

EMERGING ISSUES IN COUNTRY-OF-ORIGIN RESEARCH: A RESEARCH AGENDA UPDATE

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ABSTRACT

The significant difference that the small words “Made in...” can make in the reality of the marketplace, was noted already by Dichter (1962). His finding that “the little phrase ‘made in ...’ can have a tremendous influence on the acceptance and success of products” (p. 162) certainly rings bells with today’s international business researchers, policymakers and practitioners alike. After more than three decades of country-of-origin (COO) research, product origin has become a more complicated construct. With the trend towards multi-national production and global sourcing structures, oftentimes products can be associated with more than just one COO cue - making them so-called hybrids. The new stream of hybrid research covers this area. At the same time, despite several efforts by researchers, so far not even a consensus definition of the COO term has been established (Lampert and Jaffe, 1998; Sauer et al., 1991). Furthermore, no consensus on the size and importance of those effects has been established in the available literature (Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999). Still, literature in the field is quite rich — calling for another review update in order to guide future research based on existing studies as well as theory as far as available.

In the meantime, events in politics and industry are moving on. In an industry as important as the automotive sector, trade-related policies are being set up and further developed continuously. Also, product decisions as well as production location decisions have to be made regularly. In this context, the shaping of new trade regimes within the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and their application to - and specific relevance for - the automotive industry provide a particularly interesting research setting. The authors therefore build their paper not only on a review of the current literature, but also on data collected in that area. In fact, a literature review reveals that this area has not been researched in a COO framework yet, although all major regional car segments are dominated by such hybrids - both for country-of-brand (COB), country-of-assembly (COA), and country-of-components (COC). Consequently, a related study provides new views on the COO phenomenon. The objective of this paper is thus to contribute to the constantly emerging field of COO research, providing some glimpses on what might develop as potential items on a future research agenda.