Product-specific regional image as a moderator of regional identity and consumer regiocentrism effects on wine purchasing behaviour

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Consumer ethnocentrism and national identity are constructs deriving from social identity theory which address the importance of place of origin in purchasing behaviour where consumers prefer products from their own country. The objective of this study was to examine the effects of consumer regiocentrism and regional identity on wine purchasing behaviour. Further, we aimed to understand the influence of wine-specific regional image on the perception and wine purchasing behaviour. Regionality of food products has become an important criterion for European consumers in their product evaluation and purchasing decisions (Lorenz et al., 2015). The strategy of marketing agricultural products based on region-of-origin enables the perception of superior quality and the development of long-term competitive advantage (Thode and Maskulka, 1998). According to van Ittersum (2002; 2007), a region is defined as an area situated in one or more countries which forms an entity based on local and regional characteristics, such as traditions, culture and scenery. The aim of our study was to identify opportunities to tailor marketing approaches at a region-of-origin level, considering the effects of regional identity and consumer regiocentrism on wine purchasing behaviour against the background of wine-specific regional image from the perspective of regional consumers. Shimp and Sharma (1987) noted that regional marketing is an especially exciting application of the CETSCALE, a scale to measure the level of consumer ethnocentrism, a term they decried as beliefs of consumers about the appropriateness and morality of purchasing foreign-made products, which (from the perspective of ethnocentric consumers) would be wrong as it hurts the domestic economy, causes loss of jobs and is unpatriotic. The ethnocentrism theory relates to social identity theory which is based on a set of concepts that address intergroup relations and was proposed by Tajfel and Turner (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Later it was shown that the social identity approach can also be employed in social contexts comprising ingroups at different levels of inclusiveness (Simon et al., 1995). Regional identity is an example where a smaller (in this case, regional) group of people consider themselves as a distinct entity and not just a sub-group of the more inclusive national group (Simon et al., 1995). Regional identity explains pro-in-group while consumer regiocentrism describes anti-out-group tendencies, meaning they are conceptually different constructs, and it is therefore important to study the effects of each independently (Zeugner-Roth et al., 2015). Contrary to consumer ethnocentrism and national identity, which were intensively studied, the two constructs in the regional context have been somewhat neglected in academic studies. In a recent review on consumer perceptions and preferences for local food (Feldmann and Hamm, 2015) it was pointed out that in the context of local food research there is evidence of a gap between attitudes and behaviour. None of the previous studies at a regional level (Lantz and Loeb, 1998; Fernandez-Ferrín and Bande-Vilela, 2013; Lee et al., 2016) looked at the effect of each construct independently on actual purchasing behaviour. Our study was conducted with an attempt to understand the direct impact of regional identity and regional ethnocentrism on consumer purchasing behaviour. Van Ittersum et al. (2003) found that product perception is significantly influenced by the perceived product-specific regional image, which was confirmed by Lorenz et al. (2015). With our study we wanted to go a step further and understand whether product-specific (in this case wine-specific) regional image has an effect not only on product preference but also on purchasing behaviour.
The data for the quantitative part of the study was gathered in 2016 from 221 wine consumers from two Slovenian wine regions: namely, 109 from the Primorska and 112 from the Podravje wine regions. Data was gathered through an online questionnaire, with purposive sampling strictly following equal distribution in age, gender and place of residence. There were four inclusion questions at the beginning of the questionnaire. The respondents: had to be born and resident in one of the two studied wine regions; had to be above 18 years of age; had to drink wine at least once per month; and had to buy wine at least twice per year. Wine amateurs, professional winemakers and sommeliers were excluded. The response rate of the contacted respondents was 48%. The questionnaire was divided into 4 sections: wine purchase and consumption habits; wine-specific regional image; regional identity and consumer regiocentrism measures; and socio-economic questions. To select the list of attributes to measure wine-specific regional image, qualitative research was performed by means of focus groups before the quantitative part of research. To measure the wine-specific regional image we used a list of attributes, where respondents had to choose one wine region (from the two studied) for which each of the listed attributes is more typical. To measure the wine-specific regional image from the perspective of regional consumers, we checked if the proportion of answers for one or another wine region was statistically significant, which was conducted with the one-way chi-square test. We analysed the differences in perception between consumers from the two wine regions and compared it to the likelihood ratio between place of residence and region of most commonly purchased wine. To measure regional identity and consumer regiocentrism, adapted versions of regional identity scale and CETSCALE were used (Fernandez-Ferrin and Bande-Vilela, 2013). The validity and reliability of both scales was confirmed with factor analysis. Finally, the Pearson correlation coefficient was used as a tool to evaluate the connection between regional identity and consumer regiocentrism scores and the proportion of wine bought from different wine regions in the past year.

A comparison of socio-demographic characteristics of the two wine regions indicates that samples were similar in relation to gender distribution, employment status and level of education. Interesting results were found when we analysed wine-specific regional image. Independently of region of residence, in the minds of Slovenian wine consumers from both regions, Primorska wine region has a much better wine-specific regional image than Podravje. Looking at the likelihood ratio between the region of residence and the region from which consumers most often purchase wines, we saw that 92.7% of wine purchased from respondents living in the Primorska wine region was from their own wine region, and less than 5% was from the Podravje region. Respondents from the Podravje wine region bought 61.6% of wine from their own region, 33% from Primorska and less than 5% from elsewhere. Association is statistically significant (p < 0.001), meaning that regional consumers from both wine regions prefer to buy own regional wine; however, both also perceive the Primorska wine region has higher wine-specific regional image. There was no statistical difference between the levels of regional identity and consumer regiocentrism scores between the samples from the two studied wine regions. Furthermore, we observed no statistically significant correlation between regional identity or consumer regiocentrism and proportion of purchased wine with the respondents from the Primorska wine region. With the respondents from the Podravje wine region we observed a weak positive statistically significant correlation between regional identity, consumer regiocentrism and percentage of wine purchased from the Podravje wine region. This means that consumers from Podravje, who are more regiocentric and more attached to their region, will buy more wine from their own wine region. These findings are somehow contrary to the findings of Lantz and Loeb (1998), van Ittersum (2002), Fernandez-Ferrin and Bande-Vilela (2013) and Lee et al. (2016), which could be due to the fact that we were looking specifically at purchasing behaviour and not only at product preference or purchasing intention.
Our findings show that Slovenian people from two different wine regions differ in terms of how regional identity and consumer regiocentrism affect their wine purchasing behavior. It was also found that regional identity is a better predictor of wine purchasing than consumer regiocentrism. Evaluating the wine-specific regional image it was shown, that it seems to be linked to preference, but not necessarily to actual purchasing behavior. We propose that when product-specific image is very positive, the effects of consumer regiocentrism and regional identity seem to be less relevant in wine purchasing decisions.

The limitation of the study is that it was conducted only in two wine regions. Studying the effect of product-specific image and the effects of regional identity and consumer regiocentrism of other regional products would give more insight into the importance of studied constructs in purchasing decisions.

**Keywords:** consumer ethnocentrism, factor analysis, image, Slovenia, wine

**References**


