Determinants of Country-of-Origin Evaluations

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Two experiments examined the factors that influence and the psychological processes that underlie country-of-origin evaluations. Subjects received attribute information that was either condensed in a single product or dispersed across several products manufactured in a country with relatively unfavorable associations. When consumers use country of origin as a basis for judgment under low motivation, or when the processing goal is to evaluate the country of origin, they focus on the country-of-origin information. Under such conditions, relevant evidence about the country of origin provided by dispersed information is likely to affect country-of-origin evaluations. In contrast, if consumers do not focus on the country of origin, such as under high motivation, or if their processing goal directs their attention away from country-of-origin information, any evidence about the country of origin is less likely to be utilized in their judgments. Findings from two experiments are consistent with this theorizing and highlight the central role of motivational intensity and direction in moderating the effect of information type on country-of-origin evaluations.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The Effect of Processing Motivation on Country-of-Origin Evaluations

The dual process models of persuasion, the elaboration likelihood model (Petty and Cacioppo 1979) and the heuristic-systematic model (Chaiken 1980), identify the cognitive processes involved in accepting a persuasive message. These models distinguish between two modes of processing on the route to persuasion, depending on a receiver's motivation and ability. Under high motivation conditions, consumers are thought to engage in a detailed processing of the persuasive message that involves thoughtful examination of relevant message arguments (e.g., attribute information). In contrast, under low motivation, a less effortful mode of processing is anticipated, and consumers are likely to form judgments in cognitively simple ways by minimizing effortful processing. One possibility is to draw upon affect associated with a general category in which the product holds membership. Alternately, perceivers can also use simple decision rules, such as that products manufactured under a well-known brand name are likely to be of good quality. Thus, under low (vs. high) motivation, subjects may try to form their judgments with a minimum effort, and country of origin offers a basis for doing so (Maheswaran 1994). In contrast, high motivation consumers are less likely to use cognitive short-cuts in forming their judgments. Country-of-origin information may be processed and considered but more as one of the product attributes instead of an overall basis for judgments.

This reasoning implies that if high motivation consumers

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are provided with both country-of-origin and attribute information, they are less likely to process attribute information in relation to the country of origin. When later asked to make a country-of-origin judgment, high motivation subjects may view this task as unrelated to the evaluation of specific products and are likely to report their judgment based on retrieving their prior evaluations. However, when motivation is low, consumers are likely to direct their attention toward the country of origin. What happens if consumers notice that new information (e.g., attribute information) is categorically unexpected? Research on person perception suggests that categorically unexpected information that cannot be situationally attributed prompts controlled and effortful processing (Kardes 1994). For example, Fiske and Neuberg (1990) argue that information that is incongruent with category expectations leads to effortful processing of person impressions. They argue that the process of impression formation follows a continuum ranging from category-based to individuating processes. They suggest that category-based impression formation will occur “to the extent that a perceiver can interpret a target’s attributes to fit a category” (p. 2). In contrast, attribute-oriented processes will occur if a perceiver cannot fit a target’s attributes to an appropriate category. Similarly, Brewer (1988) points out that if perceivers do not find a target self-relevant and involving (i.e., low motivation condition), category-based processing is likely to occur. However, if perceivers encounter unexpected information under low motivation conditions, they may either consider the target as an exception or may process the attribute information in relation to the category-based expectations, depending on the type of information. Extending this view to the country-of-origin domain, it is likely that if consumers encounter unexpected information about a target country under low motivation, either they may consider the information as an exception or they may process attribute information in relation to the country of origin, depending on the type of information.

The Effect of Information Type on Country-of-Origin Evaluations

Previous research in social psychology suggests that perceptions of groups are sometimes influenced by new information that is incongruent with expectations (Johnston and Hewstone 1992; Maurer, Park, and Rothbart 1995; Weber and Crocker 1983). In addition, the distribution of the incongruent information has been shown to determine the extent to which new information affects evaluations. Weber and Crocker (1983) suggest that perceptions of a specific group are influenced when incongruent traits are distributed across various members. They presented information that consisted of congruent, incongruent, and irrelevant behaviors displayed by group members. The incongruent information was either condensed in describing a few group members or dispersed across several group members. In the condensed condition, only a small subset of group members displayed all incongruent behaviors. For example, only two members in a group of six displayed incongruent behaviors, while others did not exhibit any incongruent behavior. In the dispersed condition, incongruent information was distributed across all members so that each one of them slightly disconfirmed the expectations. Specifically, each member displayed one incongruent behavior. This study showed that perceptions of the group were more likely to be affected when incongruent information was dispersed across several group members. When incongruent information was condensed in a few group members, subjects maintained their evaluations by regarding these group members as exceptions. Similarly, Maurer et al. (1995) showed that condensed information is less effective in affecting perceptions of the group because it is likely to be subtyped, leaving prior expectations intact. Maurer et al. (1995) found that when subjects were instructed to sort group members in relation to their prior expectations, disconfirming members (i.e., those described with several incongruent attributes) were subtyped. Such subtyping led subjects to perceive disconfirmers as highly atypical and confirmers as very typical of the group. Hence, the group perceptions were not affected despite disconfirming members. While there is some evidence to suggest that condensed information may also influence evaluations, research has shown that it is more likely only when the group is homogeneous (Hewstone, Johnston, and Aird 1992). Since country-of-origin evaluations are likely to be heterogeneous with multiple products and categories, dispersed (vs. condensed) information is likely to have more impact in the country-of-origin context.

In sum, we expect that incongruent attribute information condensed in one product may not provide compelling evidence to evaluate the country of origin, since country-of-origin perceptions reflect the country’s reputation for producing high- or low-quality products in general. Because dispersed information will provide several examples, it can be perceived as more relevant than condensed information to evaluate the country of origin. Thus, we suggest that dispersed information would lead to more favorable country-of-origin evaluations than condensed information. More important, this research proposes that the effect of information type on country-of-origin evaluations will be evidenced only under low motivation. As noted earlier, because the focus of the high motivation subjects is on using the attribute information to judge the products, the country of origin will not be considered as a general basis for evaluations, and subjects are less likely to relate attribute information to the country of origin. They are likely to retrieve their prior evaluations when later asked to make a country-of-origin judgment under high motivation conditions. If this expectation were true, then country-of-origin evaluations under high motivation should not be different than those reported in a no-treatment control group. In contrast, when motivation is low, consumers are likely to direct their attention toward the country of origin. Whereas condensed information can be considered an exception, dispersed information, because it provides relevant evidence, can influ-
ence country-of-origin evaluations under low motivation. This premise is consistent with research in social psychology which suggests that information that is incongruent with category expectations leads to effortless processing of person impressions (Brewer 1988; Fiske and Neuberg 1990). Therefore, we expect a significant interaction effect between motivation and information type such that:

**H1a:** When motivation is low, country-of-origin evaluations will be more favorable in response to dispersed than condensed information and no-information control group.

**H1b:** When motivation is high, country-of-origin evaluations will not vary as a function of information type and will not be different than no-information control group.

The process issues are examined by using two sets of measures. First, cognitive responses are obtained to understand the nature of the elaboration. Consumers are expected to focus on the country of origin under low motivation. Under high motivation, the country of origin would be relatively less accessible, and subjects are likely to focus on the attributes. Therefore, they are likely to generate more country-of-origin-related thoughts under low than high motivation. When motivation is low, these thoughts are expected to be more favorable in the dispersed (vs. condensed) condition, which provides several favorable examples relevant for country-of-origin evaluation. When motivation is high, country-of-origin-related thoughts are likely to be minimal and, thus, information type would not influence the valence of these thoughts.

**H2a:** More country-of-origin-related thoughts will be generated under low than high motivation.

**H2b:** When motivation is low, country-of-origin-related thoughts will be more favorable in response to dispersed than condensed information.

**H2c:** When motivation is high, the valence of country-of-origin related thoughts will not vary as a function of information type.

Second, the extent to which the elaboration is guided by the relevance of the information was examined by subjects' perceptions of the usefulness and relevance of the information in evaluating the country of origin. We anticipated that the elaboration of the country-of-origin information is more likely when the information is perceived to be relevant to the evaluation of the country of origin. Dispersed information, since it provides multiple instances of information incongruent with prior country-of-origin perceptions, is likely to provide more relevant evidence than condensed information. We also expected that the relevance of dispersed information would be pronounced only under low motivation when consumers focus on the country of origin.

**H3:** Information will be rated as more relevant only when it is dispersed and motivation is low.

### EXPERIMENT 1

**Method**

*Pretests.* Several pretests were conducted to choose the country of origin and the products featured in the message. Electronic products made in South Korea and Taiwan were determined to have unfavorable associations based on a series of pretests using multiple groups. For example, in the first pretest, subjects rated the favorability of electronic products manufactured in different countries on a seven-point scale \((n = 35)\). South Korea \((M = 3.72)\) and Taiwan \((M = 3.80)\) were among the least favorable countries. In contrast, Japan \((M = 6.34)\) and Germany \((M = 5.92)\) had more favorable associations. In another pretest, subjects listed their thoughts about electronic products manufactured in South Korea and Taiwan \((n = 43)\) and mostly unfavorable thoughts were obtained (87 percent and 82 percent, respectively).

The products were chosen based on two pretests, which suggested that subjects were familiar with the variety of electronic products manufactured in South Korea and Taiwan. For example, in one of the pretests \((n = 29)\), subjects were provided with a list of electronic products and were asked to indicate the probability that these electronic products were manufactured in South Korea or Taiwan. The mean ratings for the products included in the stimuli (e.g., TV set, VCR, stereo system) were between 78 percent and 95 percent. Therefore, experiments 1 and 2 featured Taiwan as the target country of origin.\(^1\)

*Subjects.* One hundred and twenty-five undergraduates received partial course credit for participation. They participated in small group sessions and were randomly assigned to conditions in a 2 (motivation: high or low) × 3 (information type: condensed, dispersed, or no-information) between-subjects design.

*Procedure.* Subjects were told that a major electronics retailer wants to market a new line of electronic products and that they would read some information about this new line. They were also told that the target products were evaluated by an independent agency along with a representative sample of other products on the market. Next subjects read instructions that conveyed motivation manipulation, after which they learned that a well-known Taiwanese company in Taiwan manufactured the products. To minimize the possibility of making the country of origin salient, country-of-origin information was conveyed with price and warranty information. Subjects were told that the products were all in the same price range and had a one-year warranty. Then, on the next page, they read attribute information that was either condensed in a single product or dispersed across three products. After they read attribute information at their own pace they placed the information sheet aside and completed the dependent measures.

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\(^1\) We conducted a follow-up study (described in n. 2 below) that featured South Korea as the target country of origin.
Independent Variables

Motivation. The cover page of the questionnaire manipulated motivation by varying the personal relevance/importance of the decision task (Haugtvedt and Wegener 1994; Maheswaran and Chaiken 1991). High motivation subjects learned that a major local retailer was surveying small samples of consumers in their area to assess their reactions to a new line of electronic products. They were told that their opinions were very important and would weigh heavily in the decision to market the products. They also learned that the products would soon be available in their area. Low motivation subjects learned that a retailer in another area was surveying large samples of consumers across different geographical locations. They were told that their individual opinions were not important as they would be averaged with those of several other respondents. They also learned that the products would soon be available in another area.

Information Type. As noted earlier, based on Weber and Crocker (1983), two versions of information—condensed and dispersed—were presented. In both condensed and dispersed conditions, subjects read information about the same set of six attributes. These attributes were selected in a pretest in which subjects listed features that they believed were important in buying electronic products or a VCR. Specifically, the following six attributes were included in the message: picture quality, sound quality, remote control, design, ease of use, and reliability. Attribute information was featured as a comparison with a representative sample of products in the market and indicated that the target products were superior to the competition. Each attribute was described by three or four sentences that were adapted from several electronic product advertisements and Consumer Reports descriptions.

In the condensed condition, a single product (VCR) was described by a set of six attributes. In the dispersed condition, three different products (a VCR, a stereo system, and a TV set) were described with two attributes, each from the same set of six attributes. Specifically, in the dispersed condition, three products were associated with the following attributes listed in parentheses: VCR (picture quality and sound quality), stereo system (remote control and design), and TV set (reliability and ease of use). For example, in the condensed condition, the design feature read: “Simplicity is often the best policy when it comes to product design. This principle is clearly embraced by the VCR S-150. This VCR has aesthetically pleasing finish and overall appearance. It is rated better than many other products tested.” In the dispersed condition, subjects read the same attribute information but the information pertained to a stereo system. Therefore, “the VCR S-150” was replaced by “the Stereo System B-23” in the description (see the Appendix for complete message used in experiment 1). Subjects in the no-information control condition first read the instructions, which included motivation manipulation. Then, they responded to some dependent measures without reading attribute information.

In order to render equivalence between dispersed and condensed information conditions, we matched the products to the attributes such that the importance of an attribute would be similar for the corresponding products in both dispersed and condensed conditions. These attribute importance ratings were assessed in a pretest in which subjects were asked to indicate the importance of attributes in buying different electronic products. For example, the importance of design was 5.88 for a VCR and 5.68 for a stereo system (on a seven-point scale). Similarly, the importance ratings for reliability were 6.28 for a VCR and 6.45 for a TV set.

Dependent Variables

All dependent variables, except for cognitive responses, were assessed using scales anchored by 1 and 7. First, cognitive responses were elicited. Then, subjects indicated their evaluations of and beliefs about Taiwanese electronic products. To disguise the purpose of the experiment, we also measured subjects’ attitudes toward the target products. Since the focus of this research is on country-of-origin evaluations, we report only country-of-origin findings. After indicating their country-of-origin and product evaluations, subjects responded to manipulation and confound check questions.

Cognitive Responses. Subjects were given three minutes to list any thoughts that came to their minds while reading the material. Cognitive responses were collected before subjects made their country-of-origin evaluations to avoid directing subjects’ attention to the country of origin. Such a focus could have cued the subjects to write down country-of-origin-related thoughts even if they did not focus on the country of origin. Two independent raters categorized these thoughts as country-of-origin-related or attribute-related (C, A) and as positive, negative, or neutral (+, −, 0). Interrater agreement was 93 percent and the discrepancies were resolved by discussion. Some examples are: “Taiwan has become a quality leader in electronics” (C+), “My TV is made in Taiwan” (C0), “I don’t think electronic products from Taiwan are high quality” (C−), “The VCR has excellent sound quality” (A+), “I don’t like simple designs” (A−), “How much does it cost?” (A0). A small number of thoughts could not be classified as either country-of-origin-related or attribute-related (e.g., “I liked these products”). No significant effects emerged on these simple evaluative thoughts (F < 1). In addition, no significant effects emerged on unrelated thoughts.

Evaluations. Subjects evaluated the country of origin on three seven-point scales anchored by “positive” and “negative,” “not at all favorable” and “very favorable,” and “good” and “bad.” These items were averaged to form an evaluation index (α = .91).

Beliefs. Belief measures were adapted from Weber and Crocker (1983). Subjects rated the extent to which the attributes depicted (e.g., high picture quality, high sound quality, etc.) in the message were characteristic of Taiwanese
TABLE 1

MEANS (STANDARD DEVIATIONS) OF EVALUATIONS AND COGNITIVE RESPONSES IN EXPERIMENT 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High motivation</th>
<th>Low motivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dispersed</td>
<td>Condensed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluations</td>
<td>4.31 (.72)</td>
<td>4.11 (.75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs</td>
<td>4.29 (.80)</td>
<td>4.19 (.64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information relevance</td>
<td>4.01 (.55)</td>
<td>4.21 (.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total thoughts</td>
<td>3.12 (.85)</td>
<td>3.41 (.66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COO-related thoughts</td>
<td>.38 (.50)</td>
<td>.46 (.59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribute-related thoughts</td>
<td>2.58 (.77)</td>
<td>2.68 (.78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCT</td>
<td>−.13 (.54)</td>
<td>−.09 (.50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VAT</td>
<td>1.54 (.93)</td>
<td>1.77 (.92)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.—COO = country of origin; VCT = valenced index of country-of-origin-related thoughts; VAT = valenced index of attribute-related thoughts.

Results

The evaluations were analyzed using a 2 (motivation: high or low) × 3 (information type: dispersed, condensed, or no-information) between-subjects ANOVA. Other dependent variables (manipulation and confound checks, information relevance index, and cognitive responses) were analyzed using a 2 (motivation: high or low) × 2 (information type: dispersed or condensed) between-subjects ANOVA. No differential effects were observed on gender, age, and nationality as covariates.

Manipulation and Confound Checks. An ANOVA on the motivation index revealed only a main effect of motivation (F(1, 85) = 4.49, p < .05). High (vs. low) motivation subjects reported greater interest in the material (Ms = 4.63 vs. 4.15, respectively). Separate ANOVAs on the message valence, believability, argument strength, and congruence indices revealed no effects (ps > .15), indicating that experimental manipulations did not induce differential message perceptions.

Evaluations. An ANOVA on the evaluation index yielded a significant effect of information type (F(1, 119) = 9.39, p < .001) and motivation (F(1, 119) = 3.93, p < .001). More important, this main effect was qualified by an interaction of information type with motivation (F(1, 119) = 4.13, p < .05). The means and standard deviations of the dependent measures as a function of experimental manipulations are presented in Table 1.

Consistent with Hypothesis 1a, the simple effects test revealed that when motivation was low, subjects evaluated Taiwanese products in general more favorably in response to dispersed information (vs. condensed: Ms = 5.05 vs. 4.26, respectively; F(1, 119) = 3.95, p < .001). In addition, under low motivation, country-of-origin evaluations were more favorable relative to the no-information control group only when information was dispersed (Ms = 5.05 vs. 3.87, respectively; F(1, 119) = 24.74, p < .001). Consistent with Hypothesis 1b, when motivation was high, information type had no effect on evaluations, and evaluations in response
to dispersed and condensed information were not different than those reported in no-information control group ($M_S = 4.31$ vs. $4.11$ vs. $4.06$, respectively; $F < 1$). Analyses based on the belief measures indicated a similar pattern of results, and the means are presented in Table 1.

**Cognitive Responses.** An ANOVA on the total number of thoughts yielded no significant effects ($M = 3.15$; $p > .17$). While it may be intuitive to anticipate differences in total number of thoughts under high and low motivation conditions, several studies documented that the critical difference should be on the type of thoughts that represents the nature of elaboration (Eagly and Chaiken 1993). Consistent with previous research and Hypothesis 2a, low (vs. high) motivation subjects generated more country-of-origin thoughts, indicating that subjects are more likely to focus on country of origin under low (vs. high) motivation ($M_S = 0.70$ vs. $0.41$, respectively; $F(1, 85) = 6.30$, $p < .01$). In contrast, an ANOVA on the number of attribute-related thoughts indicated that high (vs. low) motivation subjects generated more attribute-related thoughts ($M_S = 2.63$ vs. $1.74$, respectively; $F(1, 85) = 22.28$, $p < .001$).

An ANOVA on the valenced index of country-of-origin-related thoughts (VCT) revealed a main effect of motivation ($F(1, 85) = 4.48$, $p < .05$) and a two-way interaction between information type and motivation ($F(1, 85) = 4.62$, $p < .05$). Consistent with Hypothesis 2b, the simple effects test indicated that in low motivation conditions, more favorable country-of-origin-related thoughts were generated in response to dispersed (vs. condensed) information ($M_S = .41$ vs. $-.10$, respectively; $F(1, 85) = 8.06$, $p < .01$). In contrast, consistent with Hypothesis 2c, the VCT did not vary as a function of information type under high motivation ($M_S = -.13$ vs. $-.09$, respectively; $F < 1$).

**Information relevance.** An ANOVA on the information relevance index revealed a main effect motivation ($F(1, 85) = 6.05$, $p < .05$). In addition, the interaction of motivation × information type ($F(1, 85) = 5.33$, $p < .05$) was also significant. Consistent with Hypothesis 3, simple effects test indicated that dispersed information was rated more relevant under low (vs. high) motivation ($M_S = 4.67$ vs. $4.01$, respectively; $F(1, 85) = 11.21$, $p < .001$). Moreover, within low motivation, dispersed information was perceived as more relevant than condensed information ($M_S = 4.67$ vs. $4.22$, respectively; $F(1, 85) = 5.12$, $p < .05$). Also consistent with Hypothesis 3, relevance of information did not vary as a function of information type under high motivation ($M_S = 4.01$ vs. $4.21$, respectively; $p > .27$).

**Discussion**

The evaluations indicated that country-of-origin perceptions were more favorable under low (vs. high) motivation when the information is dispersed across several of the country's products. We proposed that when motivation is high, consumers engage in effortful attribute-based processing. They are less likely to use country-of-origin information as a basis for judgments. When later asked to make a country-of-origin judgment, subjects under high motivation view this task as unrelated to the evaluation of specific products and are likely to report their judgment based on retrieving their prior evaluations. Consistent with this theorizing, we found that country-of-origin evaluations under high motivation were not different from the no-treatment control. When motivation is low, consumers are likely to form their judgments with a minimum effort, and country-of-origin information offers a basis for doing so. Consequently, consumers are likely to direct their focus of attention on the country of origin under low motivation. However, if they are exposed to dispersed information, which provides relevant information about the country of origin, they are likely to form more favorable evaluations. Consistent with this premise, we found that under low motivation country-of-origin evaluations were more favorable in response to dispersed than condensed information and relative to the no-treatment control group.

An issue that emerged from this research needs further attention. The premise that the low motivation subjects focused on the country of origin was somewhat speculative. Processing focus was only inferred from the pattern of responses on evaluations and cognitive responses. Such an inference may be more compelling if consumers' processing focus was explicitly manipulated. Experiment 2 was designed to examine our processing focus interpretation.

**EXPERIMENT 2**

Hypotheses

Experiment 2 featured a 2 (processing goal) × 2 (information type) between-subjects design with a single control group to address the premise that when subjects focus on

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6In this study, cognitive responses were measured prior to evaluations. This raises the question of whether such a measurement could have influenced subsequent evaluations. In addition, evaluations were measured immediately after exposure to the attribute information. Such immediate measurement precludes any inferences about the persistence of evaluations. To examine these issues, experiment 1 was replicated with three changes. First, we administered evaluations without cognitive responses. Second, for half of the subjects, we measured evaluations after the subjects performed a filler task. Third, we used a different country of origin (i.e., South Korea). The pattern of evaluations was consistent with that in experiment 1. Country-of-origin evaluations were more favorable in the low-motivation-dispersed condition. The absence of an order of measurement effect on the cognitive responses is consistent with past findings that suggest that the pattern of evaluations does not vary as a function of order of measurement and that the order of measurement needs to be considered in relation to the research objectives (Cacioppo, Harkins, and Petty 1981; Meyers-Levy and Pernachio 1996; Petty, Wells, and Brock 1976). We replicated experiment 1 incorporating a delayed condition within the same experimental session to avoid the attrition likely to occur in two separate sessions. To that extent, our replication findings speak more to short time delays rather than to enduring long-term effects.
the country of origin, they are more likely to elaborate on relevant information, thereby leading to more favorable evaluations of the country of origin. Two processing goals were induced. Subjects were instructed to evaluate either the country-of-origin or the attribute information.

New information is likely to affect country-of-origin evaluations when consumers focus on the country of origin and elaborate on their beliefs. One of the factors that directly induces a focus on the country of origin information is consumers' processing goals. Past research indicates that consumers may have different processing goals when attending to persuasive messages, and these goals direct their attention to different parts of the message (Pettty and Cacioppo 1986; Shavitt et al. 1994). For example, consumers were shown to focus on the peripheral features (vs. attribute information) of the ads when their processing goal was to evaluate the advertisement (vs. product; MacKenzie and Spreng 1992). In experiment 2, subjects were asked to evaluate either the country of origin or the attributes of the product(s).

Subjects in both processing goal conditions received one of two types of information (i.e., condensed and dispersed). We expect that subjects evaluating the country of origin (vs. attributes) are more likely to focus on the country of origin and elaborate on the message in relation to their prior expectations about the country of origin. As in experiment 1, we expect that more favorable evaluations of the country of origin will be obtained in response to dispersed information than to condensed information.

H4a: When the processing goal is country-of-origin evaluation, more favorable country-of-origin evaluations will be obtained in response to dispersed than condensed information and no-information control group.

H4b: When the processing goal is attribute evaluation, country-of-origin evaluations will not vary as a function of information type and will not be different than the no-information control group.

Cognitive Responses

Under the country-of-origin (vs. attribute) evaluation goal, more country-of-origin-related thoughts are anticipated. Consistent with experiment 1, dispersed (vs. condensed) information is expected to affect the valence of elaboration. When the information is dispersed across products (vs. condensed), more favorable country-of-origin thoughts will be generated.

H5a: More country-of-origin-related thoughts will be generated when the processing goal is country-of-origin evaluation than attribute evaluation.

H5b: When the processing goal is country-of-origin evaluation, more favorable country-of-origin-related thoughts will be obtained in response to dispersed than condensed information.

H5c: When the processing goal is attribute evaluation, the valence of country-of-origin-related thoughts will not vary as a function of information type.

Method

One hundred and one undergraduates, both males and females, received partial course credit for participation. They participated in small group sessions and were randomly assigned to conditions in a 2 (processing goal: country-of-origin or attribute evaluation) × 2 (information type: condensed or dispersed) between-subjects design with a control group that did not receive any information. The procedures were similar to those in experiment 1. Briefly, subjects first read the instructions that contained processing goal manipulation and learned that a well-known Taiwanese company in Taiwan manufactured the products. Then, they read the attribute information and filled out a questionnaire that assessed the dependent measures.

Independent Variables

Processing Goal. The cover sheet of the experimental booklet manipulated the processing goal of the subjects. In the attribute evaluation condition, subjects were informed that the objective of the research was to gain insight into how consumers evaluate attributes of different electronic products and that their task was to read the information and form an evaluation of the attributes (MacKenzie and Spreng 1992). In the country-of-origin evaluation condition, subjects were told that the objective of the research was to gain insight into how consumers evaluate different countries and that their task was to read the information and form an evaluation of the country featured in the message.

Information Type. The condensed and dispersed information conditions, as well as the presentation format, were similar to those in experiment 1. To recapitulate, in the condensed condition, a single product (VCR) was described by the set of six attributes. In the dispersed condition, three different products (a VCR, a stereo system, and a TV set) were described with two attributes, each from the same set of six attributes.

Dependent Variables

All dependent measures were similar to those in experiment 1. In addition, as a manipulation check, subjects indicated the extent to which they focused on and evaluated the attributes versus the country of origin while reading the information on two seven-point scales anchored by 1 (focused on/evaluated the attributes) and 7 (focused on/evaluated the country of origin). These items were averaged to form a processing goal index ($r = .81$).
RESULTS

The evaluations were analyzed using a 2 (processing goal) \times 2 (information type) between-subjects ANOVA with a single control group, as recommended by Winer (1971). The experimental groups were contrasted with the control group consistent with the approach used by Dunnett (1955). Other measures were analyzed using a 2 (motivation) \times 2 (information type) between-subjects ANOVA. No systematic effects were observed with gender, age, and nationality as covariates.

Manipulation and Confound Checks. An ANOVA on the processing goal index revealed only a main effect of processing goal (F(1, 77) = 33.10, p < .001). Subjects in the country-of-origin (vs. attribute) evaluation condition reported increased focus on the country of origin (Ms = 4.99 vs. 3.73, respectively). Separate ANOVAs on the message believability (a = .77), valence (r = .82), strength (a = .83), and congruity (a = .75) indices revealed no significant effects (ps > .35).

Evaluations. An ANOVA on the evaluation index (a = .91) revealed a main effect of information type (F(1, 96) = 12.00, p < .001) such that subjects expressed more favorable attitudes in response to dispersed information (vs. condensed; Ms = 4.59 vs. 3.92, respectively). More important, this main effect was qualified by an interaction of information type and processing goal (F(1, 96) = 5.67, p < .05). The means and standard deviations are presented in Table 2.

Consistent with Hypothesis 4a (the simple effects test revealed under the country-of-origin goal), subjects evaluated Taiwanese electronic products in general more favorably when they were exposed to the dispersed information (vs. condensed; Ms = 4.91 vs. 3.80; F(1, 96) = 17.29, p < .001). The experimental groups were contrasted with the control group using Dunnett's t-test. Consistent with Hypothesis 4a, country-of-origin evaluations were more favorable under country-of-origin evaluation condition in response to dispersed (vs. control; Ms = 4.91 vs. 3.83, respectively; t(2, 96) = 4.05, p < .001). However, country-of-origin evaluations in response to condensed information under country-of-origin evaluation were not different than those in the control condition (Ms = 3.80 vs. 3.83, respectively; t(2, 96) < 1). In contrast, consistent with Hypothesis 4b, subjects' country-of-origin evaluations did not vary as a function of information type under attribute evaluation condition (Ms = 4.25 vs. 4.05, respectively; F < 1) and evaluations in experimental groups were not different than those reported in the no-information control group (ps > .10). Analyses based on the belief measures indicated a similar pattern of results, and the means are presented in Table 2.

Cognitive Responses. An ANOVA on the total number of thoughts yielded no significant effects (M = 3.80; p > .15). An ANOVA on the attribute-related thoughts indicated that subjects under the attribute evaluation condition listed more attribute-related thoughts than those under the country-of-origin evaluation condition (Ms = 2.68 vs. 2.12, respectively; F(1, 77) = 5.65, p < .001). No other effects were significant on this measure (Fs < 1).

An ANOVA on country-of-origin-related thoughts indicated a significant effect of processing goal (F(1, 77) = 28.73, p < .001). Consistent with Hypothesis 5a, subjects listed more country-of-origin-related thoughts when they had the country-of-origin evaluation goal (vs. the attribute evaluation goal; Ms = 1.07 vs. 0.43, respectively). However, the main effect of information type was also significant (F(1, 77) = 4.05, p < .05), indicating that more country-of-origin-related thoughts were listed in response to dispersed (vs. condensed information; Ms = 0.88 vs. 0.63). In addition, the interaction of processing goal and information type was also significant (F(1, 77) = 10.68, p < .01). The simple effects test showed that the number of country-of-origin-related thoughts did not differ as a function of information type under attribute evaluation condition (Ms = 0.35 vs. 0.50, respectively; F < 1). In contrast, information type had a significant effect on the number of country-of-origin-related thoughts under the country-of-origin evaluation goal (F(1, 77) = 14.81, p < .001). Subjects in the country-of-origin evaluation condition generated more country-of-origin-related thoughts when the information was dispersed (vs. condensed; Ms = 1.38 vs. 0.75, respectively). These findings parallel the pattern of evaluations and suggest that subjects elaborated on the country of origin more in response to dispersed (vs. condensed) information under the country-of-origin evaluation condition.

Next, we examined the impact of processing goal and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MEANS (STANDARD DEVIATIONS) OF EVALUATIONS AND COGNITIVE RESPONSES IN EXPERIMENT 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribute evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dispersed</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beliefs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total thoughts</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COC-related</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attribute-related</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VCT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VAT</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** COO = country of origin; VCT = valenced index of country-of-origin-related thoughts; VAT = valenced index of attribute-related thoughts.
information type on the valenced index of country-of-origin-related thoughts (VCT). An ANOVA on the VCT revealed
two main effects. Subjects generated more favorable country-of-origin-related thoughts under country-of-origin (vs.
attribute) evaluation (Ms = 0.12 vs. −0.23; F(1, 77) = 6.13, p < .05) and in response to dispersed information (vs.
condensed; Ms = 0.20 vs. −0.30, respectively; F(1, 77) = 12.84, p < .001). More important, the interaction of information
type and processing goal was significant (F(1, 77) = 10.33, p < .01). The simple effects test showed that under the at-
tribute evaluation condition, there was no difference among the different types of information (Ms = −.20 vs. −.25,
respectively; F < 1). In contrast, when subjects evaluated the country of origin, more favorable country-of-origin-re-
lated thoughts were listed in response to dispersed (vs. condensed) information (F(1, 77) = 23.80, p < .001). Consistent
with Hypothesis 5b, country-of-origin-related thoughts were more favorable in response to dispersed information (vs.
condensed; Ms = 0.57 vs. −.35, respectively).

Discussion

The findings under the country-of-origin evaluation condition suggest that country-of-origin evaluations are more
likely to be favorable when consumers focus on the country of origin and when the information is dispersed across sev-
eral of the country’s products.

In experiment 2, we directly asked subjects to evaluate the country of origin. It is possible to argue that subjects
guessed the purpose of the study and responded accordingly. However, if this explanation were plausible, subjects should
have more favorable evaluations in response to both dis-
persed and condensed information. Inconsistent with a de-
mand artifact interpretation, more favorable evaluations were obtained only in response to dispersed information
under the country-of-origin evaluation condition.

The findings from the attribute evaluation condition sug-
gest that when consumers focused on the attribute informa-
tion, country-of-origin information was not highly ac-
cessible and was less likely to be related to the new
information. Evaluations in response to condensed informa-
tion were not different from those in the no-information control condition, even when consumers focused on the
country of origin. These findings suggest that multiple in-
stances are needed for influencing country-of-origin eval-
uations. Thus, it appears that in addition to making the coun-
try of origin salient, the appropriate information format (i.e.,
dispersed information) is required to have an impact on
country-of-origin evaluations.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

This research examined how country-of-origin evaluations are influenced in response to new information, and it
identified factors that affect country-of-origin perceptions. We showed that motivation, processing goals, and infor-
mation type interact to affect country-of-origin evaluations.

Both experiments taken together showed that when con-
msumers use country of origin as a basis for judgment under
low motivation or when the processing goal is to evaluate
the country of origin, they focus on the country of origin.
Under such conditions, compelling evidence about the coun-
try of origin provided by dispersed information is likely to
affect country-of-origin evaluations. In contrast, if consum-
ers do not focus on the country of origin, such as under
high motivation, or if their processing goal directs their
attention away from country-of-origin information, any evi-
dence about the country of origin is not likely to be utilized
in their judgments. In general, cognitive responses showed
that when the country of origin is salient and consumers
find the new information relevant to their judgment, more
favorable country-of-origin thoughts are listed, resulting in
more favorable evaluations of the country of origin.

This research makes several contributions to the coun-
try-of-origin literature. While several studies have examined the effect of the country of origin on product evaluations,
very little theory-based research has examined the determinants of country-of-origin evaluation (Peterson and Jolibert 1995).
Our research provides an information processing theory
based explanation for when and how new information affects
country-of-origin evaluations. Specifically, a systematic ex-
amination of the moderating variables has been lacking. We
identified information type and processing motive as factors
that influence country-of-origin evaluations. More impor-
tant, this research implicated the central role of processing
motive in affecting country-of-origin evaluations. Several
studies have demonstrated the effect of the intensity of mo-
tivation on processing and evaluations (Maheswaran and Chaiken 1991). In this study, we extend these findings and
suggest that in addition to the intensity of motivation, the
direction of motivation may be a precondition for deter-
mining the effect of information type on country-of-origin
evaluations.

Country-of-origin literature features several findings that
document interesting outcomes related to the use of country
of origin in consumer evaluations. However, systematic the-
ory-based research that provides an effective framework for
exploring the processes that underlie country-of-origin ef-
fects has been lacking. We propose the dual processing
framework as a means to integrate the various findings in
this area. Another significant addition to the country-of-
origin literature is the insights provided on the process issues
related to the utilization of new information in relation to
the country of origin. Current research has examined how
consumers use existing information about country of origin
in their subsequent evaluations of new products from the
target country. In this research, we showed that new infor-
mation may influence country-of-origin evaluations when
consumers focus on the country of origin. Low motivation
was shown to be a natural condition under which country
of origin is likely to be the focus of attention. High moti-
vation subjects did not think about country of origin and
did not relate attribute information to their prior perceptions
of country of origin. However, in the low motivation con-
ditions, subjects were presented information in the dispersed condition in such a way that it could not be dismissed as an exception. Since categorically unexpected information cannot be situationally attributed prompts controlled and effortful processing (Kardes 1994), the distribution of information in the low motivation condition motivated more effortful processing.

Several interesting extensions for future research can be envisaged. One interesting issue that emerged from our research is the finding that in experiment 1, high motivation subjects did not evaluate the country-of-origin information. One likely explanation is that under high motivation, the country of origin was not salient, and hence the relevant information provided in the dispersed condition was ignored. However, if the subjects were made to note the country of origin under high motivation, then they were likely to process the new information in relation to the country of origin. One induction that may be used to examine this possibility is priming. It is likely that when consumers are primed about country of origin in general, they may process the attribute information in relation to the target country of origin under high motivation. Another issue relates to the durability of country-of-origin evaluations. While the two experiments converged in demonstrating a shift in evaluations within the experimental time period, the extent to which this effect is enduring was not documented. More investigation is needed to assess whether the effects shown in this research are robust over time. Also, the effects under low motivation are of particular interest since prior research suggests that attitude change under low motivation may be less enduring (Eagly and Chaiken 1993).

In this research, it appears that subjects processed new information in an objective manner and incorporated relevant information in their evaluations. However, in other contexts, subjects may not be amenable to new information or may choose to engage in selective processing of new information. For example, highly ethnocentric consumers may be less likely to process new information that is counter to their home-country-related beliefs in an objective manner. Recent research addressing biased processes suggests that preference-inconsistent information is counterargued more and influences evaluations differently than preference-consistent information (Jain and Maheswaran, 2000). More research is needed to examine such biases in processing new information in the country-of-origin context. Finally, some issues related to the measurement also warrant future consideration. Our inferences regarding the effect of information type on country-of-origin evaluations are based on comparisons with the control group. Specific changes were not measured at the individual level either by using pre- and postmeasures or by using a longitudinal design. It may be desirable to measure changes at the individual level to corroborate the results of this research.

From a managerial perspective, our findings also provide important guidelines to effectively manage country-of-origin effects. The processing focus related findings suggest that communication strategies should direct consumers’ attention to the country of origin to be effective. Recently, several countries have attempted to influence consumers’ and investors’ perceptions to increase foreign investment and to improve their performance in international markets. This research suggests that this can be accomplished by featuring several good examples under conditions that foster a focus on the country of origin.

APPENDIX

NEW PRODUCT STUDY

After motivation manipulation, subjects read the following country-of-origin information along with price and warranty.

A well-known Taiwanese company in Taiwan manufactures the target products. All the products tested are in the same price range and have a one-year warranty.

On the next page, they read the following attribute information either in a dispersed or condensed format.

CONDENSED INFORMATION

The VCR S-150 delivers a high quality picture; richer in color saturation and clearer than many leading brands. This is partly because the S-150 transmits about 250 lines of resolution ensuring a high quality picture. Many other products on the market deliver about 200 lines resulting in a perceptible loss of detail.

The VCR S-150 offers excellent stereo sound reproduction due to a special process. Rotating audio heads lay down diagonal audio tracks across the width of the tape under the video. This process produces a high quality sound superior to several models tested.

The VCR S-150 has a well-designed, full-function remote. It is well-proportioned, nicely balanced, and comfortable to hold. The glow-in-the-dark buttons are logically laid out and easy to use. Although many other VCRs come with a remote, their remotes suffer from a confusing button layout and a poor contrast between the button labels and the background.

Simplicity is often the best policy when it comes to product design. This principle is clearly embraced by the VCR S-150. This VCR has aesthetically pleasing finish and an overall appearance. It is rated better than many other products tested.

According to Consumer Reports’ annual questionnaire, 26% of the VCRs bought from 1992 to 1998 have needed repair at least once. The VCR S-150 has been among the least troublesome brands.

The VCR-S150 was also rated high in terms of ease of
operation. It has special features that make operation significantly easier and intuitive. Its manual is comprehensive to make it easier to find any information one may need.

DISPERSED INFORMATION

The VCR S-150 delivers a high quality picture; richer in color saturation and clearer than many leading brands. This is partly because the S-150 transmits about 250 lines of resolution ensuring a high quality picture. Many other products on the market deliver about 200 lines resulting in a perceptible loss of detail.

The VCR S-150 offers excellent stereo sound reproduction due to a special process. Rotating audio heads lay down diagonal audio tracks across the width of the tape under the video. This process produces a high quality sound superior to several models tested.

The Stereo System B-23 has a well-designed, full-function remote. It is well-proportioned, nicely balanced, and comfortable to hold. The glow-in-the-dark buttons are logically laid out and easy to use. Although many other stereo systems come with a remote, their remotes suffer from a confusing button layout and a poor contrast between the button labels and the background.

Simplicity is often the best policy when it comes to product design. This principle is clearly embraced by the Stereo System B-23. This stereo system has aesthetically pleasing finish and an overall appearance. It is rated better than many other products tested.

According to Consumer Reports’ annual questionnaire, 26% of the TV sets bought from 1991 to 1997 have needed repair at least once. The TV Set T-320 has been among the least troublesome brands.

The TV Set T-320 was also rated high in terms of ease of operation. It has special features that make operation significantly easier and intuitive. Its manual is comprehensive to make it easier to find any information one may need.

SUMMARY OF THE MAJOR DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Country-of-Origin Evaluations:

Please indicate your evaluation of Taiwanese electronic products by circling the appropriate number below. Your general evaluation of Taiwanese electronic products is

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all favorable</td>
<td>Very favorable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Country-of-Origin Beliefs:

Please rate the extent to which the following attributes are characteristics of Taiwanese electronic products.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High picture quality</th>
<th>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all characteristic</td>
<td>Very characteristic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High sound quality</th>
<th>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all characteristic</td>
<td>Very characteristic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Easy to operate</th>
<th>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all characteristic</td>
<td>Very characteristic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reliable</th>
<th>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all characteristic</td>
<td>Very characteristic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nice design</th>
<th>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all characteristic</td>
<td>Very characteristic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superior remote control</th>
<th>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all characteristic</td>
<td>Very characteristic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Information Relevance

Please indicate the degree to which the information provided was relevant or irrelevant for your evaluation of Taiwanese electronic products.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Irrelevant</th>
<th>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</th>
<th>Relevant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Please indicate the degree to which the information was useful in your evaluation of Taiwanese electronic products.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The information was of no use</th>
<th>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</th>
<th>The information was of great use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Please indicate the degree to which the information provided was indicative of how good or bad Taiwanese electronic products are.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all indicative</th>
<th>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</th>
<th>Very indicative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Manipulation and Confound Checks

Please describe your perceptions of the information provided to you by answering each of the following questions. For each question please circle one number on each scale that best describes your perceptions.

In your opinion the claim made was

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all believable</th>
<th>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</th>
<th>Highly believable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all true</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td>Absolutely true</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Determinants of Country-of-Origin Evaluations

Not at all acceptable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Totally acceptable
As you read the material presented in the questionnaire, would you say that you were:
Not at all interested 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Highly interested
Not at all involved 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Highly involved
Please describe your perceptions about the strength of the arguments presented in the message. In your opinion, the message arguments were:
Very weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very strong
Not very convincing 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very convincing
Not very powerful 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very powerful
Please rate the extent to which the information portrayed the product(s) as:
Having few positive attributes 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Having many positive attributes
Having many negative attributes 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Having few negative attributes
Please rate the extent to which the information was different from your expectations:
Totally expected 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Totally unexpected
Not at all different 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very different

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——— Garry L. Wells, and Timothy C. Brock (1976), "Distraction Can Enhance or Reduce Yielding to Propaganda: