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XÂY DỰNG KHUNG LÝ THUYẾT VỀ ẢNH HƯỞNG CỦA NHẬN THỨC VỀ QUỐC GIA XUẤT KHẨU LÊN MỨC ĐỘ SẴN SÀNG MUA TRÁI CÂY XUẤT KHẨU CỦA KHÁCH HÀNG TẠI CÁC THÀNH PHỐ LỚN Ở VIỆT NAM

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Tóm tắt

Nghiên cứu khám phá về vai trò quan trọng của hình ảnh nước xuất khẩu và ảnh hưởng của nó đối với sự tin tưởng của người tiêu dùng về chất lượng và an toàn thực phẩm trong thị trường trái cây tươi ở Việt Nam. Nghiên cứu cũng khám phá cách những quan điểm này tác động đến mức độ sẵn sàng chi trả của người tiêu dùng đối với trái cây nhập khẩu. Phương pháp nghiên cứu sử dụng khảo sát để thu thập dữ liệu, nhằm phân tích cách người tiêu dùng Việt Nam nhận thức ba yếu tố của “Khung hình ảnh quốc gia” đối với sáu quốc gia xuất khẩu và đánh giá sự tin tưởng và khả năng mua sắm trái cây tươi từ những quốc gia này. Kết quả của nghiên cứu là đề xuất ra một khung hình ảnh quốc gia đầy đủ, mở rộng hơn so với mô hình hiện có, tập trung vào các đặc điểm con người như năng lực quốc gia và mức độ thân thiện. Những bổ sung của bài nghiên cứu đã tích hợp cả các đặc điểm môi trường, đặc biệt là “hình ảnh xanh sạch,” để đánh giá tác động của nó đối với mức độ sẵn sàng chi trả của người tiêu dùng Việt Nam cho trái cây tươi từ nước ngoài. Mặc dù nghiên cứu thừa nhận một số hạn chế, tính mới của nó nằm ở việc đề xuất một khung hình ảnh quốc gia độc đáo, được thiết kế xét theo xu hướng của người tiêu dùng Việt Nam đối với việc mua trái cây

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tươi nhập khẩu, từ đó gia tăng hiểu biết về hành vi của người tiêu dùng trong ngữ cảnh thị trường Việt Nam.

Từ khóa: Hình ảnh quốc gia xuất xứ, Stereotype content model, mức độ sẵn sàng chi trả, trái cây, Việt Nam.

THE IMPACT OF COUNTRY OF ORIGIN ON THE CUSTOMERS' WILLINGNESS TO BUY EXPORTED FRESH FRUIT IN VIETNAM'S METROPOLISES: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Abstract

This conceptual paper delves into the pivotal role of the exporting country's image and its influence on consumer trust regarding food quality and safety within Vietnam's fruit market. It further explores how these perceptions shape the consumers' propensity to purchase imported fresh fruits. The research employs a survey methodology to gather data, aiming to dissect how Vietnamese consumers perceive three elements of the "Country image framework" for six exporting nations, and to assess their trust and willingness to engage in purchasing fresh fruits from these countries. The findings introduce an innovative theoretical Country image framework, which expands upon the existing Stereotype content model that traditionally emphasizes human traits such as competence and warmth. This enhancement integrates environmental attributes, specifically the 'clean green image,' to evaluate its effect on Vietnamese consumers' readiness to buy fresh fruit from abroad. While the research acknowledges certain limitations, its originality lies in proposing a unique Country image framework tailored to scrutinize the inclination of Vietnamese consumers towards buying imported fresh fruits, thereby adding value to the understanding of consumer behavior in Vietnam's market context.

Keywords: Country of origin, Stereotype content model, Willingness to buy, fruit, Vietnam

1. Introduction

Country of Origin (COO) constitutes a vital external signal that directs consumers' product assessment, especially in situations of information scarcity (Bilkey & Nes, 1982). The impact of COO pertains to consumers' cognitive processes, emotional states, inclinations, and consumption actions (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999), with varying effects contingent on factors such as product category, country image, and consumer characteristics (Liefeld, 2004).

The association between Country of Origin (COO) and consumers' willingness to buy (WTB) has been investigated for several decades with numerous findings indicating the significant influences of COO on WTB. Studies have documented that negative views of a country, emanating from past military, economic, or political conflicts, negatively affect consumers' willingness to buy a country's products (e.g. Nijssen & Douglas, 2004; Riefler & Diamantopoulos, 2007). Touzani et al. (2015) argue that, in emerging markets, COO is a major determinant of consumers' preference for foreign products, as it reflects various factors such as economic development, cultural exposure, and historical ties. As an emerging market, Vietnam may also exhibit a similar

pattern of COO influence on consumers' WTB. Despite the importance of COO in influencing consumer behavior, this topic has received limited attention in the Vietnamese context. Therefore, it is essential to investigate the impact of COO on Vietnamese consumers' WTB.

The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a noticeable shift in global consumer behavior towards health-conscious lifestyles and dietary patterns. In the post-pandemic era, fresh food has emerged as a prominent choice among nutrition options (Alonso et al., 2021), especially, fruit consumption is regarded as a beneficial dietary habit since it helps in the prevention of various non-communicable diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, neurological disease, obesity, diabetes mellitus, osteoarthritis, and some cancers (P. Jaglan et al., 2022). The Vietnam Times reports that the demand for healthy food has been on the rise for several years, following the “clean-eating” movement in Western European countries and America, as well as the macrobiotic diets in Asian countries. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has further accelerated this trend, as many consumers have realized the importance of adopting a healthy lifestyle and consuming healthy products. Additionally, a 2022 survey of Decision Lab about lifestyle changes, especially in the eating habits of Vietnamese consumers since the pandemic reveals that 46.3% of the respondents expressed interest in changing their eating habits and 43.4% of them claimed to have improved their knowledge of healthy food. This nuanced shift in consumer behavior reflects a growing commitment to health and well-being in the post COVID-19 pandemic context, with fresh fruit becoming more popular among consumers for its positive effects on human health.

In this research, we concentrate on the fruit industry in Vietnam, one of the world's largest fruit producers and exporters, with a total fruit area of 1.1 million hectares and a production of 12.8 million tons in 2019 (GSO, 2020). Vietnam's fruit market has seen considerable growth in size and revenue in recent years. According to Statista, the fruit market is expected to grow annually by 7.86% (CAGR 2023-2028). Besides, Vietnam also imports a large amount of fruit from other countries, such as China, Thailand, Australia, and the US, to meet the domestic demand and diversify the fruit supply (VASEP, 2020). The Vietnamese fruit market is thus characterized by high competition and diversity, which poses challenges and opportunities for domestic and foreign stakeholders in the fruit market. We decided to narrow down our scope of research and focus only on matters that are relevant and suitable for Vietnam's context: fruits imported from the 6 countries that Vietnam imports the largest: China, the USA, Australia, Thailand, Korea, and New Zealand. Given the importance of COO impacts on consumers' WTB as well as the changing consumption habits towards fresh food, we attempt to examine this relationship in the Post COVID-19 situation in the Vietnam fruit market. Based on our findings, we provide practical implications and recommendations for fruit producers, exporters, importers, retailers, government, and policymakers on leveraging COO as a marketing tool and regulating the fruit market effectively and efficiently.

All the objectives mentioned above led us to the following research questions:

- *RQ1*: How does the COO affect Vietnamese consumers' WTB?

- *RQ2*: What is the relationship between COO and Vietnamese consumers' WTB in Post COVID-19?

2. Literature review

2.1. Trust in quality and safety of fresh fruit and its effect on consumers' willingness to buy

In recent decades, the demand for high-quality and safe food has been on the rise, partly because contemporary consumers have become highly demanding, fragmented, and knowledgeable, paying increased attention to the quality and health-related values of the food they eat (Petrescu et al., 2019; Kealesitse & Kabama, 2012; Gjerris et al., 2015). Extensive research demonstrated that overall food quality and food safety are driving forces for consumers' levels of trust in food, including trust in producers, suppliers, and the economic development level of producing nations (Taylor et al., 2011; Petrescu et al., 2019). Prior findings suggest that consumers' confidence in food can be seen as a promoter of their purchase behaviors, while a lack of trust may be an obstacle to them (Canova et al., 2020; Hansen et al., 2018). Necessarily, trust is instrumental in the decision-making process when consumers assume that food is organic, natural, healthy, tasty, and safe (Canova et al., 2020).

Within the food industry, in recent decades, numerous academic efforts have been put into defining and conceptualizing the term "quality" in food (Grunert, 2005; Kahl et al., 2012). Generally, consumers' evaluation of food quality can be categorized into two main dimensions: tangible sensory attributes and less tangible credence attributes (Wu et al., 2021). The former refers to the physical and sensory characteristics of food, namely taste, flavor, freshness, juiciness, and appearance (Wu et al., 2021; Grunert, 2005; Petrescu et al., 2019). The latter covers a wide range of implicit cues such as nutritional and functional benefits, convenience, together with ethical and environmental concerns (Naspetti & Zanolli, 2009; Wu et al., 2021; Kealesitse & Kabama, 2012). Regarding fruit quality, a handful of prior studies have stated that appearance and taste are dominant indicators that influence consumers' assessment of fruit quality (Rohr et al., 2005; Feng et al., 2021; Naspetti & Zanolli, 2009). Visual appearance, such as the intensity and color of fruit skin or fruit size, is of utmost importance in the quality grading of fruits, which is also proven to affect both consumers' acceptance to purchase a greater quantity and sales (Iglésias et al., 2008; Crassweller and Hollender, 1989). Previous findings have also indicated that, besides appearance, taste, as an eating quality, is the most important parameter influencing consumers' purchase decisions of apples (Iglésias et al., 2008; Harker, 2001; Donati et al., 2003).

The perception of food by consumers is greatly influenced not just by the quality of food, but also by the safety concept associated with it (Van Rijswijk & Frewer, 2008). Food safety can be characterized by a confined or broader approach (Ritson & Mai, 1998). The more narrow sense defined food safety as the opposite of food risk, in other words, the probability of not being subjected to any harm from consuming certain food (Henson & Traill, 1993). The broad

interpretation of food safety not only covers the more confined definition but also includes the nutritional qualities of food and more concerns about the attributes of unfamiliar foods (Ritson & Mai, 1998).

According to the Foodborne Disease Burden Epidemiology Reference Group (FERG) published by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2010, the worldwide impact of Foodborne Diseases (FBD) is comparable to major pandemics such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria. The global impact of Foodborne Diseases (FBD), attributed to the 31 hazards, resulted in 33 million Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) with the most substantial burden experienced by African regions, followed by Southeast Asian regions (Havelaar et al., 2015). Consequently, ensuring the safety of food has been an essential part of securing food for billions of individuals in developing and emerging nations for decades. (Ortega & Tschirley, 2017).

It has been recognized that the presence of foodborne pathogens and pesticide residues are two significant problems affecting the safety of fresh fruit and also acting as the criteria for consumers' purchasing decisions (Van Boxtael et al., 2013; Yu et al., 2018; Feng et al., 2021). Fresh fruit, being naturally biological, can foster the proliferation of pathogenic microorganisms, which can potentially result in foodborne illnesses (Fung et al., 2018). More than 200 different foodborne diseases identified are induced by species such as Salmonella, Listeria, Escherichia Coli, etc (Bintsis & Author_Id, 2017). The use of agricultural pesticides has boosted global agricultural output, thereby aiding in achieving food security (Warren 1998; Fisher et al. 2012). Despite their benefits, pesticide residues have presented potential threats to food safety, directly affecting human health (Zhang et al., 2015). Many countries in the world, including Vietnam, have put into force regulations about maximum levels of residues for pesticides in food (Winter & Jara, 2015; Vietnam MOH, 2016).

In the current times, customers have become more particular and evaluative, and have diversified their selections in food (Grunert 2005). They tend to take into consideration food quality and food safety as two key elements guiding their perceptions and purchase decisions (Wilcock et al., 2004; Grunert, 2005; Ro`hr et al., 2005). Even though there was a notable interrelationship in the consumers' perceptions of food quality and food safety (Grunert, 2005; Knight et al, 2008; (Van Rijswijk & Frewer, 2008), most consumers believed that safety is derived from the definition of food quality (Grunert, 2005), rather than the converse. Rijswijk and Frewer (2008) noted that for several individuals, safety is considered to be one criterion of quality assessment, and thus, finding a high-quality product also suggests that it is safe. Additionally, a study on fresh fruit reveals that consumers associate high-quality fresh fruit with its safety for consumption and the absence of chemical residues (Chamhuri and Batt, 2015). According to all the above findings, we hypothesize that:

H1. Consumers' trust in food safety will be indicated positively by their trust in food quality.

Generally, a large amount of prior literature shows that consumer's perception of food quality and food safety can be a facilitator for their purchase behaviors of food items, including imported fresh fruits (Kealesitse & Kabama, 2012; Wang et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2021; Seo et

al., 2020). One of the main drivers for consumers' willingness to purchase imported fresh fruits is their enhanced trust that the food is of superior quality (Feng et al., 2021; Gao et al., 2014; Feng et al., 2012). Additionally, this research also stated that consumers tend to be willing to pay more for their fruit consumption, motivated by their confidence in the quality and safety of fruits (Liu et al., 2020; Nandi et al., 2017).

In Vietnam, due to enhanced consumers' knowledge about food quality and safety, accompanied by the mushrooming of food scandals such as poor cultivation practices, the overuse and misuse of pesticides in agricultural production, or issues related to the unclear origin of food products, increased research has been conducted to investigate consumers' perception of food quality and safety, as well as their responses and attitudes towards specific products (My et al., 2017; Mergenthaler et al., 2009; Ha et al., 2019). Also, according to these studies, Vietnamese consumers, in general, are driven to buy food products such as rice, vegetables, or meat based on the belief that the food has high quality and assured safety. Regarding Vietnamese preference to buy imported products, greater quality and safety are key motivations for their purchase decisions, as foreign products are often associated with quality, safety, and hygienic benefits (Speece and Nguyen, 2005; Tuyet & Smith, 2011). There is little research on this aspect that covers consumer's attitudes towards imported fresh fruits in their scope. Given all the above findings and analysis, we therefore hypothesize that:

H2. Consumers' willingness to buy imported fresh fruits will be positively influenced by their trust in food quality and food safety.

2.2. Country image framework

Previous studies have emphasized the significant impact of perceived country of origin (COO) upon consumer's evaluation of a product (e.g. Feng et al., 2021; Verlegh, 2007). Given a large amount of COO-related literature, there has been an inconsistency in the conceptualizations of COO effects (Roth and Diamantopoulos, 2009). Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009), divided existing literature into 3 groups. The first group, including the definition proposed by Papadopoulos (1993), Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999), Kotler et al. (1993), Martin and Eroglu (1993), indicated that country image is not only a cognitive cue of a product's quality, but also refers to consumer's emotions, identity, pride and autobiographic memories. In the second group, including the studies of Nebenzahl et al. (2003), Papadopoulos and Heslop (2003), country image is defined as the perceptions of specific attributes of a product made in a specific country, the emotions and social convenience related to the ownership of this product. Finally, the third group, with findings of Nagashima (1970), Han (1989), Roth and Romeo (1992), refers to country image as the total perception of products made in a certain country (based on previous perception, market's characteristics, reputation, etc.). None of these definitions is comprehensive enough to cover the domain of the construct "country image" (Roth and Diamantopoulos, 2009). This paper accesses the concept of country image according to the first group of conceptualizations defined by Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009), with the evaluation of fresh fruit based on both the product quality and the attitude concept.

Despite the considerable attention given to studying the COO phenomenon, there has been a limited effort to investigate the linkage between international marketing literature and a products' perceived COO. According to Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009), a country's image comprises two components - affect and cognition. These two elements are separate but interconnected, exerting a causal influence on the country conations. Regarding COO towards consumers, Heslop and Papadopoulos (1993), through their empirical study, used an 11-item scale to investigate the relationship between the perceptions of countries as well as their people and the perceptions of products. The findings of this study indicated three underlying constructs namely affect, belief and behavioral link. Also, the Heslop and Papadopoulos (1993) study concluded that both belief and affect are significantly correlated with product evaluation and consumers' willingness to buy (WTB).

The SCM model by Fiske supported empirically and conceptually the previous study of Heslop and Papadopoulos. Fiske et al. (1999, 2002) constructed a model of stereotype content named SCM, which captured two specific dimensions of COO: *perceived competence* and *perceived warmth*. The Fiske et al. (2002) study indicated six "competence" traits namely competent, intelligent, confident, efficient, competitive, and independent and six "warmth" traits namely friendly, well-intentioned, sincere, good-natured, warm, and trustworthy.

Given the usefulness of SCM model in measuring the impact of national stereotypes and COO-based product evaluation, major studies investigating the relationship between perceived warmth, perceived competence and consumer preference have been conducted in the food industry such as soft drinks, chocolate bars, bottled fruit juice and meat (Barbarossa et al., 2016; Xu et al., 2013; Halkias et al., 2016). Previous studies show that these 2 dimensions, both have a correlation with consumers' product evaluation and purchase behavior (e.g. Heslop and Papadopoulos, 1993; Herz & Diamantopoulos, 2013)

2.1.1. Perceived competence

According to Fiske et al. (2002, p. 881), the perceived competence of out-groups is directly related to their perceived levels of power and high status. Later in 2013, the definition of perceived country competence was updated as the perception of the degrees of economic and technological advance, which results in the power and influence in the global society. (Xu et al., 2013, p. 285). A country's perceived competence is shaped by "its degree of modernity, innovativeness, technology, sophistication and economic development" (Barbarossa, 2016).

Other than basic quality characteristics, consumers also perceive food quality based on the concern for economic development (Onozaka and McFadden, 2011). Furthermore, Gao (2018) stated that with respect to the genetically modified food industry, consumers' perception is influenced by the image, politics, and technology impression of a country. For example, Chinese consumers tend to consume genetically modified foods from Australia and the United States, which stems from their perceptions regarding the economic development of these two countries. Chinese consumers believe that Australia and the United States, with their high level of

development as well as advanced technology in agriculture production and biotechnology, could result in higher product quality (Gao, 2018).

Regarding the safety of fresh food, EU consumers posit that developed countries could have strict regulations on pesticide and chemicals usage, which results in higher safety standards (Gao, 2014). Moreover, consumers believe that countries with high competence will have more knowledge and trustworthiness in agricultural practices such as strict pesticide control to ensure food safety (Feng, 2023). Due to the aforementioned findings, this paper hypothesized that:

H3. The perceived competence of a country would have a positive impact on consumers' trust in food quality and food safety in that country.

2.1.2. Perceived warmth

Fiske et al. (2002) pointed out that “out-groups are seen as relatively warm and nice to the extent that they do not compete with others”. Xu et al. (2013) referred to perceived warmth as the extent to which an individual perceives a country as well-intentioned, friendly, warm and cooperative. In the same study, Xu et al. (2013) identified the relationship between consumers’ willingness to buy and the perceived warmth of a country. Their study implied that positive national stereotypes of perceived warmth results in consumers’ belief in the brand, even in the case of brand failure. These findings were supported by Barbarrosa et al. (2016): In case of food crisis, a product from a “warm” country will suffer from less severe loss in trust in food safety, compared to the one from a “cold” country. Therefore, it could be expected that higher perceived warmth is associated with higher trust in food safety and quality.

H4. The perceived warmth of a country would positively predict consumers' trust in food safety and trust in that country.

2.2. Clean green image

Previous studies have shown a significant correlation between the country image and product evaluation as well as consumers’ willingness to buy (Papadopoulos et al., 2000; Seo et al., 2022). Similar patterns also emerge in consumer behaviors related to the consumption of fresh fruit (Gázquez-Abad et al., 2012). The study by Gilradi et al. (2012) also supports this statement as the country image is shown to positively affect consumers' attitudes in evaluating fresh fruit. Additionally, besides country image, concerns about safety, health, and the environment also help shape consumers' preferences which will influence their purchasing behaviors (Terano et al., 2016).

As previously illustrated, country image is a multidimensional concept. In the initial period of country image research, from the marketing perspective, the study of Martin et al. (1993) concluded that country image has only three main dimensions which are economic, political, and technological. However, in later studies, researchers also expanded the country image framework with other social & psychological dimensions such as culture, labor, the familiarity of a country, demographics, shopping behaviors, and the attitudes and values of consumers (Ahmed et al., 2008;

Allred et al., 2000). After that, the study of Renko et al (2017) has described that with the rising environmental concern of the consumer and green corporate applications (Ham et al., 2001; Isaksson et al., 2010), green dimension should be included in the country image framework. Besides the long-standing consumers' perception of country of origin, with the increasing trend in their environmental concerns, the inclusion of a nation's environmental characteristics into the country image dimensions would be necessary to enhance comprehensive research and comprehension of consumers' evaluating and purchasing decisions.

A country's clean green image is the environment-related dimension of a country image, which refers to how the country's environment is perceived to be pure, unspoiled, clean, and beautiful (Coyle et al., 2003; Feng et al. 2021). The Feng et al. (2021) study has discovered that the clean green image of a country can positively influence consumers' trust in food safety and food quality of imported fresh fruit. This is consistent with previous studies that have explored findings showing the relationship between the clean green image and consumers' trust in safety and quality. For instance, favorable consumer perceptions of specific environmental factors, such as the natural surroundings, climate, sunlight exposure, and soil fertility in a given region or country, may contribute to a positive appraisal of the quality of fruits and vegetables produced in that area (Van Ittersum et al., 2003). Besides, research pertaining to the food sectors in New Zealand also indicates that when a country possesses an appealing clean, and green reputation, consumers are inclined to perceive that the nation adheres to stringent standards in hygiene, quality, and pesticide regulations (Hynes et al., 2014). Study also found that in the case of a food crisis, countries perceived as highly competent, or highly clean and green would suffer a greater loss of consumers' trust in food safety as it violates their expectations (Feng et al., 2023). Such findings indicate that countries perceived as highly clean and green would create higher consumer expectations of the safety and quality of food, thus influencing them to have higher trust in it.

H5. Clean green image positively influences consumers' trust in food safety and quality.

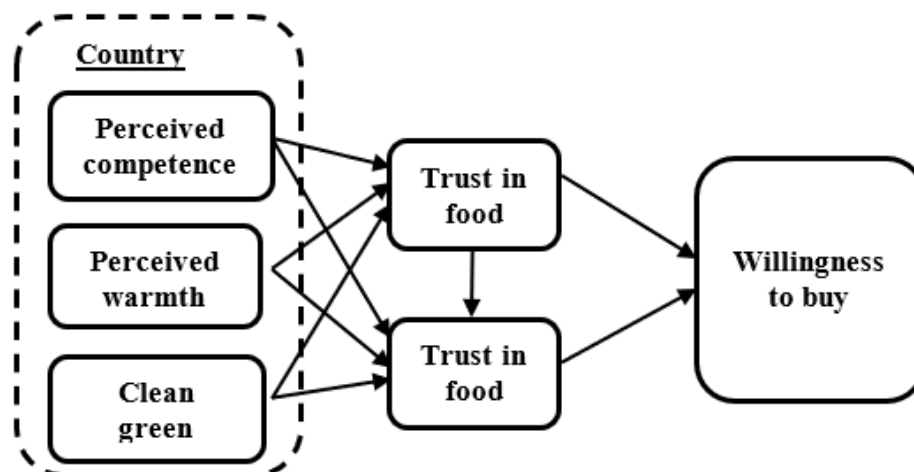


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

3. Propositions

The Stereotype content model developed by Fiske et al. (1999, 2002) consisting of perceived warmth and perceived competence is purely about how human characteristics impact consumers' trust. However, the environmental characteristic (i.e. clean green image) is also a highly influential factor and needs to be examined when considering consumers' trust in food quality and food safety, which in turn, affects their willingness to buy imported fresh fruits from six different countries namely China, the USA, New Zealand, Australia, Thailand and Korea. Therefore, this research introduces a comprehensive model designed by incorporating "clean green image" factor into the previous country image framework, which only comprises perceived country competence and warmth), to reveal the underlying mechanisms that influence Vietnamese consumers' willingness to purchase imported fresh fruit based on the country-of-origin.

4. Discussion

Many studies have investigated factors influencing consumers' preference for imported fresh fruit. In this topic, it has been shown that there would be differences in consumers' purchasing behaviors across different countries based on perceived country image. It has contributed to the mechanism by which country image can affect consumers' purchasing behaviors in general and in imported fresh fruit specifically. However, when searching for the literature review on the effect of country image on imported fresh fruit, our group noticed that there were very few studies about Vietnamese consumers purchasing behaviors. Therefore, we would like to examine whether this under-researched area also has similar findings with previous studies.

Our research developed a conceptual framework to extend the understanding of how a country image can influence Vietnamese's willingness to buy imported fresh fruit. With the rise of consumers' environmental concerns and green corporate applications (Ham et al., 2001; Isaksson et al., 2010), we incorporated the clean green image into the country image framework beside characteristics that refer to consumer's emotions, identity, pride, and autobiographic memories such as perceived competence and perceived warmth (Papadopoulos, 1993; Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999; Fiske et al., 2002), thus extending it. The research showed that all the studied factors which are perceived competence, perceived warmth, and clean green image of an exporting country do influence the consumer's trust in food quality and safety of its exported fruits, thus positively affecting their willingness to buy those fruits. With this result, we have gained insights into the mechanism of Vietnamese consumers' purchasing behaviors toward the consumption of fresh fruits from these three studied factors.

As described in the study, trust in food quality and food safety were positive predictors of consumers' willingness to buy in all six studied countries which supported the findings of Feng's study (2021). Moreover, the impact of the clean green image on influencing Vietnamese consumers' trust and their willingness to buy imported fruits is much more impressive. The effect

of a clean green image was the most significant and most consistent predictor of willingness to buy. Perceived competence and warmth of Vietnamese consumers' trust and willingness to buy imported fresh fruits were more complicated since they varied depending on the exporting country. Nevertheless, both factors influence the trust and the subsequent purchase of imported fruits by Vietnamese customers.

5. Limitations and further implications

Apart from those valuable insights aforementioned, there exists several limitations in this research. First, the conceptual framework previously suggested demonstrates a lack of empirical test, yet provides various research propositions for further investigation. Future empirical studies could test the proposed hypothesis regarding the relationship of trust in food safety and food quality (H1), their potential impacts on consumers' willingness to buy (H2) as well as the effects of three COO dimensions (perceived competence, perceived warmth, and clean green image) on consumers' trust in food quality and food safety (H3-H5).

Secondly, the literature review conducted in this paper is not comprehensive enough to cover the domain of country-of-origin, which has been researched for several decades due to its complexity. In future studies, a literature review that digs deeper into different conceptualizations of a country's image could offer a better understanding of existing knowledge.

These research propositions proposed above could be tested via an empirical study, which will later provide various implications for further research. First, the expansion of our conceptual framework could be considered. The hypotheses in this paper are related to the direct impact of key variables; however, the indirect effect, which includes the role of moderators also needs to be taken into account. During the purchasing process, consumer characteristics (e.g. consumer expertise, consumer involvement, and consumer ethnocentrism) are also major determinants of their willingness to buy. Therefore, the moderating role of consumers' characteristics is worthwhile to investigate in further research.

Secondly, with the complexity of the country-of-origin concept, other types of conceptualizations (e.g. country of manufacture, country of brand origin, country of design) are simultaneously important. The varying impacts of different conceptualizations of a country's image on consumers' willingness to buy could also be verified and compared in different contexts.

Finally, the development of a nation over a period of time will lead to some changes in its economic and political power as well as its social conditions, attitude, and environment. Thus, consumer's perceptions of a country will change over time, which emphasizes the need to investigate and compare national stereotypes in different time frames.

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