

The Impact of Territorial Branding on Customer Attitude towards « the made in Morocco » Brands: Case of Agri-Food Products.

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Déclaration de divulgation : L'auteur n'a pas connaissance de quelconque financement qui pourrait affecter l'objectivité de cette étude.

Conflit d'intérêts : L'auteur ne signale aucun conflit d'intérêts.

Pour citer cet article : IHIS .A & NAOUI. F (2024) « The Impact of Territorial Branding on Customer Attitude towards « the made in Morocco » Brands : Case of Agri-Food Products», African Scientific Journal « Volume 03, Numéro 24 » pp: 0101 – 0120.

Date de soumission : Mai 2024

Date de publication : Juin 2024



DOI : 10.5281/zenodo.11471792
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Abstract

In the face of global market challenges, developing countries like Morocco strive to protect domestic industries while engaging in international trade. This study proposes territorial branding strategies to enhance consumer attitudes towards locally made agri food products in the Moroccan market.

Drawing on theoretical frameworks from territorial branding and consumer behavior literature, this research explores how territorial branding initiatives influence Moroccan consumer attitudes towards agri food product quality, authenticity, and trust, fostering a "Buy Domestic" mindset.

Despite limited empirical evidence, theoretical discussions underscore the role of territorial branding in safeguarding local producers from imports. By prioritizing tailored territorial branding efforts, policymakers can promote economic protectionism and empower local producers.

Keywords

Territorial Branding, Consumer Attitudes, Buy Domestic, Moroccan Market, Economic Protectionism, Agrifood Products.

Introduction

In today's globalized world, developing countries like Morocco face multifaceted challenges. They must strike a balance between embracing international trade opportunities and safeguarding domestic industries (d'Astous, A & Ahmed, 1995) . This delicate equilibrium is particularly crucial in Morocco's economic agenda.

Moroccan consumers are increasingly exposed to a wide range of products from around the world, accelerated by Morocco's membership in the World Trade Organization since 1995, and numerous free trade agreements with more than 60 countries (Royaume du Maroc & Ministère de l'Industrie, 2023) . However, this influx of foreign goods poses significant challenges for local companies, contending with intense competition from multinational firms.

The agri-food sector makes no exception to these challenges. Occupying a central position in Morocco's economy, it contributes significantly to employment, GDP, and exports (Royaume du Maroc & Ministre de l'Agriculture, 2023). However, in the face of globalization, Moroccan companies in this sector are confronted with unprecedented challenges.

To address these challenges, the Moroccan government, in collaboration with relevant ministries, has initiated various programs and strategies aimed at promoting and protecting the domestic agri-food sector. These efforts include national events such as the National Quality Week, which raises awareness among economic operators about the importance of quality management, and the National Quality Award, which recognizes companies that excel in quality management practices (Royaume du Maroc & Ministère de l'Industrie, 2023).

Additionally, the Ministry of Agriculture has implemented strategic plans to develop the agri food sector, focusing on the protection and promotion of national heritage products and the implementation of quality standards. Measures such as product labeling and legislative reforms have been introduced to enhance the competitiveness of Moroccan agri-food products in the domestic market (Royaume du Maroc & Ministre de l'Agriculture, Royaume du Maroc , Ministre de l'Agriculture, 2023).

However, the dichotomy between opening borders to international trade and safeguarding the local economy remains a central concern for policymakers. While open borders are essential for global legitimacy, they also pose the risk of overwhelming the local economy with external competition. Understanding consumer behavior is crucial for both government and businesses to navigate this complex landscape and effectively compete in domestic markets

against foreign imported competitors (Hamelin, , Ellouzi, & Canterbury, 2011).

In such circumstances, consumer preferences between local and foreign goods become pivotal questions. Understanding these preferences is essential for policymakers, as it determines whether policies should lean towards protectionism or embrace open markets. Additionally, it sheds light on the implications for domestic marketers, guiding them in developing effective strategies (Lambarraa-Lehnhardt, Ihle, & Elyoubi, 2021).

Despite the attention given to this issue by practitioners and academic researchers especially in well-developed countries (Aronczyk, 2013; Butova et al., 2019; Charters & Spielmann, 2014; Dessì, 2014; Kavartzis & Ashworth, 2005; Zhang & Merunka, 2014), there has been a noticeable absence of efforts in Morocco to promote domestically-made products, particularly in the agri-food sector.

Morocco's status as a developing country exposes consumers to notable disparities between local and imported products, including price, quality, innovation, and performance (Hamelin, , Ellouzi, & Canterbury, 2011). While similar research has been conducted in other countries, exploration of product choice disparities and the influence of territorial branding on purchasing decisions in Morocco and other Arab nations remains limited.

Competitiveness in functional product attributes—such as quality, performance, and price—typically aligns with the favorable perception of goods originating from developed nations. However, for a developing nation like Morocco, competing in such arenas may demand substantial resources (Reardon, Miller, Vida, & Kim, 2005). Herein lies the potential of territorial branding as a strategic instrument to secure long-term competitive advantages, drawing upon intangible factors like nationalism and socioeconomic solidarity. By cultivating ethnocentrism among Moroccan consumers, this approach endeavors to instill an inclination towards domestic goods while fostering an attitude that purchasing foreign products is wrong (Wang & Chen, 2004).

The principal focus of this study emerges as follows:

To what extent does territorial branding influence Moroccan consumers' attitudes towards domestically-produced goods?

This inquiry seeks to comprehensively explore this issue by investigating how territorial branding can influence Moroccan consumers' attitudes towards domestically-produced

goods, with a focus on the moderating role of ethnocentrism. We aim to examine these dynamics within Morocco's dynamic market landscape and elucidate how territorial branding initiatives can effectively cultivate positive attitudes towards domestically-made products, contributing to a deeper understanding of consumer behavior in the Moroccan context.

Consequently, the dual goals of this article are both theoretical and managerial: to provide practitioners with a strategic tool to protect the domestic market from external competition and to fill the existing theoretical gap in the literature. This study adopts a positivist epistemological view, analyzing reality through cause and effect principles, and providing hypotheses for future researchers to test their validity in the Moroccan context.

Literature Review

From Territorial Marketing to Territorial Branding:

The literature on territorial marketing and territorial branding suffers from various idiosyncrasies, as noted by scholars such as (Aronczyk, 2008; Boland, 2013; Lucarelli & Berg, 2011 ; Niodomysl & Jonasson, 2012). It's multidisciplinary, relatively recent, often relying on anecdotal evidence from single case studies, and influenced by the normative approach of consultants and other practitioners. Recent examinations by (Acharya & Rahman, 2016) and (Oguztimur & Akturan, 2015), along with various earlier literature reviews, have highlighted these issues.

To address the conceptual ambiguity in the literature, it's essential to delve into discussions about the very terminology of the field. Therefore, in the following paragraphs, we present the concepts of marketing and branding, discuss the transition from territorial marketing to territorial branding, examine how they are understood from both a scholarly and practical perspective, and finally, we present the definitions we adopt.

Territorial marketing, originating from the concept of social marketing formulated by Philip Kotler, is an essential aspect to consider. According to (Kotler , 1994) organizations aim to determine the needs, requirements, and interests of target markets and provide desired satisfaction more effectively and efficiently than competitors, while maintaining or increasing consumer and societal welfare. This concept underlies the development of territorial marketing, emphasizing the importance of meeting the needs and desires of residents and predicting changes to rationally utilize available resources (Szromnik, 2007).

Furthermore, (Szromnik, 2007) describes Territorial marketing as a market-oriented concept

of city, county, or region management, aimed at meeting present and future needs of internal and external stakeholders. This involves analysis, planning, and control over programs to establish desired exchange processes with selected markets or consumer groups. In alignment with these definitions, In the present article, we embrace the definition of territorial marketing as a series of carefully planned strategies designed to boost the competitiveness of a territorial unit, fostering its growth, and improving the management quality overseen by local authorities (Augustyn,2011;Szromnik,2007).

On the other hand, Branding isn't synonymous with marketing. According to a classical definition of marketing, branding is a part of marketing (Kotler P. , 2012). It's a marketing tool related to perception, image, mental associations, awareness, and reputation (Kapferer, 2008). Aaker defines branding as a strategy for building lasting assets that ultimately enhance shareholder value (Aaker, 2012) . Branding involves brand management, aiming to make a territory identifiable through a brand. It presupposes either the existence of a brand or the intention to create one. It's about attributing an identity to the territory for all its commercial activities, essentially making them identifiable by the brand. From a managerial perspective, there's a distinction between operational branding activities and brand strategy. The latter defines the brand's identity and usually includes a brand policy section, setting the rules for its use (Cai, 2002). However, the use of Territorial branding to refer to the entire domain covering territorial marketing, territorial branding, and brand strategy is becoming more common, ignoring these distinctions. From a practical standpoint, it's understandable why these two notions are often seen as equivalent. After all, both branding and marketing activities, in their implementation, involve communication and promotional campaigns, events, tools to enhance territories, both internally and externally, and support measures to improve the territory's quality (Papadopoulos, 2004). From a scientific perspective, the essential distinction lies in the fact that branding strategy inherently involves a process aimed at creating a brand , managing or reinforcing an existing one.

This translates into the desire to build a brand image in the minds of potential "consumers" of the territory, a brand identity comprising values and specific tangible aspects, all consistently presented under a recognizable name, often accompanied by a logo and slogan. Thus, the significant difference lies in the importance attributed to "image" and "identity" (and their management), which gain value and potentially become the image and identity of the brand (Skinner, 2008). Hence,the shift from marketing to branding is a notable trend observed in the analysis of Territorial marketing theory and practice. (Braun, 2008) highlights this transition, noting a movement towards branding in Territorial marketing strategies.

Similarly, (Kavaratzis, 2004) describes territorial branding as a new phase in territorial marketing implementation, aimed at creating new emotional, mental, and psychological associations with the territory, distinct from the functional and rational characteristics of traditional marketing measures. This shift suggests a redirection of marketing efforts, traditionally focused on the physical environment and functionality of the territory, towards more symbolic and emotional dimensions.

Branding is thus portrayed as a subsequent stage or even an "ultimate goal" (Braun, 2008), following the principles of successful brand utilization in products, services, and businesses (Kavaratzis, 2004). It's not uncommon to encounter statements emphasizing the transition of territorial marketing into the era of place branding, highlighting the growing significance attributed to image and symbolic aspects (Papadopoulos, 2004). This evolution underscores the importance of highlighting a region's unique traits and shared identity, fostering a positive image to attract investment, retain talent, and drive economic growth. While traditional territorial marketing promoted destinations or products, territorial branding focuses on showcasing a region's distinct features and collective identity (Anholt, 2005). This study aims to explore this shift and its effects on Moroccan consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards locally-produced agri-food products.

Territorial Branding in the Moroccan context

To grasp the significance of territorial branding in Morocco, we need to acknowledge the nation's rich cultural diversity and its rapidly growing agrifood industry. Morocco has actively adopted territorial marketing strategies to adapt to global changes, heightened competition, and decentralization initiatives. Particularly, the recent regionalization project has empowered different regions, encouraging competition and improving regional communication. This landscape makes Morocco an ideal environment for implementing territorial branding efforts. (El Khazzar & Echattabi, 2016) .

Since the 1990s, Morocco has undertaken significant reforms to enhance its competitiveness and attractiveness. These reforms led to the establishment of key institutions focused on promoting investment and economic growth through territorial marketing strategies (Lambarraa-Lehnhardt, Ihle, & Elyoubi, 2021). These include economic and social development agencies, regional investment centers, and the Moroccan Agency for Investment Development (AMDI). These entities aim to improve living conditions, support investment, and elevate productivity and competitiveness across different regions of Morocco.

Territorial branding aims to boost exports, protect local businesses, and strategically position

the region. Although territorial branding research in Morocco has grown in recent years, especially in areas like tourism and attracting investments, there has been little focus on applying these strategies to support Moroccan-made goods, particularly in the agri-food sector. Our study aims to address this gap by exploring how ethnocentrism can influence consumer attitudes toward local products. This is crucial, especially in the agrifood sector, where local products face competition from multinational brands (Hamelin, , Ellouzi, & Canterbury, 2011).

The agri-food sector holds a significant position in Morocco's economy, contributing substantially to employment, GDP, and exports. However, Moroccan companies in this sector face unprecedented challenges due to globalization and the influx of foreign goods, posing intense competition from multinational firms (Royaume du Maroc & Ministre de l'Agriculture, 2023). This situation necessitates a strategic territorial approach to promote and protect the domestic agri-food sector.

To address these challenges, the Moroccan government has initiated various programs and strategies in collaboration with relevant ministries. Since 2008, the Green Morocco Plan (GMP) has set the framework for unlocking the potential of agriculture for the country's economic development. As part of the GMP, initiatives like the Distinctive Signs of Origin and Quality (SDOQ) labeling for food, agricultural, and fishery products were established in 2010 to strengthen commercialization, valorization, and promotion of domestically produced agricultural and food products (Royaume du Maroc & Ministre de l'Agriculture, 2023).

The goal of these initiatives is to reinforce the link between specific production regions and product names, associating quality attributes and reputation with geographical origin to boost consumer awareness and domestic consumption. This policy aims to guide consumers towards food choices that promote and recognize traditional local food systems and preserve the nation's agricultural heritage, fostering trust and distinction in quality products and origin (Lambarraa Lehnhardt, Ihle, & Elyoubi, 2021).

Additionally, the Ministry of Agriculture has implemented strategic plans focusing on the protection and promotion of national heritage products and the implementation of quality standards. Measures such as product labeling and legislative reforms aim to enhance the competitiveness of Moroccan agri-food products in the domestic market, ensuring their sustainable development and contribution to the country's economic stability (Royaume du Maroc & Ministre de l'Agriculture, 2023).

While the success of these Marketing oriented strategies is not guaranteed, territorial branding has the potential to play a significant role in shaping consumer attitudes towards domestically

produced agri-food products (Lambarraa-Lehnhardt, Ihle, & Elyoubi, 2021). By leveraging ethnocentric sentiments and emphasizing the unique cultural identity associated with Moroccan goods, territorial branding initiatives can enhance the perceived value and desirability of these products among consumers (Hamelin, , Ellouzi, & Canterbury, 2011). However, it's essential to recognize that consumer attitudes are influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including perceptions of product quality, familiarity with the brand, and personal preferences (Ajzen, Fishbein, Lohmann, & Albarracín, 2018) . Therefore, while territorial branding efforts can contribute to promoting domestic products, their effectiveness hinges on how well they resonate with consumers and align with their values and preferences. In the subsequent section, we will delve deeper into the role of consumer attitudes in shaping purchasing decisions and explore how territorial branding, coupled with ethnocentrism, can influence consumer attitudes towards Moroccan agri-food products. By examining the interplay between branding strategies and consumer attitudes, we aim to gain valuable insights into the potential impact of territorial branding initiatives on the Moroccan agrifood sector.

Consumer Attitudes and Territorial Branding: Implications for the Moroccan Agri-Food Sector

According to (Schiffman & Kanuk, 1997), "attitude" refers to a learned predisposition to consistently favor or unfavorably behave toward a given object. This evaluation is often expressed as a psychological tendency to assess entities with varying degrees of favor or disfavor (Bagozzi, Gürhan-Canli, & Priester, 2002). Attitudes are closely linked to intentions, serving as Traditional cognitive and behavioral approaches in consumer research have encountered challenges in predicting behavioral and attitudinal intentions. These models often assume homogeneity among consumers and overlook external influences on attitudinal and behavioral responses (Morrison, 1979). Additionally, cognitive models tend to prioritize cognitive and conative aspects over affective elements, necessitating the integration of experiential approaches to complement cognitive frameworks (Belk, 1985; Holbrook M.B. & Hirschman E.C., 1982).

Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) propose an experiential approach that incorporates emotional variables alongside cognitive factors to better understand consumer decision-making processes. This holistic approach acknowledges the importance of emotional and situational variables in consumer decision-making and complements traditional cognitive models

(Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). reliable predictors of behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). The theory of reasoned action posits that both individual attitudes and subjective norms influence intentions and subsequent behaviors (Ajzen, 1991).

The Cognitive-Emotional Approach

The cognitive-emotional approach suggests that emotions result from evaluative cognitive processes, implying that emotional responses are triggered by cognitive evaluations (Alnawas & Hemsley-Brown, 2018). In this context, the emotional variable of ethnocentrism, triggered by territorial branding efforts, influences consumer affective and cognitive dimensions, shaping their attitudes and behaviors.

Transitioning from the Cognitive-Emotional Approach, the exploration naturally extends to Territorial Branding Strategies in the Agri-Food Sector. Understanding the cognitive evaluations and emotional responses inherent in consumer attitudes provides a solid foundation for examining how territorial branding can effectively shape perceptions in this sector. By delving into the roles of ethnocentrism and country of origin within this context, we can uncover how these factors influence consumer behavior and inform branding strategies (d'Astous, A & Ahmed, 1995). Thus, our inquiry moves seamlessly from understanding the psychological mechanisms to their practical application in the realm of territorial branding. The Cognitive Emotional Approach highlights the interconnectedness of cognitive evaluations and emotional responses in shaping consumer attitudes (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Leveraging this understanding, territorial branding strategies can effectively tap into both subjective and cognitive dimensions to influence consumer perceptions and behaviors (Lambarraa-Lehnhardt, Ihle, & Elyoubi, 2021).

Ethnocentrism, as a subjective and affective variable, plays a significant role in consumer evaluations of agri-food products. Consumers often exhibit a preference for products originating from their own country due to feelings of familiarity, trust, and national pride (Hamelin, Ellouzi, & Canterbury, 2011). By capitalizing on ethnocentric sentiments, territorial branding strategies can strengthen consumer affinity towards locally produced agri-food products, positioning them as symbols of national identity and cultural heritage.

Similarly, the country of origin serves as a cognitive variable that influences brand perception and product evaluations. Consumers often associate specific countries with quality, authenticity, and tradition, which can shape their attitudes and purchase decisions (Ahmed & d'Astous, 2008). Territorial branding strategies can strategically emphasize the geographical

origin of agri-food products, highlighting unique terroirs, production methods, and cultural influences. By aligning product attributes with positive country-of-origin associations, marketers can enhance product appeal and competitiveness in the market.

Overall, by integrating ethnocentrism and country of origin into territorial branding strategies, stakeholders in the agri-food sector can effectively communicate product value, foster consumer trust, and differentiate their offerings in the marketplace (Papadopoulos, 2004). This approach not only aligns with the principles of the Cognitive-Emotional Approach but also capitalizes on consumers' cognitive and affective responses to shape favorable attitudes towards Moroccan agri-food products.

Consumer Attitudes: Ethnocentrism and Country of Origin in the Agri-Food Sector

Consumer ethnocentrism, influenced by subjective and moral norms, significantly impacts product acceptance, as defined by (Shimp & Sharma, 1987), refers to the tendency of individuals to evaluate products based on their country of origin and to prefer domestic products over foreign ones. This concept is deeply rooted in subjective and moral norms, shaping consumers' perceptions of national identity and economic patriotism. Ethnocentric consumers view purchasing imported products as detrimental to their country's economy and national pride, thus favoring locally produced goods (Papadopoulos, 2004). Conversely, non-ethnocentric consumers prioritize product attributes such as price and quality over country of origin, demonstrating a more cosmopolitan outlook.

Research has shown that consumer ethnocentrism influences various aspects of consumer behavior, attitudes and preferences, including product perceptions, purchase intentions and brand loyalty (Hamelin, Ellouzi, & Canterbury, 2011). It acts as a significant barrier to the acceptance of foreign-made products, particularly in regions where nationalistic sentiments are strong. Understanding the drivers of consumer ethnocentrism and its implications for marketing strategies is crucial for companies operating in both domestic and international markets (Papadopoulos, 2004).

Consumer ethnocentrism, especially prevalent in developing countries like Morocco, significantly influences consumer behavior and product acceptance. In Morocco, where resources may be limited and competing with imported goods from well-developed countries on aspects like quality and price can be challenging, leveraging subjective variables such as ethnocentrism becomes particularly crucial. Ethnocentrism shapes Moroccan consumers' attitudes toward local products, framing consumption as a responsibility while viewing foreign

consumption unfavorably (d'Astous, A & Ahmed, 1995). Morocco's dynamic economic landscape, with its fast-growing population and emerging middle class, presents both opportunities and challenges for businesses operating in the agri-food sector. While consumers have access to a wide range of products from global markets, consumer ethnocentrism can restrict their choices, favoring domestic products over imports. This preference is driven by beliefs that purchasing imported goods negatively impacts the local economy and national identity (Shankarmahesh, 2006).

Understanding the interplay between consumer ethnocentrism and country of origin (COO) is essential for businesses aiming to navigate the Moroccan market effectively. In the agri-food sector, the relationship between COO and ethnocentrism is particularly significant due to the direct connection between the country of production and agriculture. Consumers often associate certain countries with specific agricultural practices or product characteristics, influencing their perceptions attitudes and purchase decisions (Papadopoulos, 2004).

Research on consumer ethnocentrism and perceptions of Country of Origin (COO) has been extensively conducted in developed countries, yet there remains a significant gap in understanding these phenomena within the Moroccan context. While previous studies have predominantly focused on the influence of COO on consumer behavior (d'Astous, A & Ahmed, 1995), there is a dearth of research examining the role of ethnocentrism in shaping attitudes towards "Made in Morocco" labels, particularly in the agrifood sector.

Understanding the interplay between ethnocentrism and consumer attitudes towards domestically produced goods is crucial for both local authorities and businesses in Morocco. By delving into ethnocentric market segments, stakeholders can tailor their marketing strategies effectively, thereby enhancing their competitiveness and fostering sustainable growth. This entails leveraging intangible yet unique aspects associated with the territory, thus actively cultivating a distinct competitive advantage rooted in the inherent qualities of Moroccan products (Baker & Ballington, 2002).

Through a comprehensive review of literature, we have identified three key antecedents of consumer ethnocentrism that influence attitudes towards locally produced goods.

Firstly, sociodemographic factors play a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions. Analyzing the demographics of consumers allows for segmentation based on their own attitudes towards local or foreign products. Factors such as gender, age, occupation, education, income, and household size have been shown to impact consumer preferences (Anderson & Cunningham, 1972; Bawa, 2004; d'Astous & Ahmed, 1995; Shankarmahesh, 2006; Shimp and Sharma, 1987).

Hypothesis 1: Sociodemographic factors such as gender, age, occupation, education, income, and household size significantly influence the level of consumer ethnocentrism in Morocco. Secondly, product attributes, particularly perceptions of quality, heavily influence consumer preferences. Quality encompasses various characteristics such as appearance, design, reliability, functionality, and performance (Kaynak & Kara, 2002). When there is little discernible difference in quality between local and imported products, consumers often turn to country-of-

origin information to inform their purchase decisions (Wang & Chen, 2004). Additionally, consumers tend to associate brands with developed countries as being of superior quality, leading to a preference for these brands over domestic alternatives (Hamin & Elliott, 2006).

Hypothesis 2 : Perceptions about product quality significantly influence the level of consumer ethnocentrism in Morocco. When there is perceived parity in quality between local and imported products, Moroccan consumers are more likely to exhibit higher levels of ethnocentrism.

Lastly, the country of origin serves as a significant mediator between consumer ethnocentrism and purchase intention. Consumers hold diverse perceptions about product origins, often influenced by stereotyped national images of the producing country (Parameswaran & Mohan Pisharodi, R, 2002). While studies conducted in developed countries generally indicate a preference for domestic products, this tendency may not hold true in developing nations like Morocco, where significant disparities in quality and performance between domestic and foreign-made products exist (Wang & Chen, 2004).

Hypothesis 3: Moroccan consumers' ethnocentrism is significantly influenced by the country of origin. « Moroccan-made » products are expected to elicit higher acceptance levels due to a sense of national pride. Leveraging Consumer ethnocentrism and COO perceptions play a significant role in shaping consumer attitudinal behavior in Morocco's agri-food sector. Leveraging ethnocentrism through targeted marketing efforts and understanding the nuances of COO preferences are essential for businesses aiming to succeed in this dynamic market (d'Astous, A & Ahmed, 1995).

Hypothesis 4: Ethnocentrism plays a mediating role in shaping Moroccan consumers' attitudes toward domestically made products. Higher levels of ethnocentrism lead to more favorable attitudes toward domestically made products in Morocco.

These hypotheses suggest that sociodemographic factors, perceptions about product attributes, and country-of-origin biases significantly influence the level of ethnocentrism among

Moroccan consumers, which in turn affects their attitudes toward domestically made products. Conducting empirical research to test these hypotheses would provide valuable insights into consumer behavior in the Moroccan agri-food sector.

The proposed conceptual model

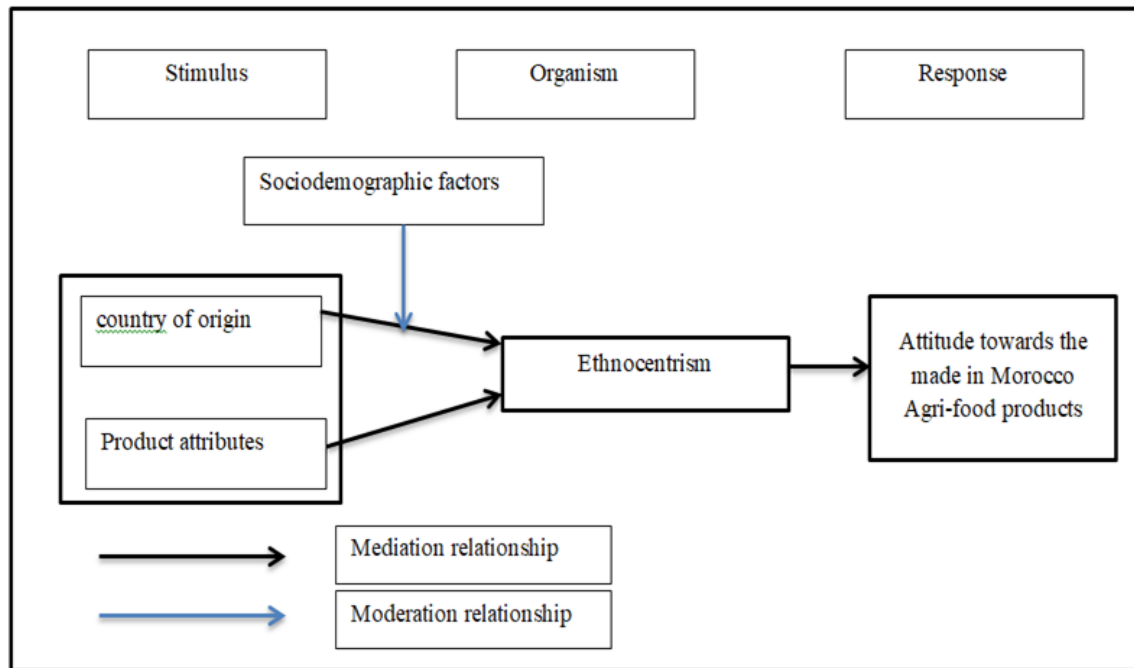
Drawing from existing literature, we are poised to present an adapted version of the foundational model, the SOR Model. Building upon the hypotheses previously put forth by scholarly works, we introduce our proposed model.

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, originally formulated by (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), suggests that environmental stimuli (S) directly influence organisms (O), namely consumers, which in turn affects their behavioral responses (R). A stimulus acts as a trigger that activates internal consumer analysis processes, leading to a behavioral response. These stimuli can be either external, such as marketing or situational stimuli, or internal, including consumer specific characteristics (Chan & al, 2017).

The organism refers to consumers' internal evaluations, encompassing emotional responses such as pleasure, excitement, and impulsivity, while the behavioral response (R) denotes consumers' reactions to stimuli and organisms (Chan & al, 2017). Previous studies have highlighted the importance of applying the S-O-R model in consumer behavior research, as this conceptual framework provides a better understanding of how environmental stimuli influence consumer behavior. Given the crucial role of the stimulus as a driver of the purchasing decision-making process (Yin, Schütze, Xiang, & Zhou, 2016).

In our proposed model, the Stimulus (S) is represented by the Territorial branding, which encompasses all the antecedents influencing consumer ethnocentrism. These antecedents include sociodemographic factors, product attributes, and perceptions of the country of origin. The Organism (O) refers to the internal evaluations of consumers, such as emotional responses and cognitive assessments triggered by the stimulus. Finally, the Response (R) represents consumer attitudes and behaviors towards the made in Morocco products, reflecting their level of ethnocentrism.

This adapted SOR model provides a framework for understanding how Territorial branding influences consumer ethnocentrism, ultimately shaping their attitudes and behaviors towards domestic products in the Moroccan context.



The revised S-O-R Model, adapted from Mehrabian and Russell (1974).

Figure N°1 : The revised S-O-R Model, adapted from Mehrabian and Russell (1974).

Proposed Methodology:

The research methodology is crucial for planning and implementing our study. It encompasses the choice of epistemological positioning, research rationale, and the approach used (Mbengue, 2001). Our epistemological positioning is positivism, adopting a hypothetico-deductive approach. This approach involves developing a hypothetico-deductive system before confronting it with empirical situations (positivism).

We will proceed with a quantitative approach. This approach allows for complementarity between secondary and primary data, thereby enhancing the credibility and reliability of the results (Thiéart, 1999).

Choice of Empirical Study: Our study will focus on territorial branding in the agri-food sector in Morocco.

Work Plan: We will employ questionnaires targeting Moroccan consumers to measure the impact of origin labeling and quality on ethnocentrism using The CETSCALE, a scale adapted for measurement in Morocco by Nicolas Hamelin, Meriam Ellouzi, and Andrew Canterbury in 2019. We aim to analyze Moroccan consumers' attitudes toward the origin-labeling policy as part of the GMP. We will examine Moroccan consumers' preferences for locally produced food specialties benefiting from a quality label of origin.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has aimed to address the pressing need for comprehensive research on territorial branding strategies in the Moroccan agri-food sector. By drawing on theoretical frameworks from territorial branding and consumer behavior literature, we have explored how territorial branding initiatives influence Moroccan consumer attitudes towards domestically produced agri-food products.

Through a thorough literature review, we have highlighted the significance of territorial branding in promoting economic protectionism, empowering local producers, and shaping consumer attitudes. Our analysis underscores the importance of leveraging ethnocentrism and country-of origin perceptions to enhance consumer affinity towards Moroccan-made products, thereby fostering sustainable growth in the agri-food sector.

The proposed conceptual model, adapted from the S-O-R model, provides a valuable framework for understanding the intricate dynamics between territorial branding, consumer ethnocentrism, and attitudes towards domestic products. By employing a quantitative research approach and focusing on empirical data collection through questionnaires, we aim to validate the hypotheses derived from our conceptual framework and contribute to the existing body of knowledge in this field.

Overall, this study serves both theoretical and managerial purposes, offering insights for policymakers, marketers, and local authorities to develop effective territorial branding strategies that resonate with Moroccan consumers. By aligning branding efforts with consumer preferences and values, stakeholders can capitalize on the unique cultural identity associated with Moroccan goods and drive positive change in the agri-food sector.

In essence, our research endeavors to bridge the gap between theory and practice, providing actionable recommendations to promote economic development, protect local industries, and enhance consumer welfare in the Moroccan market. As the global economy continues to evolve, the lessons learned from this study will remain invaluable for shaping future strategies and fostering sustainable growth in the agri-food sector and beyond.

Limitations and Future Directions of the Study

Limitations of this study include its contextual scope, which focuses solely on the Moroccan agri-food sector, potentially limiting the generalizability of findings to other industries or countries. Additionally, sampling bias might arise due to the specific sample of Moroccan consumers, raising concerns about the representativeness of the results. Despite efforts to adapt measurement tools, there could be limitations in accuracy and reliability. Moreover, the cross sectional design hampers the establishment of causal relationships between variables, suggesting the need for longitudinal research. Lastly, the study's external validity may be constrained by its narrow focus on consumer attitudes towards domestic agri-food products, potentially overlooking broader market influences.

As for future research directions, exploring additional variables such as cultural values, social norms, and marketing strategies' roles in territorial branding and consumer attitudes could provide valuable insights. Comparative studies across regions or nations may uncover variations in consumer behavior and branding strategies. Longitudinal analysis to track changes in consumer attitudes over time could offer an insight into territorial branding's long-term effects. Qualitative methods may deepen understanding of consumer motivations and perceptions. Lastly, investigating how territorial branding impacts public policy and regulations to support local industries could have significant policy implications.

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