry should be restricted to foreign companies and products</i>	0.88	14.77	0.23	0.77
7. <i>The only foreign products to be purchased should be those not locally produced</i>	0.80	13.66	0.36	0.64
SIMILARITY				0.99
1. <i>Political preferences</i>	0.64	9.66	0.59	0.41
2. <i>Customs and Lifestyle</i>	0.79	12.95	0.38	0.62
3. <i>Ethical and Religious Values</i>	0.80	13.23	0.36	0.64
4. <i>Friendships and human relationships</i>	0.92	15.05	0.15	0.85
5. <i>Importance placed upon work and wealth</i>	0.66	10.44	0.56	0.44
ATTITUDE				1
7. <i>Global evaluation of Spain</i>	0.97	16.27	0.05	0.95
8. <i>Attitude towards Spanish products and companies</i>	0.70	10.84	0.51	0.49
9. <i>Attitude towards the Spanish</i>	0.74	11.58	0.45	0.55

Validation of hypotheses. For this section, two stages of validation were employed. In the first stage, the model's global adjustment was evaluated. According to the results obtained, the model displays an acceptable level of adjustment as its adjustment indicators exceed the recommended threshold of 0.90 (Tabachnick and Fidell, 1996; Hatcher, 1994). As well as this, the results also showed that the relations that we proposed fit reasonably well with the data, as the residues are small (SRMR =0.072). In the second stage we evaluated the hypotheses adjusted by means of values "t" of "Student". We found that all the estimated parameters are significantly different from 0, because values t were ≥ 2 . Table 3 presents the coefficients (standardized parameters), values t and R² of the relations proposed by our model's hypothesis.

TABLE 3.- *Results of the Final Model*

<i>Dependent Variables</i>	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>T Student</i>	<i>Variance of Error</i>	<i>R²</i>
ATTITUDE				0.83
<i>H.2 Product Brand</i>	0.91	5.68	0.17	
PRODUCT BRAND			0.21	0.69
<i>H.1 Country Brand</i>	0.84	5.15		
<i>H.3 Ethnocentrism</i>	-0.38	-3.43		
<i>H.4 Similarity</i>	0.34	3.11		
ETHNOCENTRISM				0.34
<i>H.5 Similarity</i>	0.58	3.07	0.66	

Hypothesis 1 predicted that the level of Country Brand valuation would positively influence the level of Product Brand valuation. This hypothesis is confirmed as valid by the discovery of a positive and statistically significant relationship between both constructs (t-value: 5.15 $p < .01$). Hypothesis 2, which proposed that a higher level of Product Brand valuation would lead to a higher level of Buying Attitudes, was confirmed with the finding of a statistically significant parameter (t-value: 5.68; $p < .01$). Hypothesis 3 measured the influence of the Ethnocentrism. This suggests the level of ethnocentrism is negatively related to the type of valuations made of foreign product brands. The proposed relation was confirmed since a negative and statistically significant association was found to exist between both constructs (t-value: -3.43; $p < .01$).

Hypothesis 4 and 5 measured the influence of the perceived country-similarity. Specifically, hypothesis 4 predicted that the higher the level of perceived similarity, the higher the level of valuation of foreign product brands. This hypothesis was confirmed because a statistically significant association was found to exist between the level of perceived similarity and Product Brand (t-value: 3.11; $p < .01$). On the other hand, hypothesis 5, predicted the relationship between perceived similarity and ethnocentrism, indicating that the higher the level of similarity, the higher the level of ethnocentrism. This hypothesis also was validated since a positive and statistically significant relationship was discovered between both constructs (t-value: 3.07; $p < .01$).

According to the data presented in table3, we see that the model explains a high percentage of variation in the Product Brand construct (0.69) and that its most important predictor was Country Brand (0.81). Other significant predictors include Ethnocentrism, which has a direct and negative influence (-0.38); and Country Similarity which also displays a direct and positive influence (0.34) but also an indirect positive effect (0.58). The proposed model also explains a high percentage of variation in Buying Attitudes (0.83). As was

expected, the most important predictor of Buying Attitudes is Product Brand (0.91). Therefore, and in line with the suggestions made by the theory, all the predictive variables display significant direct and indirect effects.

5. Discussion and limitations of the research

Generally, the results of this research are in agreement with the hypotheses formulated, although they also support the multi-attribute perspective promoted by Papadopoulos and Heslop (2002). As such, the results emphasize the important role of the characteristics of the country and the variables of the buyer in moderating the effects of Product Brand in buying attitudes. The results obtained also allow us to conclude that the perceptions of both Country Brand and Similarity simultaneously affect Product Brand evaluations, even though this depends upon the level of ethnocentrism among buyers. Similarity also crops up as an important variable since it moderates the influence of ethnocentrism in evaluations of product brands. This research contributes to the literature in that it empirically investigates, within an international context, the key causes in buying attitudes. The study of these causes and the validation of their effects is not only important in allowing academics to understand buying within the international markets, but it also has important implications for both government officials and international marketing managers.

From a theoretical perspective, the validation of multi-attribute constructs (such as those used in our model) helps to clarify the conceptual identity of these constructs and their empirical interrelations. In addition, the integration of several constructs in order to analyze their impact on international buying attitudes responds to recent demands from within the literature. This suggests that more in-depth study should be made into how consumers use brand-associated images to form their attitudes towards buying (see Nguyen et al., 2008; Roth, 2006). Another contribution of our work is that it has contrasted certain key variables

presented by the literature. For example, although the Nation Brand Index developed by Anholt has been widely used and cited over the last years, this is the first time that its validity as a construct has been empirically evaluated and that its relationship with other constructs has been analyzed.

For government officials, it is essential to be able to rely on a positive Country Brand image in order to export products, to offer the country as a tourist destination and to encourage foreign investment. They therefore need certain guides which are conceptually and empirically valid since the subject of country brand management is still in its inception and the approximate amount of time needed to construct this type of brand is around 20 years (Domeisen, 2003). Further still, our results are important because there is evidence that international markets tend towards globalization and cultural homogeneity; and that to be able to compete in this context, nations need to emphasize and to promote the differentiation of their country attributes as a source of competitive advantage (Anholt 2002, 2004, 2005; True, 2006).

For managers, our research offers a guide to appropriately position their brands and to boost the buying attitudes of their markets. The multi-attribute perspective used in our research allows brand managers to have greater knowledge of which brand attributes are most highly valued. Managers can thus use this knowledge in their marketing communication strategies in order to promote or remove some brand attributes. In a similar way, the variable scales which are used in our model can serve as tools to control positioning within the target-segments.

The results of this research also are important for international brand managers since recent authors (see Teas and Agarwal, 2000) suggest that the influence of Country Brand upon buying behavior will be reduced as markets globalize and more hybrid products are sold

(products with components from several countries). Our research therefore suggests that brand managers must make combined use of the attributes of both brands (country and product) in their strategies; the Country Brand can not, by itself, be a significant influence upon buying attitudes. Recent publications indicate that past research may have overestimated the influence of the Country Brand, since survey respondents had difficulty in associating well-known brands with their countries of origin (Samiee et al. 2005; Thakor and Lavack 2003).

As with any other empirical research, this study assumes several limitations. First of all the results can only be extended to those attributes examined. Although it is likely that the results would be similar throughout various product categories, it is feasible that there are differences. Future studies should analyze if the model displays differences according to its use in various product categories, as example, categories of capital and consumer goods/equipment. As well as this, the generalization of results may be limited to the country in which the research has taken place. Although the use of a wide and representative sample of experts from different countries may increase the external validity of the results, these results may be generalizable within a Spanish context. We therefore recommend repeating this research in other countries. Another limitation of this research is that it does not analyze the specific influence of certain brand attributes in buying attitudes. As indicated by Viswanathan and Childers (1999), some attributes are important for the categorization of product brands, yet are not necessarily of most importance in their evaluation. Watson and Wright (2000) also suggest that the next stage of similar studies should determine the relative importance of specific attributes in the process of making buying decisions.

Furthermore, another limitation of this research is that it has assumed only one Country Brand or single country of origin. Given the increasing complexity of global products that incorporate various components from different countries, future studies should explore the influence of different origins, and corporate brands, or brands of the country of

distribution or assembly. Finally, the results of our study suggest that the interaction between brand images and individual variables could be better understood from within the perspective of multi-attribute research. This is especially so in the present market which is characterized by increasing globalization and where buyers have contact with a wide variety of information regarding countries and products.

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