

Research Article

Relation of Country-of-Origin Effect, Culture, and Type of Product with the Consumer's Shopping Intention: An Analysis for Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprises

Juan Manuel Berbel-Pineda,¹ Beatriz Palacios-Florencio,¹ Luna Santos-Roldán ,²
and José M. Ramírez Hurtado ³

¹Department of Business Organization and Marketing, Faculty of Business Studies, University of Pablo de Olavide, Carretera Utrera, Km.1, 41013 Seville, Spain

²Department of Business Organization, Faculty of Law and Business, University of Córdoba, Puerta Nueva s.n., 14071 Córdoba, Spain

³Department of Economics, Quantitative Methods and Economic History, University of Pablo de Olavide, Carretera Utrera, Km.1, 41013 Seville, Spain

Correspondence should be addressed to Luna Santos-Roldán; td1sarol@uco.es

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To obtain information about foreign markets is a very complex task for small- and medium-sized enterprises. This work's aim is to find out how certain variables are related to the consumer's shopping intention. It will help these firms to get a better knowledge of this intention. The work is specifically centred on products related to the gastronomy of a particular place. Through a sample of 154 tourists who visited this destination, we sought to know these products' degree of acceptance. Via structural equation modelling, it has been possible to determine the relevance which the variables of country of origin, gastronomic culture, and type of product have regarding the shopping intention. The work's novelty is to contribute a methodology of gathering information in the destination on the likes and behaviour patterns of foreign consumers without the need of costly research in their countries of origin.

1. Introduction

Thanks to the use of information, communication, and logistic technologies, the development of globalisation in these past years has enabled all firms or activity sectors, whatever the size, to be within reach of goods and services from any part of the planet (e.g., [1, 2]). This globalising phenomenon means that firms beginning their internationalisation seek sustainable competitive advantages via the “made in” or country brand influence (e.g., [3–5]).

The main aim of this research is to find out if a favourable projection of the country of origin and the consumer's positive perception of this projection have a direct relation with consumers' shopping intentions. At the same time, we mean to see the influence of culture and the perception

of certain gastronomic products on foreign consumers' shopping intentions.

To carry out the study, we have selected as a target population the tourists visiting the city of Seville, one of Spain's most visited cities [6]. They did a tasting of products belonging to firms participating in the project (related to the local gastronomy). Afterwards, they filled out a questionnaire which provided the information necessary for the study.

We have analysed a series of variables, such as the consumer's behaviour and the “made in” effect (country-of-origin image) (e.g., [7–9]). The study will be centred on this and other variables, for instance, culture (e.g., [10–12]), the respondents' knowledge of the product, their taste for Spanish food, and their perception of Spanish products (e.g., [13, 14]).

It has become fundamental for exporting to foreign markets to find out this perception and the degree of acceptance (as well as the consumption patterns) of these products, whose common link is being part of the local gastronomy and of the Mediterranean diet (so esteemed in the world for its flavour and, especially, for being tremendously healthy). But this knowledge is even more important for small- and medium-sized enterprises which do not have the necessary resources to carry out market research abroad. This results in being very complicated for them to know the tastes and needs concerning shopping and consumption [15–17].

This way of gathering information is going to enable these firms to know, in origin, the tastes of foreign consumers segmented by countries and, therefore, obtain important information in their internationalisation process. This research methodology is very useful for this kind of firms due to the complexity of carrying out market research abroad and the scarcity of resources, allowing them to know the tastes and needs of foreign consumers. The main aim is to find out how the country image (“country-of-origin effect”) has an impact on the consumer behaviour regarding the selection of products and how this can help firms in their foreign market selection process. This can lead to a competitive advantage when competing with products from other countries with a lower or even negative country image.

The contribution of this work is eminently practical. It does not add to the theoretical knowledge on the topic but does carry out an application of this theoretical knowledge to the business world. The variables have in general been measured directly, and the questionnaire has been elaborated from measures (of some of these variables) in previous studies. Nonetheless, it has also been worked out from the needs of the participating firms concerning variables which they wished to know about, referring to the shopping behaviour and the consumption behaviour. The way in which the information was collected is also novel, as it was done in origin, whereas this information tends to be collected in the destination country markets. This has therefore become a contribution of the paper.

The work is structured as follows. The first section has a thorough analysis of the extant literature on the research topic. On the other hand, we have centred ourselves on theories of consumer behaviour and country image (“country-of-origin effect”) and the relation between the shopping behaviour and the perception of the product or the relation with the culture. In the next section, the methodology details the characteristics of the research carried out. The following section presents the empirical analysis, examining and interpreting the results obtained. The last section specifies the main conclusions, the implications for management, and the work’s limitations.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Behaviour of the Consumer. It is important to know the consumer’s behaviour and understand those factors which can influence the decision-making process in the shopping decision for specific products and services [18]. The study of how consumers behave according to the country-of-

origin image of the products that they consume begins when they are going to acquire a product or are going to make use of a service to satisfy their needs. This is when the customer faces a series of decisions to be made. These vary from the type of product or the buying situation, and they define this behaviour.

Schiffman et al. [18] determine the behaviour of the consumer as “the behaviour that consumers display in searching for, purchasing, shopping, using, and disposing of products and services which they expect to satisfy their needs,” and this encompasses “what they buy, why they buy it, when they buy it, where they buy it, how often they buy it, how often they use it, how they evaluate it after the purchase and the impact of such evaluations on future purchases, and how they dispose of it.”

The complexity of the choice will depend, as we have just indicated, on the type of good and the shopping situation. And this will lead to the consumers acting under great uncertainty, due to the quality, the functioning, or the durability of the good acquired not being known at the moment of purchase. They can also face market uncertainty. According to this, the same good is found on sale in different conditions (distinct price or quality), without the consumers knowing which good presents the best conditions (e.g., Leca, 2015 and [19, 20]). In this sense, the “made in” and country brand influence can contribute to decreasing people’s uncertainty, with supplementary and relevant information being added when they make their decision [21].

Globalisation and market saturation have intensified the level of competition to such extent that a country’s brand image is highly important for firms and their products as this image positively and negatively affects consumers’ behaviours [22]. The relevance of the country of origin in the consumers’ behaviours towards brands can generate both competitive advantages and disadvantages. Due to personal experiences, information acquired, or stereotyped beliefs about countries, consumers generate their own brand-country images. If the valuations about the country of origin are positive, this will propitiate a favourable perception of the brands of products manufactured in this country [19, 23]. In relation to this, it is worth pointing out that the brands from countries with a better image are better placed to benefit from high prices in contrast to those with a discount that characterise the brands of countries which have a weak or negative image.

It is also worth considering that the family affects the beliefs, attitudes, and motivations of shoppers, that peer groups will modify the person’s behaviour patterns, and that culture defines the global behaviour pattern of a complete community, establishing norms, behaviours, values, ideas, beliefs, etc. [18].

2.2. The Country-of-Origin Effect and the Consumer’s Behaviour. The country of origin has attracted the attention of entrepreneurs because research shows that the image associated with a specific country of origin affects the evaluations that consumers make of that country’s products, as well as the shopping intentions concerning these products (e.g., [7, 9]).

The country-of-origin image has been defined in many ways over the years. Generally, the country image has been used to refer to aspects associated with the country itself and with its residents—such as identity, culture, political environment, history, people, and economic and technological development—but not with the country's products [24]. The product's aspect has been defined as the perception of a particular country's "made in" product category, referring to stereotypes concerning the country [25]. Moreover, these macro and micro concepts examine different things. The country's macro image centres on the country's image, but the micro image emphasises more the "made in" image of products of certain countries.

The studies of the country image have also varied considerably. This has meant that some discrepancies have arisen about the issue to be analysed. These discrepancies may be due to prior research having initially centred on the aspect of the country's "made in" or micro image. Through this tendency, it was evaluated if changes in locations from industrialised countries to developing countries reduced the production costs, which affected the products' perceived quality [14]. Consequently, the macro country image was ignored. In the past decades, studies have begun to appear about the macro country image to explain its influence on the preferences of the products acquired by consumers [26, 27].

The country-of-origin image is considered a factor which affects consumers, reducing the complexity of their shopping decisions [28]. When studying the influence of the country of origin, it is necessary to identify if the market is emerging or not. In the case of emerging markets, the country of origin has an influence on the product's image, while the general image of the country affects the consumers' shopping intentions [29].

The country of origin, which can refer to where a brand is based (brand origin) or where a product is manufactured (country of manufacture), is an important sign that consumers consider when they evaluate a product. The products which are offered by binational or multinational brands, the brand origin, and the country of manufacture are often different. This difference is a source of ambiguity. It reduces the evaluations that customers make about the products, which affects the shopping intention [8].

The type of product is also important when studying the influence of the country of origin and the shopping intention [14]. Thus, Berry et al. [30] show that the country of origin has an influence on the shopping intentions of consumers in the case of meat. According to these authors, the country of origin influences the food's safeness, its taste, and its freshness. These factors in turn influence the shopping intention.

So, the brand-country image perceived by the consumers will provide a differentiation of the product whenever the brand image is consistent and recognised by the market as it will provide numerous advantages. Examples of these are the renown and recognition by the market, savings in the investment of advertising and promotion, a greater speed in the launching and distribution of new products, and the entry into new markets [22]. Due to all these, centring on Spain's country image and the perception of our products

abroad, the hypothesis proposed in this research project is as follows:

Hypothesis 1. The country-of-origin image perceived has a direct and positive relation with the consumer's purchasing intention.

2.3. Gastronomic Culture and Consumer Behaviour. Gastronomy is part of a place's culture [10, 11]. It has also become one of the relevant factors in the consumer's behaviour when choosing tourist destinations, as well as in their behaviour in the destination itself [12]. Consumers often behave influenced by the place where they are, especially regarding gastronomy, given that they prefer to be one more in the destination and behave like a local consumer [31, 32].

Indeed, a place's gastronomy can be encompassed in the context of cultural tourism as the gastronomic experience which each place offers is one of the attractions of the trip. The relation between the consumer's behaviour and food enables analysing one of the most interesting dynamics of the current use of the gastronomic heritage [33].

The local gastronomy therefore becomes a significant tourist resource, being part of the cultural heritage of the geographic areas visited by tourists [34]. Gastronomy is even sought as a reflection of a geographic area's cultural identity [12].

According to Mascarenhas and Gândara [35], food practices are full of meanings. From the choice of what is edible or not to the way of preparing it, serving it, and consuming it, we can appreciate the food characteristics linked with the culture and the society. Tourism is considered one of the elements which use regional food in its activities.

In the Spanish case, its gastronomy is beginning to be recognised at an international level for different attributes, such as its innovative character, its variety, its healthiness, and the quality of its raw materials. Furthermore, the concept of meals through "tapas" (typical of Spain) is increasingly more known and accepted, even being introduced in other countries [36, 37].

To sum up, the behaviour of the consumers as to their shopping or consumption intentions can be seen reflected in the following relation where a link is established between a specific place's gastronomic culture and the behaviour itself. So, this relation can be summarised as follows:

Hypothesis 2. The gastronomic culture of the country of origin has a direct and positive relation with the consumer's purchasing intention.

2.4. Product Perception and Consumer Behaviour. In the past years, the social dimension of food and its universal interest has been markedly strengthened. As the consumption of food provides the most reliable data of the purchasing behaviour, a rigorously scientific study of this phenomenon requires a detailed approach from various perspectives [38]. A growing segment of the population demands to be able to enjoy in their homes specific dishes of their favourite gastronomy, regardless of whether they coincide or not with their native country.

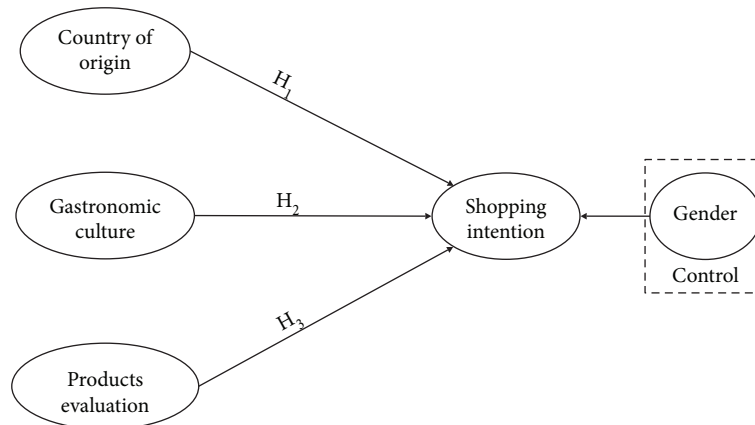


FIGURE 1: Proposed hypothesis of product evaluation.

The flavours and diversity of food are part of each locality's cultural heritage [39–41]. Mediterranean countries are ubiquitously recognised as those which are enthusiastic about eating, and Spain is no exception. This country has been the protagonist of a radical improvement in its perception by foreigners, a change which is more outstanding if one recalls that, historically, Spanish cuisine was relegated to a lower category by its systematic comparison with the internationally acclaimed French cuisine [42]. Also, coming back to the present, Spanish products have gained in the upward growth of consumption of organic food, being in 2016 among the leading European territories of organic production with 2,018,802 ha [43, 44].

Some works have been done on the product-country image (PCI) with a bilateral direction concerning two specific geographical areas. Gorostidi-Martínez et al. [45] analyse the perception of Spain by Chinese consumers, addressing the country image, the personal image, the product image, personal data, and the general knowledge of Spain. Meanwhile, Gorostidi-Martínez et al. [46] do the study conversely. Other works do not adopt this bilateralism and identify a single country for the study of the perception of a Spanish product. For instance, Aramendia-Muneta and Grande-Esteban [47], also concerning China, state in their conclusions that women, the young and those Chinese citizens who have never visited Spain, have the best valuation of Spanish products; the best valued attributes are their prestige, attractiveness, and quality. From the perspective of hypermarkets, [48] can be consulted. There have also been studies of a single type of product, such as yoghurt [49], boar meat [50], functional food [51], and fruit [13], where according to their results, the French consumers surveyed are willing to pay more for imported Spanish citrus fruits due to their high quality.

Based on the above, this article offers a panoramic view of a transcultural study, receiving the perception of tourists of different nationalities about four products related to the local gastronomy. The identification of key markets is a vital question for the future success of a firm, as the mistakes made in this period can be costly [52]. This leads us to our third hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3. The perception of the products of the country of origin has a direct and positive relation with the consumer's purchasing intention.

The relation of these variables considered with the consumer's behaviour, measured through the shopping intention, is expressed in Figure 1.

3. Methodology

To do this study, we have carried out a commercial investigation in which four Andalusian firms that plan to get international and make their products known abroad have taken part. To be able to get all the data necessary, it was essential to obtain detailed information of the destination country markets, as well as the consumers these firms would be targeting.

This is why we selected tourists from different countries as the target population. They did a tasting of the products of the firms taking part in the project. Afterwards, they filled out a questionnaire. Although the questions which make up the questionnaire were determined from the literature (e.g., [12]), the questionnaire also asked about those aspects that the entrepreneurs who took part in the project needed to know. The questionnaire was tested on experts in a foreign trade.

We thus found out the preferences of the consumers towards some products, their knowledge of these products, their tastes, the perceived quality of the products and their attributes, the purchasing intentions, information of the participants' countries of origin, their opinion of our country, and, likewise, the importance of the "made in" effect in the purchasing decisions. These are some of the variables analysed. They have provided useful information not only for the investigation but also for the collaborating firms. These have been able to find out the image that the participants have of Spain and its influence when acquiring "made in Spain" products and especially how they value the products tasted.

This information is very important not only for our research aim but also for the objective sought by the firms

taking part as it will be of great help for them in their process of entering external markets.

This research was carried out in the most touristic area of Seville over five days. Each firm (through its personnel) gave out their product for testing and provided all the information required by the tourists taking part in the study.

More than a dozen firms showed an interest in this project. For the sake of operability, four firms were chosen. They offered products that were considered suitable for this tasting and which, in some way, complemented each other. The products chosen were ecological olive oil, olives, crackers, and sauces. They belonged to the following firms: *Ecolivum Extra S.L.*, *Valdelacasa*, *Naranjas Carneado*, and *The Tapas Sauces*.

4. Empirical Analysis

Next, Table 1 indicates the main characteristics of the sample via a technical sheet.

A total of 154 tourists took part in this market study: 49 men and 105 women (percentage-wise: 31.4% men and 68.6% women).

The second point to highlight from the sample obtained is the diversification of the countries of origin. The information compiled evidences the broad range of countries present—a total of 22. To facilitate the processing of this information, we grouped together those countries that had a smaller number of participants. Having done this, we had a classification of 8 groups: Latin America (represented by Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Haiti, and Peru), Mexico, the United States, Central Europe (Germany and Belgium), geographically close markets (France and Portugal), Italy, Eastern Europe (Slovakia, the Ukraine, the Czech Republic, and Poland), and lastly a section of “others” where we have included those territories that had a lower representation (Finland, Ireland, and the United Kingdom) or were less close (Australia). This grouping is shown in Figure 2.

It can be seen that the Italian market predominates over the rest with 24.7%, almost a quarter of the total respondents. It is followed by the Mexican market (16.66%) and those of countries such as France and Portugal (encompassed in “close markets”—16.38%). After them come the representatives of markets belonging to “Central Europe” and “Latin America” (having 10.73% and 10.16%, respectively). Next are the respondents from the countries grouped in “Eastern Europe”—8.47% of the sample. In the last position are the USA and the countries in “others”: 7.8% and 5.10%, respectively.

4.1. “Made in” Effect on Purchasing Habits. One of the success factors in the commercialisation of a product is having a well-known brand. Consequently, many firms invest vast resources to achieve the positioning of their brand in the consumer’s mind. There are also many studies which justify that the brand is not the only important factor to be successful. In the case of internationalisation, a factor which strengthens the brand image and often substitutes it is the image of the country where the product is from,

TABLE 1: Investigation technical sheet.

Sample	154 participants
Gender	49 men (31.4%) and 105 women (68.6%)
Nationalities represented	Germany, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Slovakia, United States, Finland, France, Haiti, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, Peru, Poland, Portugal, United Kingdom, Czech Republic, Ukraine
Firms taking part	<i>Ecolivum Extra S.L.</i> (ecological olive oil) <i>Valdelacasa</i> (olives) <i>Naranjas Carneado</i> (crackers) <i>The Tapas Sauces</i> (sauces)

that is, the so-called “made in” effect. This is especially taken into consideration in the internationalisation of food products. As this study is centred on this modality, we believe that studying the image of Spanish products in different countries is an important factor to bear in mind in the internationalisation process.

To do so, we have analysed a series of variables that help us to find out how Spanish products and Spanish food are known and considered in foreign markets. This gives us an idea of the image that Spain has in the food sector at an international level. To do this, we worked with a Likert scale having five possible alternatives (as reflected in Table 2), where the respondents are requested to mark an option from 1 to 5, with 1 being the least valued and 5 being the most valued, according to their perception of Spain and Spanish food.

The results obtained are shown in Figure 3.

We first see in the graphs that the data denote a very positive perception of the “made in” effect regarding Spanish products and food. In general, we determine that they are widely accepted and are highly esteemed by foreign consumers.

81% of the respondents declare liking Spanish food quite a lot or a lot. This data is very significant. No one indicates not liking it, and only 5% declare that they do not like our products very much. These are positive data that strengthen the idea that our gastronomy has a privileged position within the worldwide culinary culture.

Also, a total of 82% of the respondents perceive Spanish products as good (51%) and very good (31%). In contrast, we find that 1 out of every 5 respondents does not have a very positive perception about Spanish products. This is worrying as, percentage-wise, we are talking about a significant 20% of the market. This means that many potential customers are not reached.

Dealing with the importance of the products’ country of origin, it is revealed that the consumers take this into account. Indeed, 85% of the respondents pay attention to where the product is from, 60% of them considering this to be quite important or very important.

At the same time, we note that in spite of the good ranking that the Spain brand has, Spanish products are not sold in the world as much as the idea that this perception gives. Only 14% of the respondents declare that they often buy Spanish products, compared to 44%, practically

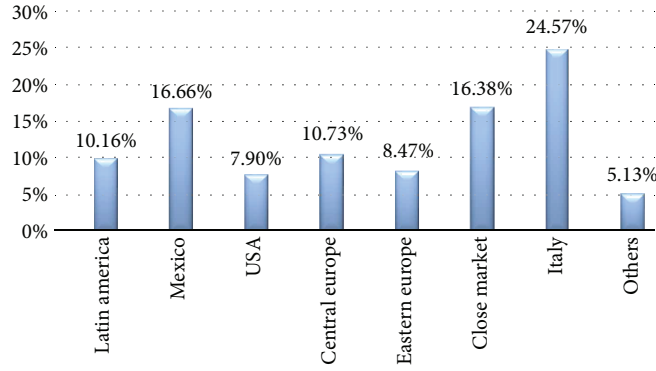


FIGURE 2: Geographic area.

TABLE 2: Questions.

	<i>Made in</i>				
The country the product is from is important	Not at all	Not much	A little	Quite a lot	A lot
	<i>Tapas culture</i>				
The concept of “tapas” food is known in my city	Not at all	Not much	A little	Quite a lot	A lot
There are Spanish taverns/restaurants in my city	None	Not many	A few	Quite a lot	A lot
	<i>Product evaluation</i>				
I like Spanish food	Not at all	Not much	A little	Quite a lot	A lot
Perception of Spanish products	Very bad	Bad	Average	Good	Very good
	<i>Shopping intention</i>				
I buy food products from Spain in my country	Never	Not often	Sometimes	Often	Very often

half of the population that indicate that they rarely or never buy Spanish products.

Lastly, it is noted that the concept of tapas and Spanish restaurants in their country of origin are not very common. Only 14% know the tapas culture, and 5% remark that there are Spanish taverns in their country.

To sum up, this introductory block also is aimed at considering the importance that the country of origin can have, analysing variables related to shopping and consumer habits. For this reason, as in any study of this kind, where the aim is to obtain information for a possible commercialisation in different international models, to get to know consumer behaviours regarding consumption and purchasing habits is very relevant.

In this way, we have intended to find out about some aspects, such as liking Spanish food, the image of Spanish products, the perception of them, and the existence of a Spanish gastronomic culture, with a view of examining if these variables influence the participants’ shopping intention.

4.2. Analysis of the Proposed Hypothesis. Next, we verify the hypotheses proposed in this work. To do so, we use the PLS-Graph (structural equation technique) programme. The PLS model is analysed and interpreted in two stages [53]: (1) the evaluation of the reliability and the validity of the measurement model and (2) the evaluation of the structural model.

4.2.1. Evaluation of the Measurement Model’s Reliability and Validity

(1) *Individual Reliability of the Item.* To measure the individual reliability, we have to take into account the loadings. In this work, all the reflective indicators have loadings (λ) above 0.707. There are researchers who have the opinion that loadings of 0.5 and 0.6 can be accepted when the scales are applied in different contexts [53]. In this case, we have included loadings less than 0.707.

(2) *Reliability of the Construct.* The reliability of a construct enables the internal consistency of all the indicators measuring the concept to be checked. That is to say, it evaluates how rigorously manifested variables are measuring the same latent variable [54]. To measure this reliability, the composite reliability is noted [55]. This must be over 0.7. Next, we present the results obtained through the indicators (Table 3). In this model, all the constructs with reflective indicators are reliable.

(3) *Convergent Validity.* This refers to the degree to which all the items try to measure the same. To do so, all the indicators of the same construct must be highly correlated. The PLS analysis measures this validity through the measurement called “average variance extracted (AVE)” [56]. This provides the quantity of variance that a construct obtains from its indicators in relation to the quantity of variance due to measurement error [57].

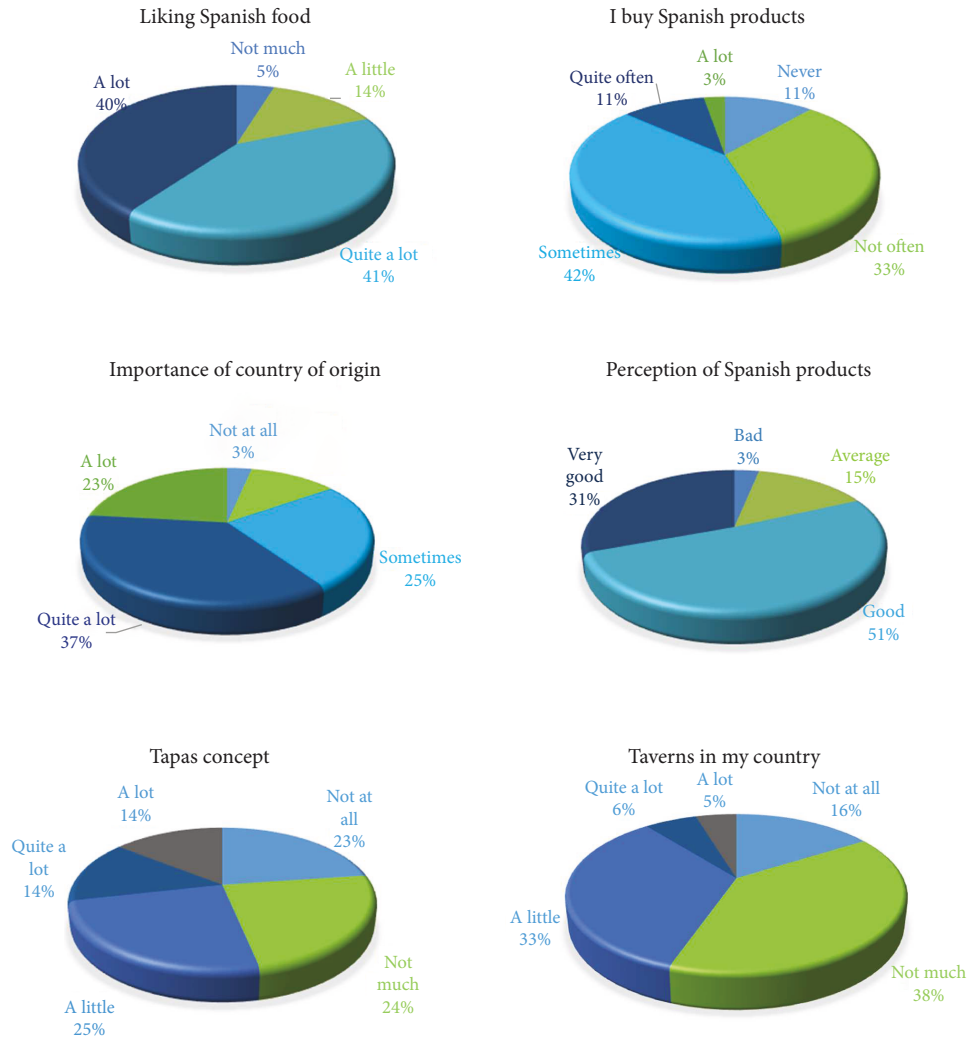


FIGURE 3: Aspects related to Spanish products and food liking/tapas concept/Spanish taverns.

TABLE 3: Measurement model.

	VIF	Weight	Student's <i>t</i>	Loading	Confidence interval Lower	Upper
Product evaluation (reflective)						
Spfd				0.907	0.813	0.951
Spprod				0.922	0.866	0.966
Tapas culture (formative)						
Taverns	1.067	0.641**	2.629			
Tapas	1.067	0.624*	2.497			
Made in (reflective)						
Made in				1	1	1
Gender (reflective)						
Gender				1	1	1
Shopping intention (reflective)						
Spbuy				1	1	1

***p* < 0.01 (based on *t*(4999, two-tailed); **p* < 0.05 (based on *t*(4999, two-tailed). *t*(0.05, 4999) = 1.960; *t*(0.01, 4999) = 2.577.

TABLE 4: Reliability of the construct, convergent, and discriminant validity.

	Composite reliability	AVE	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) Product evaluation	0.911	0.837	0.915				
(2) Tapas culture	n.a.	n.a.	0.023	0			
(3) Made in	1	1	0.158	-0.014	1		
(4) Gender (control variable)	1	1	0.033	0.007	-0.056	1	
(5) Shopping intention	1	1	0.281	0.282	0.215	-0.223	1

TABLE 5: Effect of the endogenous variable.

	R^2	Q^2	Direct effect	t value	Confidence interval	Variance explained
Shopping intention	23.60%	0.178				
Product evaluation			0.256***	3.478	[0.140, 0.381]	7.19%
Tapas culture			0.280***	3.361	[0.148, 0.423]	7.90%
Made in			0.166*	2.141	[0.037, 0.291]	3.57%
Gender (control variable)			-0.244^	3.298	[-0.351, -0.084]	4.99%

*** $p < 0.001$ and * $p < 0.05$ (based on $t(4999)$, one-tailed test). $t(0.05, 4999) = 1.645$; $t(0.001, 4999) = 3.092$. ^ $p < 0.001$ (based on $t(4999)$, two-tailed test). $t(0.001, 4999) = 3.292$.

Fornell and Larcker [56] recommend that the AVE be over 0.5. This establishes that 50% of the construct's variance is due to its indicators. This is complied with as the AVE measurements of this model's constructs with reflective indicators are over 0.5 (Table 4).

(4) *Discriminant Validity*. Discriminant validity indicates to what extent a given construct is different from the other constructs. A way of determining this is to demonstrate that the correlations between the constructs are lower than the square root of the AVE.

The diagonal elements of Table 4 correspond to the square root of the construct's AVE, while the rest of the figures represent the correlations between constructs. This model has discriminant validity as the correlations between constructs are lower than the square root of the AVE.

For an appropriate discriminant validity, the elements of the diagonal must be significantly greater than the elements that are in the corresponding rows and columns off the diagonal [53].

Having verified that the measurement model is satisfactory in relation to the preceding criteria (the measurements of the constructs are reliable and valid), we value the structural model.

4.2.2. *Evaluation of the Structural Model*. From these levels, in the following section, we will obtain the significance of the proposed relation and, therefore, we will accept it or reject it. To do so, we are going to make use of Student's t distribution of 499 degrees of freedom ($n - 1$, where n represents the number of subsamples) to calculate the significance of the path coefficients. We will obtain the values with a significance of 0.001, 0.01, and 0.05 (see Table 5). As we can also note in Table 5, the model explains 23.60% of the shopping intention variable, with the tapas culture being

the construct that most explains it and the "made in" effect being the one which does so least: 7.90% and 3.57%, respectively.

Also, regarding the "gender" control variable, as the path coefficient is negative, the higher the score the less the shopping intention. Thus, it is confirmed that the shopping intention is greater in men than in women.

4.2.3. *Verification of Hypothesis*. Figure 4 shows the causal relation between the model's constructs, and Table 6 presents the relation to be studied, the effect that this relation actually follows, the path coefficient, the t value, and the idea if the relation has been supported or not.

The result shows that the hypotheses are supported. It is thus confirmed that the "made in" effect influences the perceptions of the consumers towards some products or others in their shopping intentions. Consequently, it can be established that the greater the general valuation of the perceived country image, the greater the commercial success of the products from this country in international markets will be.

5. Discussion

This study contributes additional empirical evidence to recent observations of the positive effect of the "made in" perception, the culture, and the evaluation of the product on the shopping intention.

In general, the valuation of Spain as to the questions related to the "made in" effect is highly positive. Regarding the question of the importance of the country of origin, 85% of the respondents declare that they give some, a lot, or quite a lot of importance to the product's country of origin. This is a very relevant data for the purpose of this work given that, of the 154 participants, 131 showed an interest

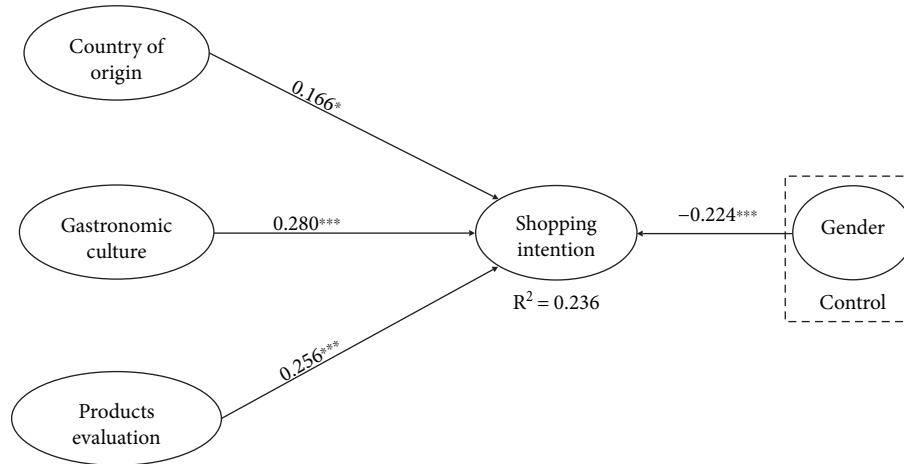


FIGURE 4: Causal relation of product evaluation.

TABLE 6: Verification of the hypotheses.

Hypotheses	Effect suggested	Path coefficient (β)	t value (bootstrap)	Supported/not supported
H1: made in \rightarrow shopping intention	(+)	0.166*	2.141	Supported
H2: tapas culture \rightarrow shopping intention	(+)	0.280***	3.361	Supported
H3: product evaluation \rightarrow shopping intention	(+)	0.256***	3.478	Supported

*** $p < 0.001$ and * $p < 0.05$ (based on $t(4999)$, one-tailed test). $t(0.05, 4999) = 1.645$; $t(0.001, 4999) = 3.092$.

in where the product that they were buying was from. Hence, it is essential for a country to transmit a positive image and, likewise, for the consumers to perceive this.

Addressing the very surprising percentages as to buying food products from Spain, only 14% declare buying Spanish products in their countries, while 44% point out that they never or very seldom buy them. These data lead us to the following question: what is the reason of this if in general we have checked that their acceptance is good and that they are perceived as having a more than acceptable quality? Perhaps, this result makes sense if we compare it with the study carried out by the Forum of Renowned Spanish Brands (FMRE) and the Spanish Federation of Food and Beverage Industries (FIAB). This is expressed in the conceptual framework in which the foreign tourists surveyed show an interest in continuing to consume Spanish products in their countries of residence, but almost half (a similar data to that of our study) say that they cannot do so due to their scant accessibility. Also, international consumers do not recognise a good part of our products as Spanish. This possibly makes sense of the valuation received in this question.

According to the data obtained in the project's questionnaire, we can answer the initial question through the evaluations carried out in the PLS-Graph programme: the proposed hypothesis is supported. This confirms the role played by the "made in Spain" effect (H_1) in the internationalisation of firms belonging to the agri-food sector. We have also found out the valuation of this effect in the perception of the Spain brand in the consumer's shopping behaviour (H_3), as well as

the influence of the gastronomic culture in the purchasing of Spanish products (H_2). These findings are in line with the studies of Cerviño et al. [19], Jiménez and San Martín [58], Ganguly et al. [59], and Li et al., [9], among others. The tapas culture represents the best predictor of the shopping intention in the research model, explaining 7.90% of its variance. The least significant variable is the "made in" effect, which explains 3.57%. This degree of significance is also found in the research carried out by Cerviño et al. [19], where the "made in" effect on the product's success is the lowest of all the study variables. This finding suggests that the consumer does not give so much importance to where the product is from, but rather to the existence of a culture such as eating tapas. Thus, Ahmed and d'Astous [25] corroborated this, stating that though the consumers may have a general unfavourable perception of a country, if they consider that it has good-quality products, they consume them. Our study's results demonstrate as well that the perception of the product variable also affects the shopping intention, having a variance explained of 7.19%. This result is consistent with other studies, such as that of Khalid and Nawawi [60].

It should be pointed out that the PLS methodology is aimed at specifying predictability through the values of the variance explained (R^2) and the redundancy (Q^2) in the model in which it is tested, as well as the decomposition of the variance explained. This contributes useful information about the practice, and theoretical conclusions can be drawn. The model tested in this study attained moderate values for the variance explained [57]. Furthermore, the

squared validated redundancy measures (Q2) show that the structural model has a satisfactory predictive relevance for the shopping intention ($Q2 > 0$). Therefore, the results indicate that a positive “made in” effect, the existence of Spanish gastronomic culture in the destination country, and the perception of the product can foster a shopping intention.

6. Conclusions, Implications for Management, and Limitations

The aim of this study has been to find out if the “made in” effect, a favourable perception of the country of origin, and the gastronomic culture have a direct relation with the consumer’s shopping intention. To do so, it was very important to compile an appropriate sample to obtain the necessary data to respond to the proposed hypotheses.

It is worth highlighting the variety of countries where the participants who answered the questionnaire were from. This enriches the data and, consequently, the analysis and the conclusions which we draw from the research.

The results of this study come from a sample whose respondents have quite varied nationalities. As a result, it has been possible to find out the image of the Spanish products in the study in a diversity of markets. Accordingly, to know the perceptions about our country and our products is valuable to configure Spain’s reputation at the international level.

Based on the studies carried out and the results obtained, we establish the following:

- (i) The country image influences both the consumers’ perceptions about a product’s quality and their shopping behaviour
- (ii) A favourable projection of the “made in Spain” effect, as well as a positive perception of it by the consumer, will significantly affect the commercial success of Spanish firms in their international expansion
- (iii) Consumers show an interest in where a product that they buy is from, so it is crucial to transmit a positive image since the consumers perceive this
- (iv) To achieve an increase in the valuation and the international positioning of the “Spain brand,” it is necessary to carry out an appropriate communication policy made up of the image projected and the image perceived
- (v) Firms should centre themselves on the variables which make up the gastronomic culture construct as it is the one which best explains the shopping intention. This implies that a greater knowledge of the gastronomic culture of Spain in the country of origin brings about a greater shopping intention regarding its products. It would hence be recommendable to create more Spanish restaurants and introduce the tapas concept in these countries
- (vi) In general, our gastronomy has a great acceptance and our products are highly esteemed by foreign consumers.

With this study, we have meant to contribute information which helps firms of the agri-food sector wishing to expand to international markets to achieve sustainable competitive advantages through the country image projected abroad.

Carrying out a commercial investigation at a very low cost leads small firms or those with scant financial resources to be able to find out the tastes and preferences of foreign consumers. It is to bear in mind that this part of the information process (knowledge of foreign markets) is undoubtedly the most important but, in turn, it is the one which costs most.

We finish these prior considerations noting that we must not forget that this study is a pilot study which will give us no more than an approach to those factors that we are going to analyse, given that the sample can in no case be understood as a representative sample. This is a significant limitation for the work. Nevertheless, it is going to mean, for the firms taking part, an access to the tastes, habits, customs and opinions that consumers of different markets have, on the one hand, about Spanish food and products and, on the other hand, about the products tested in this study.

Data Availability

The data used to support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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