

The Country-of-Origin-Effect on a Domestic Fashion Market

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Abstract

One way of defining a brand can be the focus on its country of origin. This paper starts with the assumption that on a domestic market, fashion labels can endorse their brand by the explicit use of a geographical annotation as e.g. a country or city of origin (COO) as caption in their logo, and thus obtain a USP in regard to other, global, brands. We unravel how this country/ city of origin endorsement can work for the Belgian fashion market.

For this project, we studied five cases studies of Belgian brands in the middle market segment. We interviewed brand managers and shop keepers, directed questionnaires at potential consumers in multi brand stores and analyzed websites and documents in order to get a view on the deployment of the country/ city of origin in various communication channels as well as its underlying motivations and to get an indication of the consistency of the COO- and brand image with consumers. Research results show that a country/city of origin (c.q. Belgian/Antwerp/Brussels) annotation can be used (1) to give an identity and authenticity to the label by referring to its place of origin; (2) to connect the label to assumed positive product features of Belgian/ Antwerp fashion (creativity and quality); (3) to appeal to a latent feeling of 'pride' of consumers at the domestic market. Nonetheless, this 'nationalist-effect' doesn't play a role in effective consumer behavior. Brand origin is for most consumers no argument to buy a piece of apparel.

Based on our market survey and literature study, we explain where the positive connotations for the annotation 'Belgian' and 'Antwerp' come from. This study stresses the importance of a whole ecosystem of Belgian / Antwerp fashion where famous independent designers and academies as well as shopping streets and domestic media play their role.

Key Words: Country-of-origin-effect, Belgian Fashion, fashion marketing