Image of Serbia and Food Production – Measurement, Determinants and Repercussions

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Abstract
Within the effects of integrated marketing communications it is possible, in addition to economic effects, to identify communication effects, which primarily relate to the image – of products, companies, but also of entire countries. It is the intensification of the activities of national branding that features as one of the approaches in the context of the efforts towards improving national competitiveness, where branding of one country is not necessarily oriented only to other countries' auditoriums but also to the auditorium within the country itself. The aim of these activities is to increase the consumption of products from a country that implement them.
However, there are authors who suggest that for the existence of preferences towards a product originating from a certain product-specific country image is more significant than the overall image of the country, while it is even possible for a negative general image of a country and positive product-specific country image to exist in parallel at a certain market. At the same time, within the model of the "hierarchy of effects" which refers to the effects of integrated marketing communications, the existence of preferences for specific product precedes the behavioral phase.
Bearing all this in mind, the subject of this paper is to explore the food product-specific image of Serbia (among the domestic auditorium) related to several food categories. In addition to measuring the level of the image, the paper researches image perception in the context of socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, as well as its impact on the frequency of consumption of domestic brands. The survey was conducted in December 2015 on a convenience sample of 100 respondents from the North and the South Bačka Districts.

Keywords
Product-specific country image, food products, Serbia.

Introduction

Within the effects of integrated marketing communications it is possible, in addition to economic effects, to identify communication effects (Salai & Grubor, 2011, p. 48), which primarily relate to the image – of products and companies, but also of entire countries. It is the intensification of the activities of national branding that features as one of the approaches in the context of the efforts of improving national competitiveness (Đokić & Đokić, 2015), where branding of one country is not necessarily oriented only to other countries'

auditoriums but also to the auditorium within the country itself. The objective of such activities is to increase the consumption of products from the country conducting them.

There are, however, authors who point out that, for the existence of preference for a product originating from a country, the product-specific country image is more important than the overall image of the country, and that it is even possible for a negative image of a country and positive product-specific country image to exist in parallel (Fan, 2006). At the same time, within the model of the "hierarchy of effects" which refers to the

effects of integrated marketing communications, the existence of preferences for specific product precedes the behavioral phase (Salai & Grubor, 2011, p. 88).

Bearing all this in mind, the subject of this paper is to explore the food product-specific image of Serbia (among the domestic auditorium) pertaining to the production of several food product categories. In addition to measuring the level of image, the paper also looks into its perception in the context of socio-demographic characteristics of respondents, and also its impact on the frequency of consumption of domestic brands. The survey was conducted in December 2015 on a convenience sample of 100 respondents from the North and the South Bačka Districts.

1. Literature overview, model generation and inference of hypotheses

As far as national branding is concerned, Đokić and Đokić (2015) point out that increasing attention is devoted to internal branding. What should be understood in this context is that Fan (2006) highlights that national branding should be realised in a manner which is close to domestic population, and that Anholt (2002), as the editor of a special issue of Journal of Brand Management devoted to national branding, places internal branding at the first place of future topics.

However, Fan (2006) points out that the concept of national branding is multidimensional and depends on the context, so that product-specific country image is rather stated as an influential factor in the consumers' choice. In this sense, as it has already been emphasized, what is pointed out is the possibility of simultaneous existence of a negative national image and positive product-specific image of a certain country.

Starting from the regional context of the above mentioned topic, Van Ittersum, Candel and Meulenberg (2003) explain that differences in preferences to products of different regions can be explained by variations in the perception of product attributes, and the consumers' attitudes to the product's region of origin. Variations in attribute perceptions are determined by differences in the product-specific image of the given region, in the way consumers perceive it. Consumers' attitudes to the region of origin affect the perception of product attributes and the product-specific image of a certain region. In relation to this, the above mentioned authors offer a scale for measuring the product-specific image of a certain region and differentiate between two factors related to it – human and natural potentials.

Bearing the above in mind, two hypotheses were set initially within the research to be conducted within this paper:

H₁: It is possible to identify the factor in the application of the measurement scale (within the domestic auditorium) of the product-specific image of Serbia pertaining to several categories of food products related to Serbia's human potential.

H₂: It is possible to identify the factor in the application of the measurement scale (within the domestic auditorium) of the product-specific image of Serbia pertaining to several categories of food products related to Serbia's natural potential.

Based on the above factors, a model was also defined which will be tested in the survey within this paper:
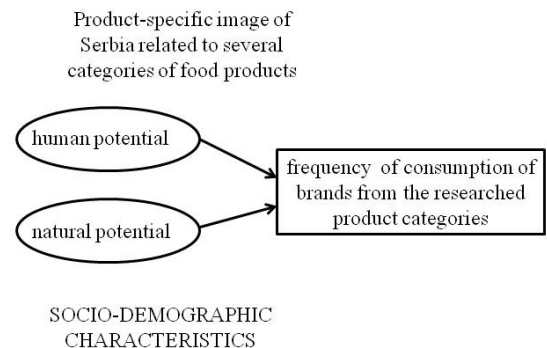

Figure 1   Set research model
Source: The authors

In addition to the above, the following hypotheses were set:

H₃: The mean score on the ungraded Likert scale for measuring the human potential of Serbia as a factor of the product-specific image of Serbia (among the domestic auditorium) in relation to several categories of food products is the closest to the 4ᵗʰ grade (the reply "I agree").

H₄: The mean score on the ungraded Likert scale for measuring the natural potential of Serbia as a factor of the product-specific image of Serbia (among the domestic auditorium) in relation to several categories of food products is the closest to the 4ᵗʰ grade (the reply "I agree").

Bearing in mind that the socio-demographic characteristics of consumers are implicitly present as the determinant of macro-level in the theories most frequently used for explaining and forecasting the behaviour of food product consumers – Theory of reasoned action and Theory of planned behaviour (Aertsens, Verbeke, Mondelaers, & Van Huylenbroeck, 2009), the following hypotheses were formulated:

H_5: The mean scores of the human potential of Serbia as a factor of Serbia's product-specific country image (among the domestic auditorium) in relation to several categories of food products are statistically significantly different between respondents of different genders.

H_6: There is a statistically significant correlation between the respondents' age and the mean score of human potential of Serbia as a factor of Serbia's product-specific country image (among the domestic auditorium) in relation to several categories of food products.

H_7: There is a statistically significant correlation between the respondents' education level and the mean score of human potential of Serbia as a factor of Serbia's product-specific country image (among the domestic auditorium) in relation to several categories of food products.

H_8: There is a statistically significant correlation between the respondents' income and the mean score of human potential of Serbia as a factor of Serbia's product-specific country image (among the domestic auditorium) in relation to several categories of food products.

H_9: The mean scores of the natural potential as a factor of Serbia's product-specific country image (among the domestic auditorium) in relation of several categories of food products are statistically significantly different between respondents of different genders.

H_{10}: There is a statistically significant correlation between the respondents' age and the mean score of natural potential of Serbia as a factor of Serbia's product-specific country image (among the domestic auditorium) in relation to several categories of food products.

H_{11}: There is a statistically significant correlation between the respondents' education level and the mean score of natural potential of Serbia as a factor of Serbia's product-specific country image (among the domestic auditorium) in relation to several categories of food products.

H_{12}: There is a statistically significant correlation between the respondents' income and the mean score of natural potential of Serbia as a

factor of Serbia's product-specific country image (among the domestic auditorium) in relation to several categories of food products.

In view of the supposed influence of the country's product-specific image for a given product on the frequency of purchase of this product, the last three hypotheses were set:

H_{13}: The human potential of Serbia as a factor of Serbia's product-specific country image (among the domestic auditorium) in relation to several categories of food products statistically significantly influences the frequency of consumption of brands from the researched product categories.

H_{14}: The natural potential of Serbia as a factor of Serbia's product-specific country image (among the domestic auditorium) in relation to several categories of food products statistically significantly influences the frequency of consumption of brands from the researched product categories.

H_{15}: The variations of the human and natural potential of Serbia as a factor of Serbia's product-specific country image (among the domestic auditorium) in relation to several categories of food products account for more than 50% variations in the frequency of consumption of brands from the researched product categories.

The following section of the paper presents assumptions, research results and comments related to the tested hypotheses.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. The questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first one gathers certain socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (the respondents' gender, age and number of years of education, and also average household income (the respondents were asked to take into account all sources of income – e.g. salaries, pensions, money received from relatives abroad, money from renting flats, etc.)).

The second section of the questionnaire offered the respondents a possibility to relate different brands from three product categories to a certain country of origin. Based on consultations with marketing experts from food industry, the following product categories were selected: fruit juice, beer, and bottled water. Moreover, both national and international brands present on the domestic market were selected.

The third section of the questionnaire was related to measuring the image of the country (to which the respondents related the offered brands) in relation to the production of the corresponding product category to which this brand belongs. Items from the scale used by Van Ittersum et al. (2003) were graded 1 to 5 on a Likert scale. The used items are shown in the section dealing with the testing of reliability and validity of the used scales. When translating the scales, back translation was used, i.e. the scales were first translated into Serbian and then back to English and compared to the originals. These two phases were performed by different experts in business English.

The fourth section of the questionnaire dealt with the frequency of consumption of brands within the three food product categories. Self-reported consumption frequency was used, which was regarded as a good predictor of actual consumption (Drewnowski & Hann, 1999). The respondents circled one of the provided numbers on a scale of 1 to 7 for two corresponding questions, with the following meanings of numbers: 1 – never; 2 – once in several months; 3 – once in several weeks; 4 – once a week; 5 – several times a week, 6 – every day; and 7 – several times a day.

Pretesting was conducted with students and did not indicate the need to reformulate the questionnaire.

2.2. Respondents

The marketing research was conducted on the territory of North Bačka and South Bačka Districts. Purposive convenience sample was used. The marketing research was conducted in December 2015. The sample consisted of 100 respondents, divided in terms of responding to questionnaires related to individual categories of food so that the questionnaire on fruit juices was replied to by 30 respondents, the questionnaire on beer by 37, and the questionnaire on bottled water by 33 respondents. It took the respondents about 10 minutes to fill in the questionnaire.

The frequency of consumption of brands from the researched categories of food products (unified by brands and categories) is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Frequency of consumption of brands from the researched categories of food products (unified by brands and categories)

Frequency of consumption	Number of respondents
Never	5
Once in several months	11
Once in several weeks	32
Once a week	10
Several times a week	26
Every day	11
Several times a day	5
TOTAL	100

Source: The authors

Furthermore, the sample comprised 49% women and 51% men. The average age of the respondent is 34.88 years (standard deviation 11.638), average number of years of education of the respondents is 14.88 years (standard deviation 2.463), while the average household income in respondents who answered this question (91% of them) is 86,769.23 dinars (standard deviation 39,428.72).

2.3. Procedures

The set criterion of accepting a particular questionnaire for data processing was relating one of the offered brands from three product categories to Serbia as the country of origin and correspondence of this correlation to the actual state. Given the fact that these criteria were met, all 100 questionnaires were included in processing, whereas replies to questions relating to brands from other countries were not taken into consideration, ranging outside the topic of this paper.

Taken the pertaining scale, its reliability was tested first, by using Cronbach's alpha, Cronbach's alpha if item deleted, and Corrected item-total correlation. The exploratory factor analysis by Maximum likelihood factor analysis and rotation method – Promax – was used for testing the validity of scales, where all the items were subject to unified testing, and it was defined that the number of factors to be extracted would be two. Before that, adequacy of conducting exploratory factor analysis was tested by Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. After that, one-dimensionality of the scale was assessed by confirmatory factor analysis with appropriate model adequacy indicators (Chi-square/df, p value of model, CFI, GFI, AGFI, SRMR, RMSEA, PCLOSE), which were compared to the recommended values given by Hu and Bentler (1999). All of the above is in compli-

ance with recommendations given by Churchill (1979), Anderson and Gerbing (1982), Danes and Mann (1984).

The human potential of Serbia as a factor of Serbia's product-specific country image (among the domestic auditorium) in relation to several food products, as well as the natural potential of Serbia as a factor of Serbia's product-specific country image (among the domestic auditorium) in relation to several food products, were then viewed in the context of socio-demographic characteristics of respondents. As regards gender (dual-level category variable), the existence of statistically significant differences was established by using the independent samples T-test. As regards the description of correlation of the two above mentioned factors of Serbia's product-specific country image (among the domestic auditorium) in relation to several categories of food products with the respondents' age, number of years of education and monthly household income of subjective and objective knowledge, Pearson's linear correlation coefficient was used.

The influences of Serbia's human and natural potential as a factor of its product-specific country image (among the domestic auditorium) in relation to several categories of food products on the frequency of consumption of brands from researched product categories were researched by using multiple linear regression.

The data were processed in SPSS and AMOS statistical packages.

3. Research results

3.1. Reliability and validity of the scale used in the questionnaire

Table 2 shows testing the reliability of the used scale (the original questionnaire used wording that referred to only one of the three product categories, and the wording "that country" was used referring to the country to which consumers associate the offered brands, i.e. Serbia in this specific case.

Table 2 Reliability of the used scale

Items	Cronbach's alpha if item deleted	Corrected item-total correlation
The country's human potential as a factor of its image in relation to the production of several categories of food products		
That country has sufficient quality of people for the production of fruit juices (or beer or bottled water).	0.849	0.662
People from that country have sufficient knowledge for the production of fruit juices (or beer or bottled water).	0.840	0.734
That country has the right people for the production of fruit juices (or beer or bottled water).	0.834	0.775
People from that country have sufficient expertise for the production of fruit juices (or beer or bottled water).	0.837	0.754
That country has sufficient tradition for the production of fruit juices (or beer or bottled water).	0.849	0.662
That country has appropriate culture for the production of fruit juices (or beer or bottled water).	0.865	0.546
That country has the right atmosphere for the production of fruit juices (or beer or bottled water).	0.880	0.423
The country's natural potential as a factor of its image in relation to the production of several categories of food products		
That country has the suitable natural environment for the production of ingredients of fruit juices (or beer or bottled water).	0.713	0.554
That country has sufficiently clean environment for the production of ingredients of fruit juices (or beer or bottled water).	0.796	0.331
That country has appropriate type of soil for the production of ingredients of fruit juices (or beer or bottled water).	0.669	0.687
That country has sufficient sun for the production of ingredients of fruit juices (or beer or bottled water).	0.693	0.608
That country has sufficient precipitations for the production of ingredients of fruit juices (or beer or bottled water).	0.723	0.527

Source: The authors

Cronbach's alpha was 0.870 for items related to the country's human potential as a factor of its product-specific country image in relation to several categories of food products, and 0.763 for items related to items to the country's natural potential as a factor of its product-specific country image in relation to several categories of food products. The possibility of increase in the value of Cronbach's alpha determined the omission of the last item from the first set of items. The value of corrected correlation of the second set of items with a total of assessed values of all items of the scale which decreases significantly in relation to the others (in accordance with: Churchill, 1979), with the possibility of notable increase in Cronbach's alpha in case of deletion of this question, has resulted in the omission of this item from further analysis.

Table 3   Validity of the used scale

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2
That country has sufficient quality of people for the production of fruit juices (or beer or bottled water).	0.717	0.072
People from that country have sufficient knowledge for the production of fruit juices (or beer or bottled water).	0.934	-0.091
That country has the right people for the production of fruit juices (or beer or bottled water).	0.888	-0.037
People from that country have sufficient expertise for the production of fruit juices (or beer or bottled water).	0.900	-0.033
That country has sufficient tradition for the production of fruit juices (or beer or bottled water).	0.428	0.343
That country has appropriate culture for the production of fruit juices (or beer or bottled water).	0.336	0.229
That country has the suitable natural environment for the production of ingredients of fruit juices (or beer or bottled water).	-0.046	0.682
That country has appropriate type of soil for the production of ingredients of fruit juices (or beer or bottled water).	-0.028	0.839
That country has sufficient sun for the production of ingredients of fruit juices (or beer or bottled water).	-0.026	0.816
That country has sufficient precipitations for the production of ingredients of fruit juices (or beer or bottled water).	0.226	0.430

Source: The authors

The results of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test of 0.786, higher than 0.6, (Kaiser, 1970; 1974) and level of significance of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity of 0.000 (Bartlett, 1954) pointed to the adequacy of conducting exploratory factor analysis.

56.894% of the total variance was explained by conducting factor analysis with set identification of two factors.

Table 3 shows the pattern matrix of all unified items.

Loadings of the 5th, 6th and 10th item (lower than the recommended 0.55 for the sample of 100 respondents – Hair, Tathan, Anderson and Black, 1998), and their loadings in both factors resulted in their omission from further analysis.

After the completion of confirmatory factor analysis and correlating residuals in accordance with recommendation of modification, model adequacy indicators were obtained which, compared to recommended values (Hu & Bentler, 1999): Chi-square/df=1.833 (less than 3 good), p model value=0.0443 (should be higher than 0.05), CFI=0.976 (higher than 0.95 – excellent), GFI=0.947 (should be higher than 0.95), AGFI=0.866 (should be higher than 0.80), SRMR=0.0553 (should be lower than 0.09), RMSEA=0.092 (acceptable if it is between 0.05 and 0.10), PCLOSE=0.132 (should be higher than 0.05) show that the obtained model, as far as almost all indicators are concerned, is adequate.

Table 4   Scale items remaining after testing reliability and validity

Items
The country's human potential as a factor of its image in relation to the production of several categories of food products
That country has sufficient quality of people for the production of fruit juices (or beer or bottled water).
People from that country have sufficient knowledge for the production of fruit juices (or beer or bottled water).
That country has the right people for the production of fruit juices (or beer or bottled water).
People from that country have sufficient expertise for the production of fruit juices (or beer or bottled water).
The country's natural potential as a factor of its image in relation to the production of several categories of food products
That country has the suitable natural environment for the production of ingredients of fruit juices (or beer or bottled water).
That country has appropriate type of soil for the production of ingredients of fruit juices (or beer or bottled water).
That country has sufficient sun for the production of ingredients of fruit juices (or beer or bottled water).

Source: The authors

Items related to the human and natural potential of Serbia as the factors of its image (among the domestic auditorium) in relation to the production of several categories of food products that remained after testing the reliability and validity are shown in Table 4.

All the remaining analyses were conducted on the above shown items.

3.2. The product-specific country image of Serbia related to food products

Table 5 shows the average of grades on a five-point Likert scale for measuring the human and natural potential of Serbia as a factor of the product-specific country image of Serbia (among the domestic auditorium) in relation to the researched categories of food products.

In both cases, the average is the closest to the 4th degree, i.e. the reply "I agree".

Table 5 Mean values of both factors

Factors	Mean
The country's human potential as a factor of its image in relation to the production of several categories of food products	3.785
The country's natural potential as a factor of its image in relation to the production of several categories of food products	3.98

Source: The authors

The following section views the above factors in the context of respondents' socio-demographic characteristics.

3.3. The food product-specific country image of Serbia in the context of respondents' socio-demographic characteristics

There is no statistically significant difference of mean grades on the scale for measuring the human potential of Serbia as a factor of the product-specific country image of Serbia (among the domestic auditorium) in relation to the researched food product categories between men (M=3.7598; SD=0.83211) and women (M=3.8112; SD=3.98==): t(98)=-0315, p=0.753.

There is no correlation between mean grades on the scale for measuring the human potential of Serbia as a factor of the product-specific country image of Serbia (among the domestic auditorium) in relation to the researched food product categories and the respondents' age, r=-0.015, n=100, p>0.05.

There is no correlation between mean grades on the scale for measuring the human potential of Serbia as a factor of the product-specific country image of Serbia (among the domestic auditorium) in relation to the researched food product categories and the respondents' number of years of education, r=0.031, n=100, p>0.05.

There is no correlation between mean grades on the scale for measuring the human potential of Serbia as a factor of the product-specific country image of Serbia (among the domestic auditorium) in relation to the researched food product categories and the respondents' household income, r=0.075, n=100, p>0,05.

There is no statistically significant difference of mean grades on the scale for measuring the natural potential of Serbia as a factor of the product-specific country image of Serbia (among the domestic auditorium) in relation to the researched food product categories between men (M=3.9869; SD=0.84843 and women (M=3.9728; SD=0.71309): t(98)=0.90, p=0.928.

There is no correlation between mean grades on the scale for measuring the natural potential of Serbia as a factor of the product-specific country image of Serbia (among the domestic auditorium) in relation to the researched food product categories and respondents' age, r= -0.155, n=100, p>0.05.

There is no correlation between mean grades on the scale for measuring the natural potential of Serbia as a factor of the product-specific country image of Serbia (among the domestic auditorium) in relation to the researched food product categories and the respondents' number of years of education, r=0.031, n=100, p>0.05.

There is no correlation between mean grades on the scale for measuring the natural potential of Serbia as a factor of the product-specific country image of Serbia (among the domestic auditorium) in relation to the production of researched food product categories and the respondents' household income, r=0.024, n=100, p>0.05.

3.4. The impact of Serbia's food product-specific country image on the frequency of use of domestic food product brands

Table 6 shows the results of regression analysis.

Table 6 Regression analysis results

Model	Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.	Colinearity statistics	
	B	St. error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
Constant	-2.792	0.601		-4.649	0.000		
Human potential	1.098	0.134	0.578	8.169	0.000	0.853	1.172
Natural potential	0.648	0.140	0.328	4.639	0.000	0.853	1.172

In addition to the indicators of adequacy of application of regression analysis, it can be concluded that regression coefficients with both independent variables are positive and statistically significant. It must also be added to the above that the coefficient of determination is 0.586, and the adjusted coefficient of determination is 0.578.

Discussion and conclusions

Multiple implications follow from the obtained research results. First, the first two hypotheses were confirmed, that is, it was possible to identify how the factor in the application of the measurement scale (among the domestic auditorium) of several food product-specific images of Serbia pertaining to the human potential of Serbia, as well as the factor pertaining to the natural potential of Serbia. Testing the reliability of the scale developed abroad resulted in its form suitable for application in the domestic conditions.

In addition to the above, hypotheses were also confirmed that the mean grades on a five-point Likert scale for measuring the human and natural potential of Serbia as a factor of product-specific country image of Serbia (among the domestic

auditorium) in relation to the production of several categories of food products is the closest to the 4th grade (the reply "I agree"). The above suggests a positive evaluation of both factors of image by consumers in the domestic environment.

Hypotheses viewing the factors of image of Serbia (among the domestic auditorium) pertaining to the production of several categories of food products in the context of socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (gender, age, education, household income) were not confirmed. Although this result diminishes the possibility of segmentation and more precise identification of the target auditorium, from the aspect of potential use of appeal that would additionally improve the generally positive food product-specific country image, addressing the mass auditorium is also possible.

Finally, both factors of product-specific country image of Serbia (among the domestic auditorium) pertaining to several food products statistically significantly influence the frequency of consumption of domestic brands from the researched product categories, where they even account for more than 50% variations of frequency of consumption of brands from the researched product categories.

Generally, it can be concluded that it would be useful to additionally improve the product-specific country image of Serbia related to several food products for the purpose of increasing their consumption.

Future research should encompass a broader territory and a larger and more representative sample, so that it would be reasonable to define more precisely the implication management. Also, observations could encompass a larger number of brands from several categories of food products, and the analysis could also include certain other determinants of choice of domestic brands. **SM**

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