Brand origin effect on brand personality, quality and purchase intention for apparel products: The À L'AISE BREIZH case

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze the effects of brand origin information on brand personality evaluation (Aaker 1997), product quality (Maheswaran 1994), and purchase intention (Vrontis et al. 2006) for À L'AISE BREIZH, an apparel brand which has become quickly successful in Brittany, the most western part of France, thanks to its strong Breton personality.

In line with recent works in the field of brand personality (Fetscherin and Toncar 2009), several research hypotheses were build and an empirical investigation was carried out among American college students by means of a survey. Ninety students divided in three groups had to take exactly the same survey; however, the brand origin information they had differed. Group 1 was not provided with any information concerning À L'AISE BREIZH's brand origin. Group 2 was told the brand was French, and Group 3 was told the brand was Breton. Each group was requested to evaluate A L'AISE BREIZH's brand personality, design, quality of materials and indicate purchase intention.

Results show that some dimensions of Brand Personality are significantly affected by brand origin. In particular, informants' judgments for brand excitement (p=.0304) and brand competitiveness (p=.0431) scored the highest for French origin. In line with these findings, also evaluations concerning materials and design quality were perceived significantly higher when students thought the brand was French (p=.0014 for materials quality, p=.0211 for design quality). Nevertheless, these positive perceptions for French products did not automatically translate into higher purchase intention levels (p=.6912). In fact, when quantitative results were compared to qualitative ones, it turned out that students considered À L'AISE BREIZH's products as low-involvement items (Laurent and Kapferer, 1985; Richins and Bloch, 1986), and that, although they considered the products as cool and casual, they didn't find them feminine enough for the female range and could not understand much of the Breton jokes and humoristic slogans printed on the items.

The present study contributes to the debate on brand origin and apparel product evaluation by providing further evidence that France exercises a positive effect on quality perception (cf. de

Mooij 2004:121); in addition, this work provides the first analysis of how French and Breton brand origins may influence brand personality. At the same time, this research served as a point of departure for À L'AISE BREIZH's international marketing strategy. While the brand's strong regional identity had a positive effect on local Breton customers, if its humoristic style will have to be maintained outside of Brittany, more adaptation to the local cultural contexts will necessarily be required to successfully penetrate any potential foreign market. Besides, A L'AISE BREIZH would benefit from advertising its French origin along with its Breton one.

1. Introduction

During the last decades, the volume of products traded across national borders has increased significantly. The globalization of production, the development of new logistic technologies, and the overall reduction of international trade barriers have played a key role in the emergence of International Marketing as an important field of business research, crucial to any small, medium, or big company aimed at serving foreign markets (Kotler and Keller 2009). The development of corporations acting on a global scale has given birth to a variety of hybrid products whose country of origin (COO) designations are becoming more and more difficult to identify (Chao 2001).

Brand personality analysis has long been considered as a key element in marketing research (Aaker 1997) not only because it plays a central role in product positioning but also because it represents a fundamental step that companies have to do in order to build loyalty and long term relationships with their customers (Keller 1993). The increasing presence of goods produced, designed and assembled in countries different from the one in which they are ultimately sold (cf. Chao 2001) led International Marketing scholars to study the effects of country of origin (COO) and brand origin on customers' perceptions for domestic and foreign goods (Lawrence, Marr and Prendergast 1992; Maheswaran 1994; etc.).

From a strictly psychological point of view, what is fascinating about these studies is the fact that they are aimed at understanding how consumers evaluate products based on mental inferences (Huber and McCann 1982). The present paper will contribute to such a field of research by analyzing the perceptions held by American college students on apparel products. In particular, this work focuses on how the evaluation of brand personality is affected by the brand origin factor. The brand under inspection is the French À L'AISE BREIZH, an apparel company operating only in Brittany, a region of France located in the most Western part of the country. Therefore, the

findings of this investigation will also serve as informative data for a potential future exporting plan of À L'AISE BREIZH's merchandize to the American market.

This work has two main goals. The first objective is to provide an analysis of American college students' perceptions on brand personality for À L'AISE BREIZH. This brand has become quickly popular among Breton students because of its strong Breton personality. In fact, À L'AISE BREIZH often time uses Breton humoristic expression and idiomatic sentences on its apparel products, features which proved to be successful on the local apparel market. So far, no studies have been carried out on the potentials of this trade mark on any foreign market. For this reason, one of the main aims of this study is to accurately explore several aspects of this brand personality and try to understand which factors, if any, may make it appeal to American customers. The second goal is to study the influence of France and Brittany as country and region of brand origin for À L'AISE BREIZH's brand personality. It is generally believed that French fashion products should be perceived positively (de Mooij 2004:121); however, to our knowledge, no empirical experiments have ever been carried out to test to what extent this factor can modify brand personality perceptions for apparel goods, neither for French brands, nor for Breton ones. This paper will fill such a gap by analyzing the perceptions of Ohio college students by means of an appositely designed experiment.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides a literature review of the main works dealing with brand personality and brand origin effects on customers' perceptions. Section 3 consists of an outlay of the hypotheses tested in the present study, it also describes the methodology adopted. Section 4 presents and discusses the results. Finally, section 5 concludes.

2. Literature review

After briefly presenting the concept of branding and its advantages for companies and customers, this section reviews the main publications concerning country of origin and brand origin effects on customers' perceptions for foreign products. After such a review, this section deals with two other important topics related to the present study: brand personality and the effects of brand origin the perception of brand personality .

2.1. Branding

Keller identifies a brand as "a set of mental associations, held by the consumer, which add to the perceived value of a product or service" (1998:5). This definition is key to understand why companies adopt brands and what are the psychological mechanisms triggering certain customers' perceptions and / or behaviors. Consumers, in fact, tend to associate information derived or inferred from previous experiences with specific distinguishing names / or symbols which, in turn come to identify and differentiate a company's goods and services from those of competitors (Aaker 1991:7). It is also often argued for this reason that brands add value to consumer products by supplying meaning (McCracken 1993).

Successful branding has long been proved to provide advantages for companies and customers. A powerful brand reduces introduction costs of new products through brand extension (Aaker and Keller 1990:38-40), it reduces financial risks, and improves profit performance (Mackiewicz 1993:43-46) by developing customer loyalty (Murphy 1990:7). From a strategic perspective, brand loyalty generates benefits such as substantial entry barriers to competitors and market share (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán 1999). Branding has positive effects not only for companies, also consumers can benefit from strong brands as they reduce risk (Matzler et al 2008) and generate higher levels of satisfaction (Anderson et al 1994). Nevertheless, if branding strategy is not carried out in the proper way, it can also have negative results both for customers and companies, thus eventually leading to brand distrust and aversion (Lassar et al 1995).

In essence, this means that the brand allows the company to develop a communication channel with customers by playing with the different components of its marketing-mix strategy and thus increasing (or decreasing) its brand equity in relation to competitors. Brand equity is regarded as a set of assets and liabilities connected with the brand image (Aaker 1991:15). As Thakor and Hohli (1996:27) pointed out, brand image – defined as "that cluster of attributes and associations that consumers connect to the brand name" (Biel 1993) – must be of central interest to researchers as a key determinant for a company's success. Brand image is therefore an abstract concept; it is composed by a variety of associations inferred by consumers. It can be a crucial factor in patterning purchasing behavior, especially when consumers lack factual information about good characteristics (Gensch 1978).

Aaker (1991:ch.5) identifies eleven different types of association that customers make with a brand and that therefore participate in creating their brand image: (1) product attributes, (2) intangibles, (3) customer benefits, (4) relative price, (5) use/application, (6) user/customer, (7) celebrity/personality, (9) product class, (10) competitors, and (12) country/geography area. Of particular interest to the present study are the associations derived from brand personality and country/geographic area of origin. The following sections further illustrate such concepts.

2.2. Brand personality

During the 70's, 80's and early 90's a considerable amount of consumer behavior research was carried out to study the concept of brand personality, which considers the set of human characteristics associated with a brand. Scholars who pioneered this topic explored different aspects of how brands relate to the concept, self-expression and to their symbolic use (Belk 1988; Malhotra 1988; Kleine et al 1995; Keller 1993). However, despite these investigations, the research panorama of these studies remained quite limited in its nature because no consensus among scholars existed on a common framework to systematically define and measure brand personality and its effects on consumer behaviors. These were the reasons that pushed Aaker (1997) to define brand personality as "the set of human characteristics associated with the typical user of a brand" (1997: 347) and to propose a multidimensional framework to measure it – The Brand Personality Framework.

Brand personality traits are assigned to a brand in direct ways through the people associated with the brand (e.g. the company's employees or CEO) (McCracken 1989), or via indirect associations, through product related attributes, logo, price, distribution channel, advertising style, etc. (Batra et al 1993). These associations can sometimes include clear demographic characteristics, such as age, gender or social class (Levy 1959). To provide some concrete examples, Aaker (1997:347) mentions that due to different direct and indirect associations, customers tend to perceive Virginia Slims as feminine, whereas Malboro is usually perceived as masculine. Apple is associated with young people, while IBM with older ones. Saks Fifth Avenue is perceived as upper class, whereas Kmart is generally seen as blue collar.

By the time Aaker proposed the Brand Personality Framework, considerable research in psychology had developed a robust series of scales to evaluate the five main dimensions of human personality, the "Big five": openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (thus making the well-known OCEAN acronym) (cf. Norman 1963; Tupes and Christal 1958; John 1990; etc). Early studies tried to use psychological scales of human personality to measure the degree of congruity between a brand or its image and self (Dolich 1984; Bellenger et al 1969). In fact, brands, like people, can be described with adjectives and therefore associated with personalities (Plummer 1985). Nevertheless, Aaker (1997) observed that even though human and brand personality characteristics may have elements in common (Epstein 1977); brands and human personality traits are formed differently. While human personality traits are inferred on the basis of an individual's behavior, physical characteristics, beliefs and demographic characteristics (Park

1986), brand personality features are associated via inference due to the direct or indirect contact that customers had with the brand (Plummer 1985).

Given these considerations, Aaker (1997) developed a new, *ad hoc* scale to measure brand personality and its effects on customer behavior. She borrowed evaluating parameters from theoretically-based human personality research and from applied marketing practice and created a new framework for brand personality evaluation, which included five main dimensions (sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness), subdivided into 15 facets, broken down into 45 traits (3 traits for each of the 15 facets) (see Figure 1). In Aaker's view, the Brand Personality Framework works across product categories and for this reason it can be seen as a platform for comparisons which has the advantage of providing "theoretical insights into when and why consumers buy brands for self-expressive purposes" (Aaker 1997:348).

Figure 1. Brand Personality Framework (Aaker 1997:352).
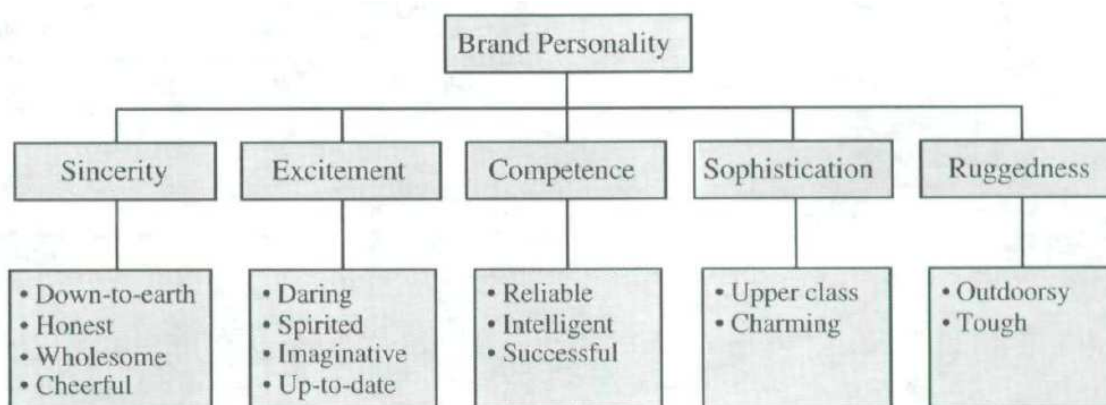
In more recent years, Aaker's framework has been criticized by several scholars, who identified problems with some of her assumptions. Azoulay and Kapferer (2003), for example, think that Aaker's description of brand personality is too lose as it includes also aspects of a brand that refer to its image, beyond its personality. Caprara et al (2001) suggest that more evaluative parameters should be added (e.g. economical, convenient, famous, etc.). Sweeney and Brandon (2006) argue that Aaker's scale includes only positive brand attitudes, but that in reality brands can also be perceived as arrogant, calculating, cocky, etc. These two authors go on as to propose a new framework, the interpersonal circumplex (IPC), derived from work of Guttman in psychometrics, Leary and Wiggins in personality and Plutchik and Lorr in emotions (Plutchik and Conte 1997). In Sweeney and Brandon's view, the IPC model should be seen as complementary to Aaker's scale, as

it draws on interpersonal research (Schmidt et al 1999) and is able to provide a better picture of the intrapersonal relation between the customer and the brand. It should not be seen as an alternative to Aaker's framework, the latter, in fact, is more comprehensive, but provides a less in-depth examination of the interpersonal dimension (Sweeney and Brandon 2006: 645-649).

All these new studies are valuable in that they try to refine the original model proposed by Aaker to better analyze brand-driven market perceptions; nevertheless, these proposals are still in their early stages and have not yet been adopted by the majority of scholars working in the field. For these reasons, in the present work, we decided to acknowledge their existence and their importance for further research; however, the perception experiments ran in this study will use Aaker's original scale, which provides a widely accepted measurement tool and therefore a bigger platform to compare research findings.

2.3. Country of origin and brand origin

Country of origin (COO) has long been shown to have an effect on how customers perceive products and their quality. Schooler (1965) was the first to identify this factor as an important perception conditioner and found that people evaluate foreign goods based on the preconceived notions that they hold about a particular country. In particular, Schooler discovered that consumers perceived the quality of products made in less developed countries as inferior to those proceeding from more advanced economies. As other researchers have pointed out, people hold ideas about foreign countries based on direct and /or indirect experiences they had with them (Han and Terpstra 1988). Ultimately, customers associate such ideas with the product they evaluate and infer (correctly or not) their quality (Bilkey and Nes 1982; Tse and Gorn 1993). On the other hand, different works (Maheswaran, 1994; Hong and Wyer, 1990) have indicated that positive COO inferences lead to favorable consumers' perceptions of product and quality.

Marketing researchers have indicated that consumers around the world use COO as an attribute in product evaluation across a variety of product categories (Bilkey and Nes 1982; Hong and Wyer 1990; Maheswaran 1994; Okechuku and Onyemah 1999; etc.). As far as the apparel industry is concerned, Dickerson (1982) proved that COO significantly affected consumers' perception of apparel goods and that the majority of US consumers preferred to have domestically produced apparel.

At first, the term 'country of origin' identified the country where a product was manufactured or assembled (Bilkey and Nes 1982; Han and Terpsta 1988). For this reason, the image or the association linked to this factor were initially described as the "the picture, the

reputation, or the stereotype that businessmen and consumers attach to products of a specific country" (Nagashima 1970). However, in more recent years, due to the increasing internationalization of business activities, this definition has been criticized and refined. In particular, the development of hybrid products with components proceeding from different countries has posed serious problems to definitions such as the aforementioned one (Baker and Michie 1995; Baughn and Yaprak 1993). For example, Chao (1993) proposes a decomposition of country of origin (COO) into two specific aspects: country of assembly (COA) and country of design (COD), and in a later work he adds an additional dimension, country of parts (COP) (Chao 2001). Due to the increasing globalization of production and logistic activities, it has become more difficult for consumers to pinpoint the origins of the goods they purchase every day. It is for this reason that consumers tend to identify well-known brands, rather than products, with particular countries, even when their goods were manufactured elsewhere. Thus, Toyota, Sony, and Honda products are perceived as Japanese; Marks and Spencer and Body Shop items are considered to be from the UK; McDonald's and KFC are American (Ahmed et al 2002:104). It is exactly for this reason that the concept of 'brand origin' has been proposed (Thakor and Kohli 1996). Brand origin, therefore, represents the country or region with which a brand is associated, even though its products are manufactured elsewhere. In a review article on the conceptualization of 'brand origin', Thakor and Kohli (1996:30) humoristically quotes Liefeld's (1993:146) observation, which exemplifies the issue at stake: "An afternoon at the supermarket and department store reveals that for many products one has to be an amateur detective to find country-of-origin information". This seems to be especially true for products manufactured in poorly considered countries, because companies try to obfuscate their real origin. The authors bring up a study by Ratliff (1989), who showed that only 8 percent of people knew where Volkswagen Fox was actually manufactured – Brazil – while more than 66 percent thought it was made in Germany. Thakor and Lavack (2003) further highlight the need of a new term. They mention the predecessors to 'brand origin' such as location of ownership, location of manufacture, location of assembly, origin of top management, etc. and provide a new unifying concept – the perceived brand origin. In Thakor and Lavack's view, perceived brand origin is the most indicative source of brand appeal, much more powerful in fact than the COO, which has become more and more difficult to identify.

To summarize, this section has defined the concepts of country of origin and brand origin as well as their implications for product evaluation. With the growth of hybrid products, it has become increasingly more difficult for customers to identify the COO of the products they buy (Thakor and Kohli 1996). As a result, in more recent years it has been shown that people tend to associate a product with its brand, regardless of where the product was actually manufactured or

assembled (Ahmed et al 2002); it is for this reason that terms such as 'brand originbrand origin' or 'perceived brand origin' (Thakor and Kohli 1996; Thakor and Lavack 2003) better account for present marketing reality.

3. Research hypotheses and methodology

The first goal of this research was to empirically test American college students' perceptions for À L'AISE BREIZH brand personality. This French Breton brand was created in 1996 by a Breton entrepreneur and Breton artist. Designed and distributed in Brittany only, products have become immensely popular with Bretons, thanks to the strong Breton identity of the brand and its ongoing inspiration on Breton humoristic references for its design and communication. Products are sold throughout the world, mainly to Breton expatriates and Brittany lovers. The second objective was to evaluate how such perceptions might be affected by brand origin information. In order to obtain the data and analyze them, a quantitative and qualitative research approach was adopted. Data were collected using Ohio college students who volunteered to fill in questionnaires. The quantitative information was analyzed by using a statistical software program, Stata; while the qualitative aspect of the study consisted of analyzing students' answers to a list of open-ended questions on certain product features. The rest of the section illustrates the specific research hypotheses, the research design, and the statistical analysis methods adopted in the present study.

Aaker's (1997) brand personality is a multi-dimensional construct composed of five dimensions, including 15 facets and 42 measurement items. Items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale, and scores were summed and averaged within each facet and dimension. Results were used to evaluate the effects of brand origin information on brand personality perception for À L'AISE BREIZH. In line with similar works on brand personality (cf. Fetscherin and Toncar 2009:117-118), several hypotheses were tested in the present study:

H1: The perceived brand personality varies by brand origin.

Given that brand personality can be subdivided into five different dimensions, H1 was tested by analyzing the effects of brand origin on each of those parameters. For this reason, five additional hypotheses could be derived from H1:

H2: The brand *sincerity perception* varies by brand origin.

H3: The brand *excitement perception* varies by brand origin.

H4: The brand *sophistication perception* varies by brand origin.

H5: The brand *competence perception* varies by brand origin.

H6: The brand *ruggedness perception* varies by brand origin.

As À L'AISE BREIZH is not yet known to the American market, no hypotheses were made concerning the impact of brand origin on brand awareness (cf. also Fetscherin and Toncar 2009:118). However, as several studies confirmed that country of origin and brand origin have an effect on a variety of features associated with a certain good (e.g. Schweiger, Gerald and Gereon 1995), the present study also tested whether brand origin had an effect on perceived quality of materials, design quality, and purchase intentions.

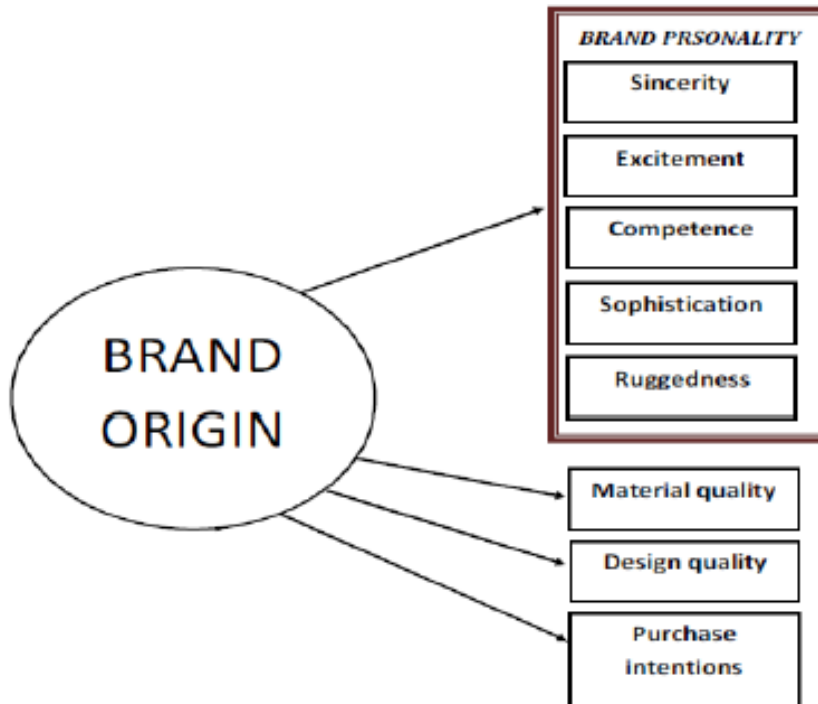For this reason four additional hypotheses were formulated:

H7: The perceived quality of materials varies by brand origin.

H8: The perceived design quality varies by brand origin.

H9: Purchase intentions vary by brand origin.

The following figure provides schematic illustration of the research framework used in this thesis.

Figure 2. Brand origin effects.

BRAND PRSONALITY
- Sincerity
- Excitement
- Competence
- Sophistication
- Ruggedness

BRAND ORIGIN

- Material quality
- Design quality
- Purchase intentions

As for the methodology adopted, a set of surveyswas developed to collect data to empirically test the perceptions for À L'AISE BREIZH brand personality and relationship between such perceptions and brand origin information. The surveys were administered on April 21-25, 2011 to undergraduate students from two university campuses in the State of Ohio. Students were enrolled in introductory language courses, considered as interdisciplinary coursework requirement that every student has to take independently of their major coursework. For this reason, four Spanish 101 sessions and two Spanish 202 sessions were selected for a total of 101 students.

The surveys were administered at the beginning of each class. A total of 101 surveys were distributed to participants in the experiment. However, nine surveys had unanswered questions and had to be excluded from the statistical computation. For this reason, only the results of a total of 92 surveys were operationalized in Stata for statistical purposes. Participation in the experiment was voluntary and students did not receive any kind of compensation for filling in the questionnaires. The six Spanish sections selected for the experiment were divided into three groups of roughly 30 students each (27-33-32). Each group had to take exactly the same survey, but the groups would be presented with different brand origin information about À L'AISE BREIZH.

The first group was told that À L'AISE BREIZH was a foreign company without any specific information concerning the origin of the brand. This group would be given a paper with color images showing À L'AISE BREIZH logo and a variety of clothes from both the men and women collections (a sample of T-shirts, switchers, and jackets). The second group received the

same materials, but this time students were told that À L'AISE BREIZH was a French brand. Finally, group three would know that À L'AISE BREIZH was Breton, and also in this case the stimuli would not change.

In addition, to make sure that each group had a better understanding of the country and/ or region of brand origin, different power points pointing out to such information were presented to the students before the questionnaires were handed out. Group 1 was shown a power point presenting only À L'AISE BREIZH's brand logo and the apparel products; group 2 looked at a power point including the brand's logo, the apparel products, and information on the brand's country of origin, (France); group 3 was presented with a power point indicating brand's logo, the apparel products, and its Breton origin, without emphasizing the fact that it is also French.

The survey consisted of two questionnaires. Questionnaire 1 was used to test students' perceptions for À L'AISE BREIZH brand personality. It was designed adopting the items employed in Aaker's (1997) framework (cf. Aaker 1997:354, appendix A). To avoid boredom effects, the order of the items was randomized (cf. Aaker 1997:349). Students were therefore asked to rate their perceptions for the specific items on a 5-point Likert scale. Questionnaire 2 consisted of several questions concerning perceived material quality, design quality, and purchase intentions for À L'AISE BREIZH's products. The version of questionnaire 2 provided to group 1 included an additional question concerning the potential origins of À L'AISE BREIZH.

Survey results were analyzed with Stata, a statistical software program commonly used in the social sciences. Differences in customer perceptions were studied by using several multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA). This technique was selected because it allows testing for significant differences between means when there is more than one dependent variable at a time. In order to test Hypothesis 1 to 6, each one of the facets compounding brand personality were analyzed individually; for this reason, five different runs were carried out independently to study the effects of brand origin on brand sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. These analyses were carried out in several steps: firstly, questionnaire 1 answers for the 42 items were averaged to obtain the mean of each facet for each experiment participant. Secondly, results were digitalized on a .cvs file. Thirdly, data were imported into Stata. Subsequently, the MANOVA operation was employed for each single facet, taking Group 1, Group 2 and Group 3 as dependent variables. This provided F values, degrees of freedom, and p-values for each facet for each group. Finally, the TABSTAT operation was used for all facets taken together and for Group 1, Group 2 and Group 3 as dependent variables; this generated a table showing the means of each facet value for every given group (Stata Tutorial 2011).

In order to test Hypotheses 7-9 additional MANOVA tests were performed. This was done in order to determine whether belonging to Group 1, Group 2 or Group 3 (dependent variables) had an effect on apparel product evaluations concerning quality, and design estimation; these operations also served to test whether or not students' purchase intention was affected by brand origin information. These analyses were carried out by following the steps mentioned for the previous set of hypotheses, with the difference that the independent variables used were not the brand personality facets derived from questionnaire 1 but rather perceived material quality, perceived design quality and purchase intention extracted from questionnaire 2.

As for the qualitative part of this research, the questions proposed asked the students why they would or would not buy À L'AISE BREIZH's products. Answers were taken into account to complement statistical findings.

4. Results

The present section provides the quantitative and qualitative findings of the current research. Hypotheses 1-16 were explored by using the MANOVA and t-test operations encountered in Stata. In Stata, MANOVA output includes four multivariate test statistics for each predictor variable (Wilks' lambda, Pillai's trace, Lawley-Hotelling trace, and Roy's largest root). For each of the four test statistics, an F statistic and associated p-value are provided by the program (Stata Tutorial 2011). Every time a MANOVA is run, the null hypothesis is tested. The null hypothesis states that a given factor has no effect on the outcomes. Such a hypothesis is evaluated with regard to the associated p-value. For a given alpha level, if the p-value is less than alpha, the null hypothesis is rejected, if not, the null hypothesis is accepted. In this study, alpha level equals .05; we selected this value because it is the common value employed in social sciences. A p-value is also provided by the t-test operation. The main difference between MANOVA and t-test analyses has to do with the number of dependent variables involved. While in the t-test case variables are two, MANOVA operations can deal with more variables at the same time.

4.1. Hypothesis 1-6

Given that brand personality is subdivided into five different dimensions, five different MANOVA analyses were ran to test Hypothesis 1 (the brand *sincerity perception* varies by brand origin). For this reason, groups 1, 2 and 3 were kept as independent factors and tested for Aaker's

(1997) brand personality facets independently. This technique provided specific answers also to hypotheses 2-6. The results of all multivariate hypothesis tests associated with brand personality are summarized in Table 1 below. Several statistically significant results were obtained. In particular, our results supported H3 and H4 (and therefore indirectly also H1), while H2, H5, and H6 were rejected.

Table 1. MANOVA of Brand Personality Dimensions.

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	F	Df	p-value	Unknown origin	France	Brittany
BRAND SINCERITY	1.74	2	0.1809	2.535714	2.79261	2.73864
BRAND EXCITEMENT	3.63	2	0.0304	3.324675	3.59375	3.0625
BRAND COMPETITIVENESS	3.26	2	0.0431	2.174603	2.42114	2.0761
BRAND SOPHISTICATION	1.64	2	0.2002	2.482143	2.56717	2.26042
BRAND RUGGEDNESS	1.12	2	0.3319	2.65	2.35961	2.4125

As far as Hypothesis 2 is concerned (the brand *sincerity perception* varies by brand origin), results indicate that no significant differences were perceived by the three groups. In fact, À L'AISE BREIZH's products received very similar ratings for the four facets making up Sincerity (Down-to-earth, Honest, Wholesome, Cheerful) independently of the brand origin. When the origin was unknown the sincerity mean equaled 2.535714, when the origin was France, the mean was 2.79261, and when students thought that the brand was Breton, sincerity had a mean of 2.73864. However, even though some differences were reported, results did not prove significant as the p-value equaled 0.1809.In regards to Hypothesis 3 (the brand *excitement perception* varies by brand origin), the MANOVA test provided a significant p-value (0.0304). This time the French origin presented an excitement mean of 3.59375, followed by the brand with unknown origin (3.324675), and the Breton brand (3.0625). In fact, the subcategories composing excitement (daring, spirited, imaginative, and up-to-date) received the highest overall rating by the group which was told that the brand was French. A similar pattern was also found when Hypothesis 4 (the brand *competitiveness perception* varies by brand origin) was tested. The overall mean of the categories subsumed under the competitiveness facet (*reliable*, *intelligent*, and *successful*) was the highest for the French brand (2.42114), followed by the brand with unknown origin (2.174603), and then the Breton one (2.0761). Also in this case the p-value reported a significant number (0.0431). Hypothesis 5 (the brand *sophistication perception* varies by brand origin) was rejected. Also in this case the highest mean for the sophistication categories (*upper class* and *charming*) was obtained by group 1

(2.56717), followed by group 2 (2.482143) and group 3 (2.26042). Nevertheless, the p-value was not significant as it equaled 0.2002. Finally, Hypothesis 6 (the brand *ruggedness perception* varies by brand origin) could not be confirmed either. The means for the ruggedness categories (*outdoorsy* and *tough*) presented the highest level for group 1 (2.65) followed by group 3 (2.4125) and group 2 (2.35961). However, also this time, the p-value was not significant (0.3319).

4.2. Hypotheses 7-9

An additional set of MANOVA operations were ran to test how brand origin affects perceived quality of materials, perceived design quality, and purchase intentions. Table 3 summarizes the results for such tests.

Table 3. MANOVA of quality of materials, design quality and purchase intention.

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	F	Df	p-value	Unknown origin	France	Brittany
QUALITY OF MATERIALS	1.74	2	0.0014	3.071429	3.59375	2.875
DESIGN QUALITY	3.63	2	0.0211	3.25	3.5625	2.9375
PURCHASE INTENTION	3.26	2	0.6912	2.857143	3.03125	2.90625

Hypothesis 7 (the perceived quality of materials varies by brand origin) was confirmed (p-value= 0.0014). Group 2 had the highest mean (3.59375), followed by group 1 (3.071429), and group 3 (2.875). Hypothesis 8 (the perceived design varies by brand origin) was not rejected either (p-value= 0.0211). Also in this case, group 2 had the highest mean (3.5625), followed by group 1 (3.25), and group 3 (2.9375). Finally, Hypothesis 9 (the purchase intention varies by brand origin) was rejected. Group 2 had the highest mean (3.03125), followed by group 3 (2.90625), and group 2 (2.857143); however, the p-value reported by the MANOVA test was not statistically significant (0.6912). This seems to suggest that even though students may have different perceptions of À L'AISE BRAIZH's brand and products due to its origin; this, in turn, does not seem to be strong enough to affect their purchase intentions.

4.3. Qualitative findings

As far as the questions concerning reasons for buying or not buying the clothes were concerned, students expressed several opinions which may provide us with a better idea of how À L'AISE BREIZH and its products were perceived. Among the reasons for why students would buy the products, it is worth mentioning some comments. Several students indicated that the products were exotic, cool, trendy, and stylish. They looked comfortable and casual. They had nice colors and logo. They had character because of the writings on the humoristic t-shirts. On the other hand, the most common reasons for not buying them would be that they were not geared for a female demographic, or they were not feminine enough. The writings on the T-shirts were not understandable and some students did not feel comfortable with wearing products without knowing their meaning. The design was classified by some as "goofy and too cartoony". Several informants said that the products were for younger people, they looked childish and they were not classy at all.

Another interesting piece of qualitative information, which may help us shed light on the overall quantitative findings, is that 25 out of 27 students of group 1, when asked about the potential origin of À L'AISE BREIZH, indicated that it might be French, while the remaining two students said it was Italian. Same informants wrote that they thought it was French because of the French words on the T-shirts and in the brand name.

5. Conclusion

An interesting pattern emerging from the analysis of the results is that H3-4 were confirmed (thus supporting also H1), while H2,5 and 6 were rejected. In particular, we can notice that the French brand scored the highest in both brand excitement and brand competitiveness followed by the unknown brand and the Breton one. This seems to suggest that participants were significantly affected by certain ideas they hold about French apparel attributes and rated À L'AISE BEIZH following such ideas. These results are in line with Leclere et al (1994), who encountered a preference for French sounding brands for wine, perfume and fashion-related products. A potential reason for why the unknown brand scored higher than the Breton one might be found in the fact that 93% of group 1 informants suspected that À L'AISE BREIZH had a French origin (25 students out of 27). This, in turn, might have played an important role in the evaluation of the brand personality, thus leading the unknown brand to score closer to the French one. On the other hand, results appear to indicate that the Breton origin of this company did not evoke a positive link in the students to the apparel industry, so that in both instances the Breton brand was graded more poorly.

Findings also indicate that no significant effect was found for brand sincerity, sophistication and ruggedness, thus suggesting that independently of the origins, students perceived the brand in the same way for those parameters. In particular, common comments that appeared transversally in all the three groups suggest that À L'AISE BEIZH is perceived as "not classy at all", but "fun and cool" for some informants, and "not geared towards female demographics".

Results for H7-9 led to remarkable findings too. Also, in this case, the French brand scored significantly higher for quality of materials and design quality, followed by the unknown brand and the Breton one. The reason for this ranking may well be the same one which affected the results of H1-6: group 1 students suspected the French origin of the brand. This is again in line with Leclere et al (1994). Nevertheless, material and design superiority perceptions do not seem to automatically translate into more purchase intention. This may be due to the fact that brand origin per se is not enough to determine a significantly higher purchase interest. This could potentially have to do with the fact that À L'AISE BREIZH's products might be perceived as low-involvement items (Amhed et al 2002). For this reason, even though college students may hold some ideas on French material and design quality, this ultimately may not be enough as to push them to buy more. Two students' comments that may provide a partial account for this fact are the following: "if these products are French, they may be more expensive, I do not care about expensive t-shirts" and "I would wear these t-shirts to the gym. I do not care if they are French or Chinese". These remarks provide us with insightful feedback. They appear to indicate that À L'AISE BREIZH, if it wants to become successful among American college students, should strive to stand out and differentiate itself from many other brands offering similar products. A French origin can potentially be seen as a 'plus', however, the company's marketing strategy cannot be based exclusively on that. À L'AISE BREIZH should try to communicate to its target customers a stronger value proposition, if it wants to succeed. This communication process may well be a key element to succeed. One reason why students did not appreciate À L'AISE BREIZH's t-shirts was because they could not understand the French writings on them. If the company decided to enter the US market and offer humoristic t-shirts; it should definitely solve this issue, by adapting to the local sense of humor and by using English writing. Alternatively, given the fact that the French origin brings a plus in terms of brand perception and it translates mainly through the French words printed on the products, a strategy which should not be ruled out would be to advertise ALB as a French Breton brand. This may require the use of French writing, but in a way that English speakers can understand; maybe through humoristic translations highlighting common cultural clashes between the Americans and the French.

In summary, this study has shown that two facets of À L'AISE BREIZH's brand personality (excitement and competitiveness) vary according to brand origin. In addition, brand origin significantly affects also students' perceptions for material and design quality. Nevertheless, the attributes ascribed to the French brand do not seem to trigger higher purchase intention among the informants. A potential reason for this might be that À L'AISE BREIZH, as it is perceive right now, does not represent anything special for US students and its products are seen as low-involvement items. If we look at the reasons why À L'AISE BREIZH has been so successful among Breton college students, we immediately realize that the company was able to rely on local humor and developed a strong regional image. Such an image, however, cannot be seen in the same way by American college students, who do not speak French and live in a cultural reality different from the Breton one. In order to penetrate the Ohio market, À L'AISE BREIZH should provide its target customers with a stronger value proposition, not exclusively based on its origin, but rather communicating messages that have to do with the local sociocultural context. American students may perceive the French origin as a positive attribute; however, unless a clear value proposition is communicated, they will not be ready to pick the items of a brand that may look to them not so different from many other brands already available on the market.Another fact which may be worth taking into account for A L'AISE BREIZH's marketing strategy is that the brand was not perceived as feminine enough by American college girls. If the company decided to target the female segment, it should make some modification to the products that it is selling or introducing new ones to meet the needs expressed by the market.

The present work, however, does not pretend to have provided any extensive or comprehensive analysis of brand origin effect for À L'AISE BREIZH since only a total of 101 subjects participated in the current investigation. The ideas suggested here should be taken as working hypotheses rather than as definitive findings. Further studies are definitely needed to understand how À L'AISE BREIZH should adapt to be successful in the American college student market; nevertheless, the present work has provided an empirical foundation upon which this company might build future research.

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