

Brands as social metaphors: an application using correspondence analysis

Marcas como metáforas sociales: una aplicación usando análisis de correspondencias

Marcas como Metáforas Sociais: Uma Aplicação Utilizando Análise de Correspondência

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ABSTRACT | This research aims to explore a methodology for understanding the relationship between specific objects of interest (such as countries and geographical units/regions) and brands to facilitate the discussion of the meaning of specific brands for individuals situated in a determined context and culture. Using a cross-sectional quantitative design, we studied spontaneous brand associations with five geographical units of interest using an online questionnaire in Spanish, sent to a convenience sample of adult Internet users in Chile (n=78) through direct email invitations and personal contacts in professional social networks. Based on a correspondence analysis, the results show a clustering of brands into four main clusters, which allows us to demonstrate a correlation with the cultural, economic, and social transformations that Chile has endured. This study provides evidence that brands are not innocuous, but that behind them and their consumption, lie symbols and signs that evoke and promote, explicitly and implicitly, cultural and social associations and patterns.

KEYWORDS: country of origin effect, consumer culture theory, correspondence analysis.

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RESUMEN | Esta investigación busca explorar una metodología para comprender la relación entre ciertos objetos de interés (como países y unidades/regiones geográficas) y marcas para facilitar el debate sobre el significado de marcas específicas para individuos situados en determinados contextos y culturas. Mediante un diseño cuantitativo transversal, se estudiaron asociaciones espontáneas de marca hacia cinco unidades geográficas de interés utilizando un cuestionario en línea en español, enviado a una muestra de conveniencia de usuarios adultos de Internet en Chile (n=78) directamente vía correo electrónico y mediante contactos personales en redes sociales profesionales. Basados en un análisis de correspondencias, los resultados muestran una agrupación de marcas en cuatro principales clústeres, lo que permite demostrar una correlación con las transformaciones culturales, económicas y sociales experimentadas en Chile. Este estudio permite afirmar que las marcas no son inocuas, sino que tras de ellas y su consumo se esconden símbolos y signos que evocan y promueven, explícita como implícitamente, asociaciones y pautas culturales y sociales.

PALABRAS CLAVES: marca país de origen, teoría de consumo cultural, análisis de correspondencias.

RESUMO | Esta pesquisa busca explorar uma metodologia para compreender a relação entre certos objetos de interesse (como países e unidades/regiões geográficas) e marcas, a fim de facilitar a discussão sobre o significado de marcas específicas para indivíduos situados em contextos e culturas específicas. Através de um desenho quantitativo transversal, foram estudadas associações espontâneas de marca com cinco unidades geográficas de interesse usando um questionário online em espanhol, que foi enviado a uma amostra de conveniência de usuários adultos da internet no Chile (n=78), mediante e-mail e contatos pessoais em redes sociais profissionais. Com base em uma análise de correspondência, os resultados revelam uma agrupação de marcas em quatro clusters principais, permitindo demonstrar uma correlação com as transformações culturais, econômicas e sociais que o Chile tem experimentado. Este estudo fornece evidências de que as marcas não são inócuas, mas por trás delas e de seu consumo, símbolos e signos estão escondidos que evocam e promovem - tanto de forma explícita quanto implícita - associações e padrões culturais e sociais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: marca país de origem; teoria da cultura do consumidor; análise de correspondência.

INTRODUCTION

Branding is a fundamental part of a company's activities to serve its current and potential customers. However, the definition of what constitutes a brand is constantly contested (De Chernatony, 2010; De Pelsmacker et al., 2021). Although brands can be conceptualized from different perspectives and traditions (De Pelsmacker et al., 2021; Holt, 2002; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schmitt, 2012), there is some consensus in viewing them as defining elements in the dynamics of modern social life (Batra, 2019; Fournier & Alvarez, 2019; Schroeder, 2009).

Thus, brands are presented as signs and symbols that are part of both a visual structure and a language, providing information and cues for individuals in specific contexts and environments (Holt, 2002; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schmitt, 2012). Under these circumstances, brands can be hermeneutically interpreted as social texts that symbolize aspects of popular culture (Hatch & Rubin, 2006), interact with it in a constant dynamic (Holt, 2002; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schmitt, 2012), and become tangible expressions of values, moral concepts, and social references (Holt, 1997; Sørensen & Nielsen, 2015).

Furthermore, brands can be studied as symbolic tools endowed with psychological properties that become evocative narratives about specific places and spaces (Heller, 2000). By taking on this symbolic character, they become cultural icons that have particular meanings for certain groups of people (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011; Cayla & Eckhardt, 2008; Lury, 2004). This view is consistent with a culturalist perspective on the study of brands understood as social symbols and can be analyzed using cultural consumption theory (CCT; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Thus, brands enable the expression of stories that give social meaning and significance to specific moments (McCracken, 1986). Based on CCT, several research studies have contributed to understanding brands as mediators of cultural complexity and social structures by revealing their meanings (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). In this way, brands go beyond their pure commercial function and acquire a relevant role as instruments for constructing identities, representing values and transmitting cultural meanings (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998).

One of the most important areas of research in the field of international marketing (Bilkey & Nes, 1982; Dichter, 1962; Pharr, 2005) is the study of a product's country of origin (COO) as a variable that influences both consumption intention and brand equity evaluation (Demirbag et al., 2010) and acts as a heuristic reason that provides extrinsic cues for an offer (Magnusson et al., 2011; Papadopoulos & Heslop, 1993; Peterson & Jolibert, 1995).

This study is framed within the culturalist perspective of CCT (Joy & Li, 2012), in which brands are viewed as social reference points. Using correspondence analysis, we will examine the interrelationships that a group of people attribute to certain spontaneously remembered brands and their association with geographical entities (Latin America, China, United States, Europe, and Australia) in order to understand the nature of their perceptions. Starting from the assumption that this perception develops from a specific socio-historical context, this study will allow us to enrich the debate on the role of brands in social life in specific contexts and cultures. At the same time, we respond to the long-standing call (Hsieh, 2004; Shimp et al., 1993) to investigate the role of COO further in countries with varying degrees of industrialization/development and market openness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The country of origin concept (COO)

Country of origin (COO) has been used to explain different perspectives on how the perception of a product's origin is influenced and the impact this has on both brand equity and quality assessment (Hsieh, 2004; Magnusson et al., 2011; Shimp et al., 1993) and the purchase process (Bilkey & Nes, 1982; Demirbag et al., 2010; Dichter, 1962; Papadopoulos & Heslop, 1993; Peterson & Jolibert, 1995; Pharr, 2005).

In this sense, the COO of a product can be understood as a perceptual cue or indicator of value and quality that functions as a heuristic reason and to a greater extent when the intrinsic characteristics of the product are difficult to obtain (Magnusson et al., 2011; Thøgersen et al., 2017). For example, if a product has a low price, it is more likely to be associated with a certain low level of performance or quality and with an emerging country of origin (Brouthers & Xu, 2002). On a more general level, COO functions as a perception that ascribes a certain value to a product simply because of its origin (Pappu et al., 2007; Shimp et al., 1993), such as German manufacturing quality or Japanese technology, which acts as a cognitive link in consumers' minds (Keller, 1993) and creates a halo effect on the supply of that good (Hsieh, 2004; Magnusson et al., 2011; Shimp et al., 1993). Although the importance of COO in shaping attitudes and explaining consumer behavior in certain markets has been questioned over time (Liefeld, 2004; Usunier & Cestre, 2008), it is still accepted that brands with a strong country of origin perception are affected to a greater extent in markets whose countries are developing (Batra et al., 2000; Magnusson et al., 2011), as in these underdeveloped contexts there is an air of social status or desirability in relation to the quality level and lifestyle of those countries perceived to be of a higher level of development and glamor (Batra et al., 2000; Hsieh, 2004).

Brands as identity in cultural consumption theory

Brands as social referents can be studied from the CCT perspective, a set of theoretical perspectives that examine the complex interactions between consumer actions, the market, and cultural meanings (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). The study of brands from this perspective aims to understand how they can be transformed into social references in consumption processes (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). It attempts to explain the attitudes, values, and behaviors of people in society and assumes that culture is the basis for consumers' experiences, interpreted meanings, and actions (Geertz, 1983).

From this perspective, it can be argued, for example, that symbolic and cultural ties, including national brands and symbols, are fundamental to building a nation's identity and maintaining social cohesion. These cultural elements not only have an economic or functional significance but also play an essential role in people's sense of belonging to their country. Anderson (1991) called this the imagined community when he pointed out that every society

is imagined because even the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion (p. 6).

The brands that advertising promotes for consumption can be seen as carriers of a shared popular culture that evokes shared experiences and memories common to society (Fowles, 1996). In the context of CCT, they represent a sign and a symbol that is interpreted in the light of a particular time, culture, and context (Holt, 2002), with consumers being co-creators of these meanings and ultimately influencing purchasing behavior (Brownlie, 1998). Similarly, brands are carriers of cultural values and meanings that are constantly reinterpreted and modeled through interaction with consumers (Holt, 2002). This results in explanations for the shaping of brand perception, which makes its meaning singular in a given society, which can be very different from the perception in another socio-cultural context (Iglesias et al., 2020) and can even be adopted as a local symbol, even though it is a brand of an international nature (Schmidt-Devlin et al., 2022). The development of brands is, therefore permeated by elements of the respective culture, regardless of their actual national origin. As McCracken (1986) emphasizes, brands do not exist in a vacuum but are influenced and shaped by the cultural and social environment in which they find themselves.

From a CCT perspective, understanding brands as vehicles for communicating cultural and social meanings means examining how consumers themselves actively participate in the construction and reinterpretation of these meanings (Brownlie, 1998). This approach is fundamental to understanding how brands

influence perceptions of the cultural and social environment and how they are influenced by that environment as they are constantly reinterpreted and reshaped (Holt, 2002; McCracken, 1986). In short, brands can be studied as a unit of analysis capable of conveying cultural identities to the extent that they are used to convey a social identity by those who wear and consume them (Sassatelli, 2004).

The study of brands as expressions of cultural identity (Holt, 1997, 2002, 2004) then provides a window in which, in analyzing a given social and cultural environment, the general perception of a focused object can be examined, keeping transparent the profound perception of values, attributes and judgments that a given group of subjects has about a phenomenon, and creating interpretive frameworks that can establish the relationships between identity and contexts through the mediation of a brand.

Trademarks as interpretive platforms

A brand corresponds to a name, term, sign, symbol, or design - or a combination thereof - that serves to identify the goods or services of a seller or group of sellers in order to distinguish them from those of a competitor (De Pelsmacker et al., 2021; Perez, 2004). The brand concept is fundamental in marketing to differentiate an offer and increase the value of goods and services (Keller, 1993). Brands are considered intangible assets of a company that optimizes its productivity through rational and emotional incentives and influence consumer purchase preference (Farquhar, 1990; Keller, 1993) and, therefore, have significant value in any modern marketing strategy (De Pelsmacker et al., 2021).

In addition to their functional and emotional dimensions, brands also have a symbolic dimension and can be understood as a system of symbols and associations (Aaker, 1996; Batey, 2008; Perez, 2004). In this sense, they play an important role in the daily lives of consumers, who use them to convey an image and strengthen their position in society (Kapferer, 2012; Keller & Lehmann, 2006). This contributes to the notion that brands represent consistent value positions over time and acquire an identity based on unique attributes and characteristics that strengthen their relationship with consumers (Fournier, 1998). To the extent that this differentiation is relevant and the more unique the values with which a brand is associated, the stronger its position and the clearer its identity (Aaker, 1996). As a result, brands become a tool that allows consumers to express themselves (Balmer, 2013; Keller, 1998), and they become a socio-cultural symbol that serves as a guide and reference for a given market (Holt, 2002).

There are two main traditions of the branding concept: a product-oriented and a society-oriented one (Wood, 2000). The first is based on brand identifiability and

focuses on the perception of a product's quality and its ability to differentiate itself from other similar products on the market (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). The second recognizes that society interprets the various attributes of brands and focuses on how brands acquire value for their recipients in a given context, space, and a particular time (Wood, 2000). Although both traditions coexist, the literature of recent decades has favored a socio-cultural orientation that views brands as social texts arranged in culture and subject to interpretation (Schroeder, 2009).

Accordingly, brands would be more than a position in the consumer's mind associated with a mere perception of quality (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011; Cayla & Eckhardt, 2008; Lury, 2004); they become references that determine people's social lives (Sørensen & Nielsen, 2015). From a culturalist perspective, it has been suggested that brands are social platforms that enable collective interpretations (Hatch & Rubin, 2006) and express values and social ideas of their time (Kozinets, 2002; Lears, 1994). In this sense, the study and examination of group perceptions of brands provide a collective appreciation of larger issues that transcend the industry in which they operate commercially (Thompson & Haytko, 1997). This provides insight into the deep beliefs of popular culture, the identity of a society, and the prominent ideologies and rhetoric associated with the principles and values ascribed to that brand (Thompson & Haytko, 1997).

Chilean identity and its current situation

Authors such as Krebs (2008) postulate that Chilean identity has been built from elements such as the recognition of the beauty of the inhabited land, the warlike character of the centuries-long conflicts between the Chilean State and the Mapuche, and the war conflicts of the nineteenth century, such as the War of the Pacific (1879-1884) and the Civil War (1891). Likewise, the constant natural disasters have shaped an identity predisposed to adversity (Onetto, 2017). Another aspect of identity is the Portalian¹ ideal that emerged in the first decades after independence, whose main idea was the promotion of a strong and respected central government, which would have been crucial in areas such as the country's institutional stability.

Larraín (2001) explains that one of the contemporary milestones that shaped Chilean identity was the return to democracy in 1990. From this point onwards, a discourse is promoted by the elites in which Chile is portrayed as different from other Latin American countries. This discourse is based on the profound modernization of the country, on the enormous opening that resulted from greater

1. Of or relating to Diego Portales (1793–1837), Chilean statesman and entrepreneur who played a decisive role in shaping State and government policies (translator's note).

trade exchange through the signing of new free trade agreements, and on the success of various public policies that allowed for a high level of governance, which is known to have reduced poverty. It is an entrepreneurial narrative in which the country is portrayed as economically successful, energetic, and dynamic, with the aim of leaving underdevelopment behind.

However, this constructed profile of Chile as a successful country was called into question with the social outburst of October 2019, a milestone that can be considered as a break in the model of democracy and development of recent decades and which ended in an unprecedented constitutional process (Artaza et al., 2019; Stange et al., 2019). The causes of the massive protests, which spread across the country and lasted for weeks, are still being debated, including criticism of the extent of inequality and the rising cost of living (Ruiz, 2020; Salazar, 2023). However, it was not so much a process of refounding the model but rather structural adjustments in the context of a capitalist modernization with successes and pending debts (Edwards, 2023; Peña, 2020), which is reflected in the rejection of the constitutional proposal on September 4, 2022 (Fernández, 2022).

METHODOLOGY

Design

This study uses a quantitative cross-sectional design and survey data to investigate spontaneous brand associations with five geographic units of interest. While experimental studies have dominated the investigation of brand-COO associations, these have been criticized for the artificial nature of their study setting and the type of stimuli used, which would lead to an erroneous estimate of this effect size (Hsieh, 2004; Thøgersen et al., 2017). As an alternative, correspondence analysis has been proposed as a method to study effects derived from COO for survey data (Hsieh, 2004) or from recoded in-depth interviews (Shimp et al., 1993).

Correspondence analysis is a multivariate interdependence technique that allows the scaling of qualitative data and leads to categorization (Malhotra, 2008). It is an exploratory technique often used for dimension reduction and perception mapping (Hair et al., 2019; Malhotra, 2008). For the latter objective, correspondence analysis produces a map that depicts the spatial location of markers and attributes (such as COO) based on the association or correspondence between different objects and a set of descriptive features, using data tabulated in a contingency table and previously measured on a nominal scale. These correspondences form the basis for perceptual mapping, representing objects and attributes simultaneously in the same shared space (Hair et al., 2019). Their results are interpreted in terms of proximity

between the rows and columns in the contingency table, with closer categories being more similar in an underlying structure (Hsieh, 2004; Malhotra, 2008).

Based on the approaches of Shimp and colleagues (1993) and Hsieh (2004), who determined the proximity/distance between COO and various product attributes, this study uses a correspondence analysis to facilitate the analysis of relationships between spontaneously recalled brands and a set of pre-suggested geographic units.

Sample and data collection procedure

During the second semester of 2022, an online questionnaire in Spanish was sent to a convenience sample of adult Internet users in Chile ($n=78$; $M_{\text{age}}=29.31$, $SD_{\text{age}}=12.39$; 71.79% of women) through direct invitations via personal contacts in a professional social network. This self-administered questionnaire began with an explanatory welcome screen and informed consent to participate. Once respondents consented to participate, an initial series of questions collected the individual's sociodemographic characteristics (age, gender and city of residence).

A second set of four open questions was then applied as a *warm-up* exercise to get respondents thinking about the topic of the study, increasing their familiarity with the questionnaire and their interest in answering it (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). In detail, different focal objects were initially explored, along with potential spontaneous brand associations. First, the question "If your country could be represented by a brand, which brand would it be?" was asked, with the opportunity to give a single open answer. Then, two probing questions were asked, namely, "What values do you associate your country with?" and "If your country's social reality could be a brand, what brand would it be?". Participants were allowed to provide up to three open answers to both questions. Finally, a fourth question asked, "What brands do you associate with each of the following realities?" attempting to collect unique open responses for seven units of social interest (my family, my grandparents, today's youth, the economy, my country's upper class, my country's middle class, my country's popular class). These initial questions were deemed necessary and appropriate to familiarize respondents with the research topic and activate their spontaneous recall of a broad and diverse range of potential brands.

Once this series of preliminary tasks was completed, respondents were able to move on to the 's main question. This open question was: "Which brands do you associate with each of the following countries or continents?" The question aimed to explore spontaneous relationships with five specific geographic units (Latin America, China, United States, Europe, and Australia), which are simplified names for the main *trading blocs* with which Chile has trade agreements in the

near present. In line with Hsieh (2004), these geographic entities have different degrees of geographic proximity.

Participants were explicitly instructed to name any brand, regardless of its actual or perceived origin (national or foreign brand). Following the approach of Shimp and colleagues (1993), participants could indicate in a text box the name of a brand they spontaneously associated with each of the geographical units presented. They could also leave their answer blank. Before the end of the questionnaire, a final question was asked that explored spontaneous associations with brands on ten topics of interest (poverty, inequality, nature, corruption, trust, entrepreneurship, love, compassion, violence, and spirituality). At the end, a farewell screen thanked the respondents for their participation. The questionnaire took an average of six minutes to complete.

Review, editing, and recoding

Given the open response format used in the focus question, each brand was reviewed, edited, and recoded (Malhotra, 2008), checking for misspelled brand names (e.g., Coca cola instead of Coca-Cola), incomplete ones (e.g., Harley instead of Harley-Davidson), or other variants that might erroneously register as different brands (e.g., Falabela or fallabela instead of Falabella). In this way, 365 brand mentions were counted, allowing 188 unique brands to be identified. This means that each brand was mentioned spontaneously 1.94 times, and each respondent mentioned an average of 4.67 brands without help. A contingency table with 188 rows (brands) and five columns (geographic units) was used to calculate the number of spontaneous mentions of each brand in each cell, with each geographic unit defined by the researchers. For example, the Nike brand was associated twice with Latin America, 0 times with Australia, twice with China, four times with the United States, and once with Europe, for a total of nine times. Table 1 lists the 50 brands that were spontaneously associated with a geographic unit at least twice, representing 62.19% of the total mentions.

Data analysis

The recoded data of the 50 brands with at least two spontaneous mentions were subjected to a correspondence analysis using SPSS 28. A two-dimensional solution was used as a parameter for this analysis, as it facilitates the interpretation of the data (Gifi, 1996; Hair et al., 2019). Finally, a Chi-square-based distance measure and a symmetric normalization method were used.

	Brand	Spontaneous mentions	Total mentions		Brand	Spontaneous mentions	Total mentions
1	McDonald's	16	4.38%	26	Fruna	3	0.82%
2	Zara	14	3.84%	27	Samsung	3	0.82%
3	AliExpress	13	3.56%	28	Qantas	3	0.82%
4	Coca-Cola	13	3.56%	29	UGG	3	0.82%
5	Huawei	11	3.01%	30	Vegetemite	3	0.82%
6	Shein	10	2.74%	31	Volkswagen	3	0.82%
7	Apple	10	2.74%	32	Australian Gold	2	0.55%
8	Nike	9	2.47%	33	Balenciaga	2	0.55%
9	LATAM Airlines	7	1.92%	34	Billabong	2	0.55%
10	Doo Australia	7	1.92%	35	Cencosud	2	0.55%
11	Maui and Sons	6	1.64%	36	Changan Auto	2	0.55%
12	Falabella	5	1.37%	37	Dior	2	0.55%
13	Ferrari	5	1.37%	38	GAP	2	0.55%
14	Gucci	5	1.37%	39	Great Value	2	0.55%
15	IKEA	5	1.37%	40	Marley Coffee	2	0.55%
16	adidas	4	1.10%	41	Mercedes-Benz	2	0.55%
17	Audi	4	1.10%	42	Microsoft	2	0.55%
18	Ford	4	1.10%	43	Minizo	2	0.55%
19	H&M	4	1.10%	44	Mitsubishi	2	0.55%
20	Xiaomi	4	1.10%	45	Nescafé	2	0.55%
21	Aussie	3	0.82%	46	Nestlé	2	0.55%
22	Bimbo	3	0.82%	47	Pepsi	2	0.55%
23	Chevrolet	3	0.82%	48	Rolex	2	0.55%
24	Claro	3	0.82%	49	Savory	2	0.55%
25	El Corte Inglés	3	0.82%	50	TikTok	2	0.55%
					[Other brands]	138	37.81%

Note: brands ordered by number of spontaneous mentions and then alphabetically. The category other brands indicates the total number of spontaneous mentions of single brands other than those previously listed, but with only one mention.

Table 1. Distribution of spontaneous brand mentions

Source: Own elaboration.

RESULTS

Table 2 contains a summary of the correspondence analysis based on a Chi-square test that checks the independence of the rows and columns [$\chi^2(196)=718.500$, p -value<0.001]. The correspondence analysis solution resulted in four dimensions, with the first two retained and explaining 54.6% of the variance. Figure 1 shows a positioning map with symmetric normalization derived from the correspondence analysis containing two main dimensions. Dimension 1 (horizontal axis, 27.8% inertia) can be interpreted as the massiveness of the brand's target group. It shows on the left side of the map brands that target their marketing or communication strategies to broader population groups or more general needs (e.g., mass consumption brands), and on the right side, other types of brands that target their marketing efforts to smaller market groups (niches) or more specific preferences (e.g., lifestyle). Dimension 2 (vertical axis, 26.8% inertia) can be interpreted as the classic division between West (in the upper part) and East (in the lower part). In detail, the map immediately shows four geographical clusters in which spontaneously remembered brands are grouped and organized: China, United States/Europe, Latin America, and Australia.

Thus, in the first cluster, China, people spontaneously associate brands with a clear Asian origin (AliExpress, Changan, Huawei, Minizo, Mitsubishi, Shein, TikTok, Xiaomi), with the fact that these are oriental brands with significant penetration in the Chilean market standing out. The second cluster, United States/Europe, includes brands that strongly represent both Western values (such as Coca-Cola, Gap, Great Value, McDonald's) and elements of high sophistication and luxury (Balenciaga, Gucci, Mercedes-Benz, Rolex). The third cluster, Latin America, concentrates brands of two types: products for mass consumption (e.g., Bimbo, Fruna, Savory, Nescafé) or with a clear origin in a Latin American country, resulting in multi-Latin companies (Claro, Falabella, LATAM). Finally, the fourth cluster, Australia, mainly brings together brands with a clear origin in this geographical area (such as Australian Gold, Aussie, Doo Australia, Qantas, Maui, UGG).

Finally, although the four clusters described above are directly visible on the map, a number of brands (Pepsi, Nike, Microsoft, Chevrolet) are located in the center of the perceptual map and cannot be directly associated with a geographic entity. Although most of these brands originate in North America, we interpret this lack of association with their international or even global character and with a clear non-localized positioning.

Dimension	Singular value	Inertia	Chi-square	Sig.	Proportion of Inertia		Confidence Singular Value	
					Accounted for	Cumulative	Standard deviation	Correlation 2
1	.938	.880			.278	.278	.016	.430
2	.921	.848			.268	.546	.019	
3	.878	.771			.243	.789		
4	.817	.667			.211	1.000		
Total		3.166	718.580	<.001	1.000	1.000		

Note: The significance of the Chi-square test was calculated with 196 degrees of freedom.

Table 2. Summary of the Correspondence Analysis

Source: Own elaboration.

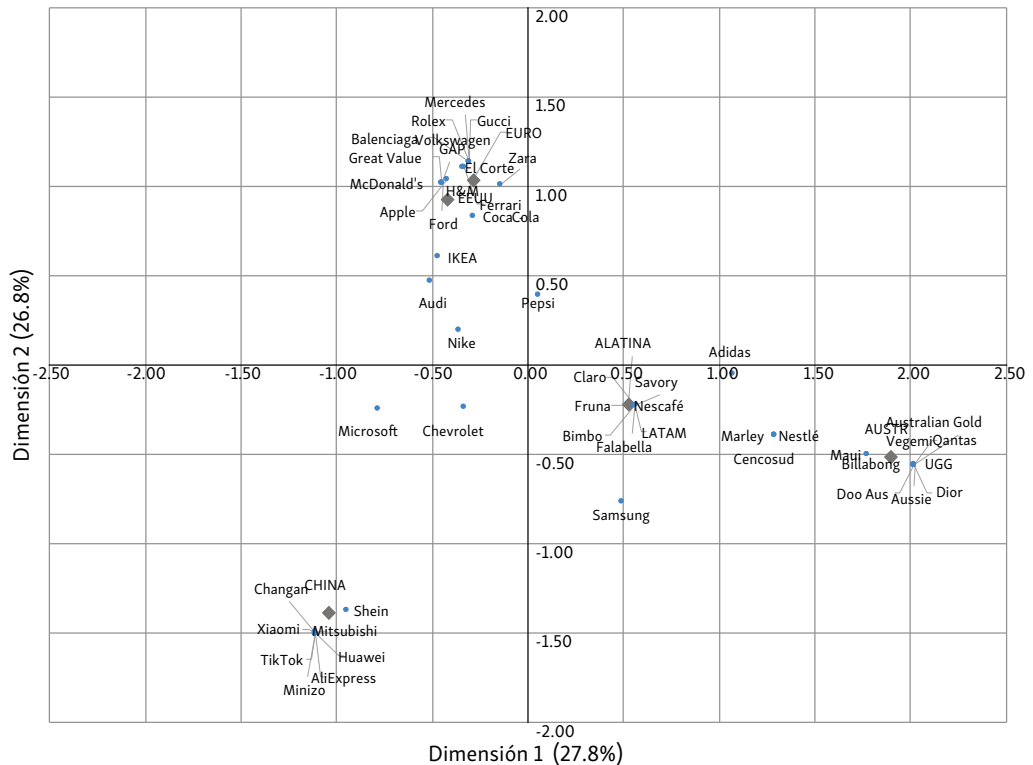


Figure 1. Perceptual map based on correspondence analysis

Source: Own elaboration.

DISCUSSION

The results of this exploratory analysis show a parallel with the recent cultural, economic, and social transformations that Chile has experienced. With the return of democracy in 1990, the Chilean economy has deepened its commercial openness to diverse international markets through the reduction of tariffs - begun in the previous period - and various free trade agreements. As Fermandois (2005) points out, the motto of these years was free trade and the cultural interpenetration of the country with the different globalization processes of the world, which is still noticeable today in the massive access of the population to the most diverse consumer goods of foreign manufacturers. In this Chilean opening to foreign trade, although the United States continues to be the most important partner due to its political and cultural influence, China is now the most important trading partner (Brito Munita & Tagle Montt, 2023).

For example, the results for Asia are significant as they show the high penetration of its brands in this Latin American country. It should be noted that China has replaced the United States as the main trading partner for both Chile and the other Latin American countries. Such a high level of alignment between brands and the Asian region would have been unlikely decades ago. Considering their low geographic proximity, this result is counterintuitive (Hsieh, 2004) and could be explained by a greater naturalization of trade activities between Asia and our country. However, this penetration of Asian brands does not necessarily correspond to other types of values beyond the quantitative. In this sense, Western brands are considered to carry more sophistication and luxury, in addition to brands that are considered cultural symbols of US capitalism, such as McDonald's. This can be explained by the fact that these brands promote greater sophistication and luxury, in addition to brands that identify as cultural symbols of American capitalism, such as McDonald's. This can be explained by the fact that these brands have a greater geographical proximity and, therefore, a higher level of recognition. Another possible explanation is that these brands come from more developed markets and are therefore associated with superior attributes (Hsieh, 2004; Perez, 2004).

The results also show how certain types of brands are associated with the regions of Chile and Latin America, which are considered mass brands, representatives of their own local identity, whose character lies in their popular image. These brands are, therefore, not necessarily associated with inferior quality but rather with an ethos that is understood as part of the identity of the country and region in which they are located. Undoubtedly, these are the brands that are most highly perceived, best known, and where consumers are likely to notice the greatest differences.

At the same time, their proximity may lead them to be perceived as more massive or with a smaller number of attributes (Hsieh, 2004).

Finally, it is noticeable in the results that a country such as Australia has a relevant presence in the spontaneous responses of the sample. This can be interpreted by the market penetration of its brands in relation to the quantity present in the Chilean market and by the greater knowledge about them resulting from the high market penetration. At the same time, as they are brands of developed origin, they have certain characteristics that are consistent with the Chilean population's cultural perception of this oceanic country.

CONCLUSION

Brands are not harmless. Behind them and their consumption are symbols and signs that both explicitly and implicitly evoke and promote cultural and social associations and patterns. In increasingly dynamic, fluctuating and globalized societies, CCT (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) therefore calls for a constant review of the way consumers shape their interaction with brands. If we assume that some countries are models of cultural references with which certain values are associated that can be considered positive (efficiency, elegance, sophistication and intelligence) or negative (low quality, massiveness, generic, extreme convenience) in relation to their own development –as suggested by the COO tradition– then the methodological proposal of this research, which relates these cultural imaginaries that are the countries and makes them correspond to certain brands, is a further contribution to understanding the reasons for individuals' consumption.

In this study, the proposed methodology was applied exploratively to a Chilean sample, which has unique historical characteristics given the profound social and economic transformations that have taken place in Chile in recent decades and the current transformations, for example, popular demonstrations such as the social outburst of 2019. As Chile is an open, globalized economy that imports foreign goods and exports raw materials, the results show that certain brands are associated with developed and underdeveloped countries, depending on the characteristics of the former and the cultural values that the latter transmit across geographical borders.

The main objective of this study was to test a methodological approach that uses spontaneous mentions to build a map of correspondences between geographical units and specific brands. It is interesting to highlight that the methodology used is effective for this purpose, as it allows us to visualize how individuals divide

their perception of the world into categories that allow them to understand and process their environment efficiently (Shimp et al., 1993). In this sense, the use of this instrument in new research in CCT and the study of COOs will contribute to the development of cultural and consumer studies, especially considering that a methodology that can be pleasant and didactic for respondents allows for insightful interpretative results.

However, this study has limitations that can certainly be overcome in future analyses. First, due to its exploratory nature, this study uses a limited number of respondents obtained through non-probabilistic random sampling. Future studies could use other sampling methods to ensure the representation of different segments of the national population.

Second, the sample is predominantly female, which could influence the type and category of products that appear in the analysis. Previous studies have indicated possible gender differences in the perception of the national origin of brands (Samiee et al., 2005). Future confirmatory studies should use a gender-balanced sample to obtain a more balanced representation and avoid potential biases.

Third, the tasks required of respondents included associations with brands remembered spontaneously, along with specific attributes. This task can be associated with a high cognitive load, which negatively affects the interest in answering the questionnaire validly and, in the worst case, increases dropout. Future studies should use a limited/assisted set of markers to reduce the cognitive effort required to participate in the study.

Finally, the geographic units considered in this study are not exhaustive (not all possible geographic regions of the world are available). That is, there are geographic units with which brands could potentially be associated that were not included in the study. However, the countries listed (Australia, United States, China) are intended to represent trading blocs that are comparable in size, scale, or significant economic relevance to entire continents. However, given the nature of correspondence analysis, future studies should use a complete and exhaustive list of continents with which respondents associate the brands studied.

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