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June 2020
ISSN: 1993-8233
DOI: 10.5897/AJBM
www.academicjournals.org

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Full Length Research Paper

Artification as a driver of public value co-creation: Evidence from the photographic exhibition on Italian Ghost hotel

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Received 2 April, 2020; Accepted 16 June, 2020

This study attempts to enlarge knowledge on public value co-creation within a complex environment such as artification. The transfiguration of object that is not regarded as art in the traditional sense into something art-like underpins the development of processes suitable for analyses within the co-creation framework. The case of "EXIT", the photographic exhibition on Ghost hotel in the province of Pavia (Lombardy, Northern Italy) has been carried out in order to achieve the research aim. The results, came out from the content analysis, demonstrated how artification triggers public value co-creation under specific conditions like the implementation of managerial logics, tools, and model. The conceptual model of artification co-creation attempts to fulfil the literature gaps which call for more investigations on the degree of citizen engagement in relation to the outcome of value creation within the democratic sphere.

Key words: Artification, value, co-creation, multi-actors engagement, strategic triangle, outcome, content analysis.

INTRODUCTION

The famous quotation "*Beauty will save the world*" from Dostoevsky (2010) well-known novel "The Idiot", reveals its effectiveness in relation to the evolution of art, its meaning and the social values transmitted in the contemporary age (Miller, 1981). The challenge triggered by the cultural sector is to change something that is not art in art-like (artification) as perceived by the audience. This concept, introduced by Finnish scholars of Contemporary Aesthetics in 2005, has been broaden investigating at multi-disciplinary levels. According to the

Shapiro's model (2019), the processes of artification engage many actors, resources and activities whose relationships open up new strands of research within the managerial studies. With regard to the latter, service science calls for more investigations on complex environment, where the value is co-created by the interactions of multi-actors (Pinho et al., 2014; Petrescu, 2019). Contextually, public management studies highlight, among critical issues on co-creation that are still under-investigated, the engagement of citizens as co-designers

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or co-implementers as well as the outcome of co-creation within the democratic sphere (Voorberg et al., 2015; Best et al., 2019). Moreover, the multi-actor theory of public value co-creation addresses research to provide more evidence on the accuracy and the effectiveness of the updated “Strategic Triangle” framework within complex environment (Bryson et al., 2017).

Considering these literature gaps, this pioneering study attempts to explore the public value co-creation in the field of artification. Thus, the research aims at extending knowledge under both managerial and cultural heritage perspectives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Value co-creation framework

The study of value creation has been developing under different managerial perspectives within service system (Vargo and Lusch, 2004) as well as public administration literatures (Moore, 1995). Both strands of research have contributed to extend the understanding of this phenomenon with strategic implications for the market and the state. Their common point is the notion of value acknowledged as: “a complex and broad-based assessment of an object or set of objects [...] characterized by both cognitive and emotive elements, arrived at after some deliberation, and because a value is part of the individual’s definition of self, it is not easily changed, and it has the potential to elicit action” (Bozeman, 2007: 13). This concept of value is closely linked to the cognitive but, also, emotional elements of those who produce and those who perceive that value (Hodgkinson et al., 2017; Ng and Vargo, 2018). The creation of value is, in fact, intimately linked to personal factors such as self-fulfilment, for having influenced the creation of that value, especially if it is provided for the benefit of the community (Bovaird et al., 2015; Alonso et al., 2019). Moreover, the adjective “private” or “public” ascribed to value concerns the same object. According to Alford and Hughes (2008), private value stands for value consumed individually by users, while public value is received collectively by the citizens, based on the needs and wants of them (Edvardsson et al., 2011). With particular regard to private value creation, the research focused on the relationship between consumer and provider has introduced the notion of *value in use* as alternative to that of *value in exchange*. The latter, according to the Good-Dominant logic, is created by the provider and exchanged in the marketplace for money. Conversely, the ‘value in use’ is “based on user’s perceptions and is created throughout and from the collaboration and interaction between the consumer and the provider in mutual exchanges, during use, consumption or experience” (Petrescu, 2019: 1734). According to the latter, providers and consumers do not

have distinct roles, because value is always co-created by reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationships. Precisely, “value is co-created when resources are used” (Pinho et al., 2014: 472). Hence, the notion of value co-creation is based on this fundament proposition: “the customer is always co-creator of value: there is no value until an offering is used, experience and perception are essential to value determination” (Vargo and Lusch, 2006: 44).

The conceptual framework of value co-creation recognises the centrality of encounters, such as the processes and practices of interaction and exchange within consumers and providers relationships (Payne et al., 2008). Whether the consumers’ ability to create value is based on the information, skill and operant resources that they can access and use, the providers’ one is based on the capacity to add to the consumers pool of resource in terms of competences and capabilities for creating value. Hence, encounters are crucial for boosting co-creation. Those are interactions and transactions through which parties exchange resources, competences, and practices according to the value proposition that “value is created by experience” (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004: 172). Recent investigations have applied the S-D logic in complex and multi-actors service systems, developing a new version of the conceptual model (Nenonen and Storbacka, 2010; Lusch et al., 2010; Best et al., 2019). They have focused on value network (system of service system), such as “relatively self-contained, self-adjusting system of resource-integrating actors connected by shared institutional arrangements and mutual value creation through service exchange” (Vargo and Lush, 2016: 161). Therefore, the encounters among actors within the service system offer opportunities to facilitate the creation of experience each other. The same literature calls for more studies on value co-creation in complex service systems, with particular regard to actors’ engagement, factors and outcomes (Pinho et al., 2014; Petrescu, 2019).

Public management literature has also suggested in-depth investigations on “public” value co-creation under a theoretical and practical perspective (Bryson et al., 2017; Voorberg et al., 2015). In fact, the social changes and the budget austerity have led governments to question the way of approaching the community in the formation of public value (Cepiku et al., 2016; Steccolini, 2019). This new approach has been conceived as a social innovation in terms of creation of long-lasting outcomes that aim to address societal needs by fundamentally changing the relationships, positions and rules among the involved actors, through an open process of participation, exchange and collaboration, thereby crossing organizational boundaries and jurisdictions (Voorberg et al., 2015: 1334). The public value co-creation as a collaborative process is developed at three levels (Petrescu, 2019: 1740): (a) individual level, contributing or receiving resources; (b) relational level, relating to the

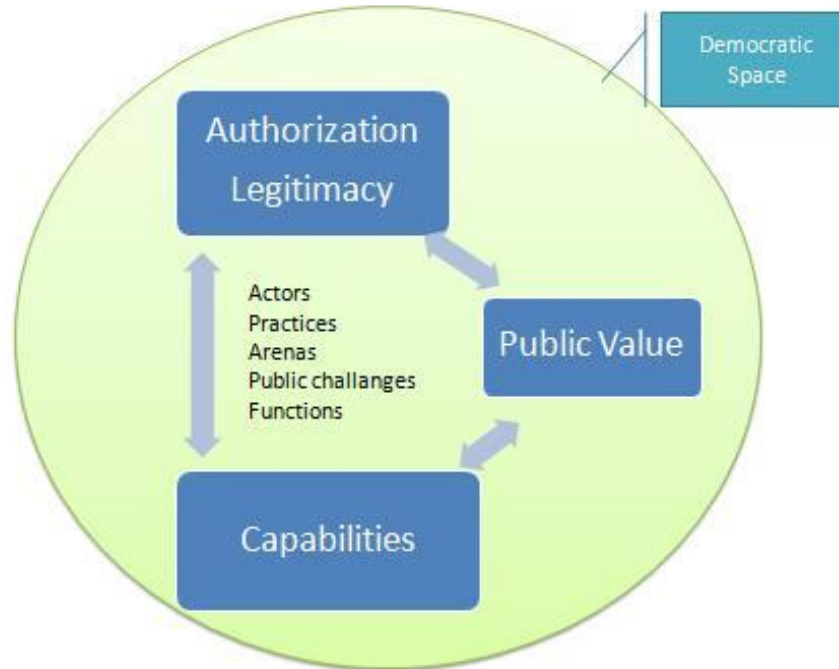


Figure 1. The strategic triangle in complex public system.
Source: Adapted from Bryson et al. (2017: 647).

interaction and collaboration with actors; and (c) network level, where the resources are integrated through the activities of a web of actors (Cepiku et al., 2014). These levels reflect the degree of the public engagement in the co-creation of value. Moreover, the role played by the multiplicity of actors such as governments, public managers, citizens, volunteers, organizations and entrepreneurs in public value co-creation is emphasised in the updated version of the Moore's "strategic triangle" early conceptualization framework (Bryson et al., 2017: 645). Accordingly, the role of multiple actors is conceived in relation to three pillars, each of which represents a vertex of the strategic triangle. Precisely, the vertices are the following:

- (a) Authorization and legitimacy of public action by various types of actors that provide resource, consensus and support;
- (b) Capabilities, which include those from different actors engaged in co-creation aiming to achieve public and institutional objectives;
- (c) Public value, produced in relation to the socio-economic environment, which materializes in the production of outcome objectively valid for actors' perspective.

The triangle is embedded in the circle (Figure 1) that represents the democratic sphere conceived as "the web of values, places, organizations, rules, knowledge and other cultural resources held in common by people through their everyday commitments and behaviours, and

held in trust by government and public institutions" (Benington, 2011: 32).

Focusing on citizen engagement in public co-creation, the literature distinguishes three different roles: (a) *citizen as co-implementer* in services, which refers to the transfer of implementing activities in the past carried out by the government; (b) *citizen as co-designer*, involved in the content or process of service delivery; (c) *citizen as initiator* who contributes to formulate specific service (Voorberg et al., 2015). The degree of citizen engagement in the creation of public value defines the service system as a relevant context, where the value is co-created through multi-actors' exchanges (Best et al., 2019: 1710).

The systematic review on co-creation literature highlights how less attention has been paid on citizen co-design and co-implementer in co-creation process (Voorberg et al., 2015) as well as on the role played by the different actors in defining and advancing public value under strategic perspective (Bryson et al., 2017).

Aligning with the previous literature calls, this research attempts to enlarge knowledge on value co-creation at different levels of actors' engagement and the relative outcome within public setting, with particular regard to cultural initiatives based on artification.

Artification as a process

The term *artification* has been firstly introduced, in the field of contemporary aesthetics, by a group of Finnish

scholars in an anthology, entitled “*Taiteistuminen*”, published in Finnish language (Levanto and Naukkarinen, 2005). However, the English translation of this Finnish word appeared even earlier in the Dissanayake’s article “An Ethological View of Music and its Relevance to Music Therapy” (2001), meanwhile its French version in the Shapiro and Heinich’s contribution, “*Qu’est-ce que l’artification?*”, in the proceedings of the XVIIth Congress of the Association Internationale des Sociologies de Langue Française in 2004 (Shapiro, 2004). Hitherto, artification has been seen as one version of aestheticization (Naukkarinen, 2005), in its categories and uses (Korolainen, 2012) or differently as a means that transforms things into art, by making or producing art or making art to exist (Dissanayake, 2001). Later on, the special issues of *Contemporary Aesthetics* on “Artification” (2012) has contributed to extend this concept including processes where something that is not art gets affected by art, but it does not turn into art as traditionally acknowledged, even though it is accepted by the art world. More specifically, Naukkarinen and Saito (2012: 1) quote that:

“this neologism, *ratification*, refers to situations and processes in which something that is not regarded as art in the traditional sense of the word is changed into something art-like or into something that takes influences from artistic ways of thinking and producing” (our Italics).

According to these theoretical viewpoints, artification represents a frame of reference within the discussion on art and non art interplaying in various contexts. Indeed, contamination of art and artist with business, health care, education, and environmental activism does not surprise (Mennell, 1989; Naukkarinen and Saito, 2012).

The incorporation of art in these other environments of human activities facilitates change and “this change is for the better” (Naukkarinen and Saito, 2012: 1). Hence, artification has been explored as a cultural phenomenon under a multi-disciplinary perspective (Shapiro, 2019). Nevertheless, a critical overview on artification is still missing and contributions by experts of other fields of research have been called since the special issue of *Contemporary Aesthetics* earlier mentioned (2012). On these lenses, the Shapiro and Heinich’s work (2012), “When is Artification?” provides insights for recognizing the phenomenon in its complexity and, meanwhile, for refreshing and expanding the model by adopting a threefold simultaneous research approach: materialistic, symbolic and contextual.

Under the materialistic perspective, this research mainstream investigates conditions under which things acquire traits of what we call art and how makers become artists. It implies to map the processes through which objects, forms, and practices are crafted and perceived as art-like works.

The symbolic perspective refers to the values, underpinned in the ratification as a process, and

encompassed by the art-like work. At this level, research focuses on how the latter becomes meaningful not only for experts (artists, patrons, curators, sociologists, etc.), but also for common people (Shapiro and Heinich, 2012). Indeed, the artification is an ongoing process in any environment because art is engaged in social change as well as other social activities. This is the reason why the research on that matter requires the contextualization of time, space and the observation of actors and institutions involved in the artification process.

In order to build a theory of artification, the literature calls for more inquiries based on case studies, which allow capturing variations and exploring the phenomenon with a holistic perspective. At this stage of research, the literature provides a dynamic model of artification composed of 10 salient micro-processes (Shapiro, 2019). Consistently with the value network perspective, the Shapiro’s model represents artification “a process of processes” (Table 1), which engages multi-actors such as creators, critics, organizers, donors, public officials, managers and many others who contribute to create value as “art-like”.

The processes of artification have been recognized by a corpus of research on social changes triggered by painting, printing, crafts, cartoons, graffiti, tribal art, cult object, national heritage, but also cinema, theatre, breakdancing, luxury fashion, gastronomy, music as well as photography (Shapiro and Heinich, 2012). Relating to the latter, after the invention of the medium in 1839, photographers started using soft focus, giving more importance to the artistic quality of the image rather than the conventional clarity of the representation. Hence, photography has been recognized as art-like (Brunet, 2009) and, thus, has been chosen as context of the investigation (Petrescu, 2019). Aligning with the aims of the study, the research questions arisen from the previous literature gaps are formulated as follows:

Whether and how can artification trigger public value co-creation?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The revelatory case study fits with the research aim in that, by definition, it allows to enlarge knowledge on a phenomenon that has not yet been investigated or is scarcely explored (Yin, 2009). The artification case study chosen is the photo exhibition, “EXIT. Hotel fantasma in Provincia di Pavia” (EXIT. Ghost hotel in the province of Pavia), edited by Marcella Milani from October 11th 2019 to November 10th 2019 in Pavia (Lombardy, Italy). She is a well-known photo-reporter of the “*Corriere della Sera*”, the historic Italian daily newspaper founded in Milan in 1876. Her notoriety is mainly due to the photography, carried out as freelance, and above all to the shots of abandoned areas and places of lived life. “EXIT” represents, indeed, her third exhibition after “*Mente Captus*” (2017), concerning a mental hospital in Voghera (in province of Pavia) and “*URBEX Pavia*” (2018) on abandoned industrial areas of that city. The motivations of this research choice came out not only from the high reputation achieved by the photographer at local and national level, but also for the success of her last temporary exhibition

Table 1. The processes of ratification.

Process	Definition
Displacement	The object, practice or person extracted from their everyday setting and placed it or them in an environment deemed appropriate for established artists for example a museum or a theatre
Renaming	Terminological change which often follows the physical displacement.
Reshuffling	Re-categorization after the cultural recognition of the artification (e.g. Break dancing from a disorderly conduct to professional form of art)
Organizational activities	The organization of activities required by the artification and so that the latter becomes a new institutional practice within creative industry and cultural heritage sector
Differentiation of functions	Different expertises and professionals engaged in the production and spreading the art-like product
Normative and legal recognition	The intellectual property of the art-like product
Redefining time	The time of the transfiguration of object in art-like
Aesthetic formalization	The acknowledgment of art-like product as contemporary innovation
Patronage	The support of public authorities by recognizing artification as means of social cohesion, identity or ascendancy at local and national level
Intellectualization	The production of analysis or commentary about artification and the dissemination of their results

Source: Adaptation from Shapiro (2019: 268-271).

created in collaboration with various actors operating in the same environment.

The project of Marcella Milani was sustained, in fact, by the Municipality of Pavia because of the intrinsic value embedded in her photos. Such value stems on the memory of hotels, many of which were luxury hotels, located in the surrounding spa areas of the city, as places where citizens of Pavia and tourists were used to be guested and spend relaxing time during the 60s to 70s. Thanks to the aesthetic value of the photos and the collateral events of the exhibition, as the Ghost hotel tours arranged by a local entrepreneur, the exhibition has given visibility to those places, making them attractive again.

This pioneering study is relevant under threefold perspective: (1) the context is the photo exhibition which is recognised as artification, according to the aesthetic literature before mentioned; (2) the 80 photos in exhibition transfigure imagines of abandoned hotels, many of which are auctioned, in art-like as demonstrated by the huge number of visitors achieved in the span-time of a month (4,556 visitors, about 20% of the annual average of those of the civic museums recorded in the last five years); (3) the exhibition, with free entrance, represents the public value co-created by a multi-actors engaging in the processes of this artification.

Numerous studies have shown the ability of content

analysis to derive photos of visitor/tourist behaviour patterns (Zhang et al., 2019; Stepchenkova and Zhan, 2013; Balomenou and Garrod, 2019), but in this case the focus is not so much on checking whether Marcella Milani's photos are artification, but whether and how her artification has contributed to co-create, while unconsciousness, public value in a complex system and the relative outcomes.

According to the content analysis method, the texts used to answer the research questions are the interviews with specific actors: the artist (Marcella Milani), the citizen who helps Milani, as volunteer, in her productions and exhibitions, the local cultural entrepreneur who arranged collateral events of the exhibition, the Pavia Municipality Councillor of the Cultural Heritage and a citizen who is a well-known photographer in Pavia too.

The interviewees have been chosen also in relation to their engagement in the co-creation of photo exhibition (Table 2). The interviews have been done a month after the end of the exhibition. Each interview, carried out individually, was conducted using a scheme of open questions in order to enable the interviewees to argue on specific topics widely and freely. The questions were formulated in such a way as to avoid the risk of shaping the answers to the research need, so to distort information and jeopardize the validity of the research (Krippendorff, 2004:

41).

The interviews have been recorded and transcribed by adopting the MAXQDA2020 program for social science-oriented data analysis. The *in-vivo* coding has been based on the on the conceptual categories identified by the frequencies of the words of the all texts analysed. The content analysis has identified sub-codes per any code, in accordance with the consulted literature. The textual evidence have been exposed to the interviewers in order to test the validity of the interpretation and made reliable the research results.

RESULTS

The content analysis requires the texts from which evidences are inferred. The answers to the questions have been transcribed by adopting the MAXQDA2020 program that has allowed to analyse more than 7.000 words. The latter have been reduced to 609 nouns. The word cloud with 70 meaningful words has been achieved (Figure 2).

Table 2. The interview protocol.

Interviewee	Engagement in co-creation	Interview time and questions	Aims of the interview
Artist	Artification processes <i>Displacement, Renaming, Organizational activities, Redefining time, Different functions, Intellectualization</i>	IT: 36' 52" Q1: How did the idea of Exit come about? what project did you have in mind? Q2: Who contributed to the project? Q3: Have you taken inspiration from another photographer? Q4: Do you think Exit has changed the perception of those abandoned hotels by the public? Q5: Has you being change your photography for EXIT? Q6. What were your expectations regarding the exhibition?	
Volunteer	Artification processes <i>Organizational activities</i>	IT 21' 23" Q1. When did you meet Marcella Milani and her exhibition? Q2. What are the elements that attract the visit? Q3. When does your collaboration start and what does it consist of? Q4. Is there an evolution of Marcella's photography? Q5. Why did the exhibition adopt the guest book? Q6. Is Marcella Milani's photography artification a tool for enhancing the culture of the area and a tourist attraction?	-Motivation of value co-creation -Co-creation factors -Co-creation outcomes
Local Entrepreneur	Artification processes <i>Organizational activities</i>	IT 24' 06" Q1. What is your opinion of Exit in terms of artification? Q2. How did your Association contribute to enhancing it? Q3. What were the visitor's numbers of the tours? And their appreciation? Q4. Did visitors come on tour out of curiosity or whatever? Q5. What was the added value of the exhibition? Q6. What are the advantages of these kind of cultural projects (artification) for the local economy?	
Pavia Municipality Councillor of Cultural Heritage	Artification processes <i>Patronage Normative and Legal Recognition Intellectualization</i>	IT 44'33" Q1. When did you meet Marcella Milani and her exhibition? Q2. What are the elements that attract the visit? Q3. When does your collaboration start and what does it consist of? Q4. Is there an evolution of Marcella's photography? Q5. Why did the exhibition adopt the guest book? Q6. In your opinion, does Marcella Milani's photography represent a tool for enhancing the culture of the area and a tourist attraction?	
		IT 36'28"	

Table 2. cont'd

Visitor-Photographer-Citizen	Artification processes <i>Reshuffling</i> <i>Aesthetic formalisation</i> <i>Intellectualization</i>	Q1. What is your opinion about Exit? Q2. Are there other photographers specialised on abandoned areas? Q3. Why is she so popular with the public? Q4. In your opinion, can Milani's photography be recognised as artification? Q5. Can the artification process lever the enhancement of cultural heritage? Q6. Does Marcella Milani's production represent a new mainstream in the photography field?
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The words with high frequency, exerted by the interview's transcription, have enabled to identify three main codes:

- (a) *Artification* (photograph, hotel, places, Marcella, abandoned, value, art, etc.);
- (b) *Actors engagement* (community, people, social, visitors, city, etc.);
- (c) *Outcome of artification* (territory, historical, projects, tourism, life, culture, etc.)

The analysis has shown the weight of the contents, referring to the previous codes, in relation to the overall texts of the interviews (Figure 3).

After having identified the main codes the analysis has adopted as keys of interpretation, the conceptual categories were derived from the value co-creation framework.

It was ascertained that the artification represents the content most discussed by the interviewees, a more detailed analysis has been carried out in relation to the meanings attributed to the value, according to the aesthetic and managerial perspectives. Precisely, the emphasis on the nature of the value sprang out by the textual evidences allowed to identify the following sub-codes (Table 3):

- (a) *Artification as cultural value*, when the paraphrases refer to the aesthetic nature of the

value as "art-like" and the relative cultural and social implication;

- (b) *Artification as private value creation process*, in terms of value created by the artist as service provider;
- (c) *Artification as public value creation process*, related to the benefits exchange in the encounter between the artist and the actors (that is public, community, local government).

Regarding the coding, "stakeholder engagement", many sentences refer to different degree of citizens/actors' engagement in co-creation (Petrescu, 2019). Hence, the sub-coding has been structured as follows:

- (a) *Pavia Community Co-designer* refers to Marcella Milani's work in creating value able to enhance the culture heritage of her community;
- (b) *Pavia Community Co-implementer*, regarding the contributions of the community as consumers in the co-creation of value as experience;
- (c) *Pavia Community Network*, relating the multi-actor's relationship underpinned in the co-creation of the exhibition.

Many types of textual evidence are connecting to the value co-creation outcomes, which reflect the benefits each actor receives from interactions and resources integration activities (Pinho et al., 2014:

481). These have been recollected in the following sub-codes:

- (i) *Outcome for the cultural heritage*, in relation to the impact of artification in terms of enhancing the historical value of the territory of Pavia and the memory of the community lifestyle;
- (ii) *Outcome for the community*, regards the visitor satisfaction, their comments and their behaviour;
- (iii) *Outcome for urban socio-economic development*, concerning the strategic opportunity to revitalise the Ghost hotels of the province of Pavia glimpsed through EXIT exhibition.

The textual evidence derived by the content analysis (Table 3) has highlighted the efficacy of the co-creation process started by a talent photographer, with the willingness to provide a relevant cultural heritage experience to the community of Pavia, her home city, and to any other target of audience. She took inspiration from territorial goods that are not more assets for its cultural heritage, but quite ruins. She was able to evoke a feeling of nostalgia for what was, for times gone by Christou et al. (2018).

The "EXIT" exhibition has been generating outcomes for the community as a cultural experience, so much to encourage excursions on site, visits of the abandoned hotels, as well as to make visible the opportunity to revitalize those areas, by activating public and private interest,

Table 3. Main evidence per specific codes and sub-codes.

Code/Sub-code	Artification as cultural value	Artification as private value creation	Artification as public value creation
Artist -	<p>I found a hotel completely degraded completely bare completely dismal, but still left me something and I took these photos. Then after a few years I came back there and I found another abandoned hotel nearby ... I said to myself to start a map of these hotels in the Province of Pavia and I found that there were more than 15 ... actually I put 11 of them on display. Hence the idea of the exhibition on abandoned hotels in the province of Pavia of which I had gathered so much material.</p> <p>However they are places of new meanings, they are waiting to be seen and reviewed later. Even the fact of taking some photos to keep it with the soft colours; I left the colour to make understand that we are here because those places can be lived.</p>	All I can get with photography, I want to provide it to people, I want them to come out with a memory with a good feeling with something that enriches them too	-
Volunteer -	Marcella's photograph awakens memories, awakens hearts and for non-Pavia from different points of view it is interactive in the same way. These pics stimulate them as well as in their places.	-	-
Local Entrepreneur -	There is a new cultural trend that really captures the public: how to make culture. Marcella is really very good at transmitting her work with passion and professionalism	The EXIT project started from the private and the public reacted.	The territory provides opportunity to co-create value
Pavia Municipality Councillor of Cultural Heritage -	In my opinion, artification leads people to reflect. Therefore the use of a wall of a building fallen into decay on which a graffiti is affixed by an artist is an expression of the contemporary that goes to contaminate history and therefore we say that it is an art form that goes from the canvas to the object itself. Here this is fundamental: the rediscovery through photography, to fix images of the past that no longer exists.	-	I have authorised the use the space in the Broletto for the exhibition because it is I consider the center of the city, a place of aggregation.
Visitor-Photographer-Citizen -	Photography is the writing of light and Marcella understood it very well, ... Marcella has been able to transfigure very well what it represents by taking a nice photo on something that most of we would grasp how bad it was	-	-
Artist	<p>Pavia community co-designer</p> <p>EXIT has been an emblematic project: a lot of students from the Milan Polytechnic contacted me about it.</p>	<p>Pavia community co-implementer</p> <p>The exhibition was free. I made a strong investment in terms of digital communication, with a crazy press review. Before the exhibition I went</p>	<p>Pavia community network</p> <p>Collaborations, also written in the project, are realities of the territory. The neon sign of the exhibition was made by hand by a local company. The set-ups were also designed by me,</p>

Table 3. Cont'd

	-			around the city and asked the first person at random, to promote the exhibition by making a video.	comparing the photo with the collectors' vintage postcards. I got help from local entrepreneur, association and the Local Government.
Volunteer	-	-		I knew Marcella in a previous exhibition and I was involved later as explorer together with her. I must say that a truly fascinating thing. Also because she really photographs from certain angles, even if it is a really dangerous work! only took care of setting up since I had already done exhibitions	-
Local Entrepreneur	-	-		-	In my opinion Exit triggered the involvement of the community. Just leveraging this integration of public and private actor makes the system
Pavia Municipality Councillor of Cultural Heritage	-	-		-	Networking is the only way that makes the strength of a city, the commerce, the friction of people, the birth of new hotels and therefore of offerings will be dragged along and the citizen, obviously, will be the first beneficiary, if will. Local marketing is important and cultural projects are also pursued
Visitor-Photographer-Citizen				I think that Marcella's typical personal path is certainly very advanced and I think that to get to take Marcella's photos one must be gifted from the point of view of aesthetic intuition, but one must have made the path that she did .She brings out her mood of sadness in the representation of these spaces: actually one sees the beautiful hotel and cannot help to think about the facts lived there a few dozen years ago. And then looking at it today	

Table 3. Cont'd

		seems a sort of "memento mori". But on the other hand once again artification can redeem this thing		
		Outcome for cultural heritage	Outcome for community	Outcome for urban socio-economic development
Artist	-	Incredible testimonies are discovered about these places. the memory of the people who worked there 30-40 years, the people who went on vacation, those who brought families, children, people who were there and in the hotel he might have received good bad news	It was therefore a very emotional exhibition for those who reviewed the photos of these hotels. I wanted to reach this audience: vast and heterogeneous an undifferentiated, large audience. Even 11-12 year olds want to go with me on urban explorations	-
Volunteer	-	There are many answers hidden in the dust of the hotel	Marcella's photography actually manages to satisfy certain curiosities both from citizens and tourists	Marcella makes the first input with photography and actors can take advantages from this opportunity to create a business by revitalising the hotels
Local Entrepreneur	-	-	We have had a noteworthy response from the public both as regards our initiative in abandoned areas despite the fact that we had to move out of the city, therefore out of Pavia. This further demonstrates people's interest; it is a public response from all over Lombardy	The creation of collateral events can lead to the work of new professionals,. Let me say that it is a new way of doing local economy through culture, but let's say culture in a broad sense that goes from food to tradition to recovering the memory of the good past times.
Pavia Municipality Councillor of Cultural Heritage		The cultural project is interesting precisely because it is based on the visual recovery of abandoned places and therefore, let's say so, it becomes a sort of historical memory of our life, these places become precisely artistic sets because they also bring to light elements of a life that doesn't exist anymore.	Marcella is loved by the city and therefore her themes I must say beyond her work of excellent quality are very interesting and current, themes obviously of great interest. Pavia knows perfectly its	The Cultural policy aims to promote events able to develop tourism, in order to spread the fame of its artistic and cultural heritage of Pavia

Table 3. Cont'd

		cultural assets
Visitor- Photographer- Citizen	<p>-</p> <p>Artification is a new way to be able to maintain the historical memory of a community in a territory as well as what is substantially recognized at a national and international level, but also at a local level. That keeps the historical memory of what is able to transmit to posterity, because history teaches us anyway, we must always know where our roots to go forward and improve or maybe go back in a more modern perspective</p>	-

visitors who had the chance to personally interact with the artist who was always present every day at the exhibition or indirectly by leaving a comment or a sign of their visit in the guest-book. The latter represents, for the artistic co-designer, a relevant tool for dialoguing with the audience of the exhibition. The efficacy of the accountability has also been underlined by the Councillor of the Cultural Heritage Sector of the Municipality of Pavia. According to the latter, the visitor satisfaction represents an interesting “thermometer” to understand the evolution of the taste of people, what they have perceived emotionally from the exhibition experience as well as to have a feedback on the public value co-created.

DISCUSSION

The content analysis results enable to answer the research questions in the context of this case study. Firstly, the knowledge of artification still appears, among the interviewees at least, relegated to the aesthetic field of culture: while its ability to transform an object into art-like is clear, there is still no awareness of its nature as a process enabling the creation of “value in use”,

that is the value generated through the encounter between the provider, the consumers and other actors (Pinho et al., 2014; Vargo et al., 2008). Moreover, if the engagement of multi-actors in artification as “process of processes” is taken for granted (Shapiro, 2019), the increasing impact of a greater involvement of the community and the other entrepreneurs sprang out by this study. As the engagement of the actors increases, the public value, as the outcome emerged by the co-creation (Pinho et al., 2014), extends from the object of transformation into art to the value intended as an experience for community up to socio-economic benefit for the territory.

Hence, in relation to the research question on *whether* artification is able to trigger the public value co-creation, this study has demonstrated that it happens throughout encounters between the artist and the different actors of the socio-economic environment. Precisely, the artification plan proposed by the artist to the Councillor of Cultural Heritage of Pavia Municipality and the authorization of this cultural event (the “EXIT” exhibition at the “Broletto” Palace of the city), based on the knowledge of the popularity of the photographer and the cultural inclinations of the community, have legitimised the development of artification as a co-creation process (Figure 4).

Regarding *how* it occurs, the case study sheds light on how operationalizing artification as co-creation of value, in terms of different functions (communication, promotion, arranging collateral events, exhibition layout arrangement, etc.), resources integration between the artist and other network actors (exhibition venue, photos, guide tours expertise, press/media service, etc.) and managerial practices (project plan, guest-book and visitor satisfaction tools). These findings contribute to provide a new conceptual model based on the updated “Strategic Triangle” framework (Bryson et al., 2017). This conceptualization of the artification as a co-creation process adds insights for formulating strategy in cultural policy within the democratic sphere (Figure 4).

Conclusion

The contribution of this study is connected to the literature gaps within two different research fields such as managerial and cultural heritage studies. The former calls for investigation on how the co-creation of value is operationalized in complex environments, while the latter for extending knowledge on artification under a multi-disciplinary

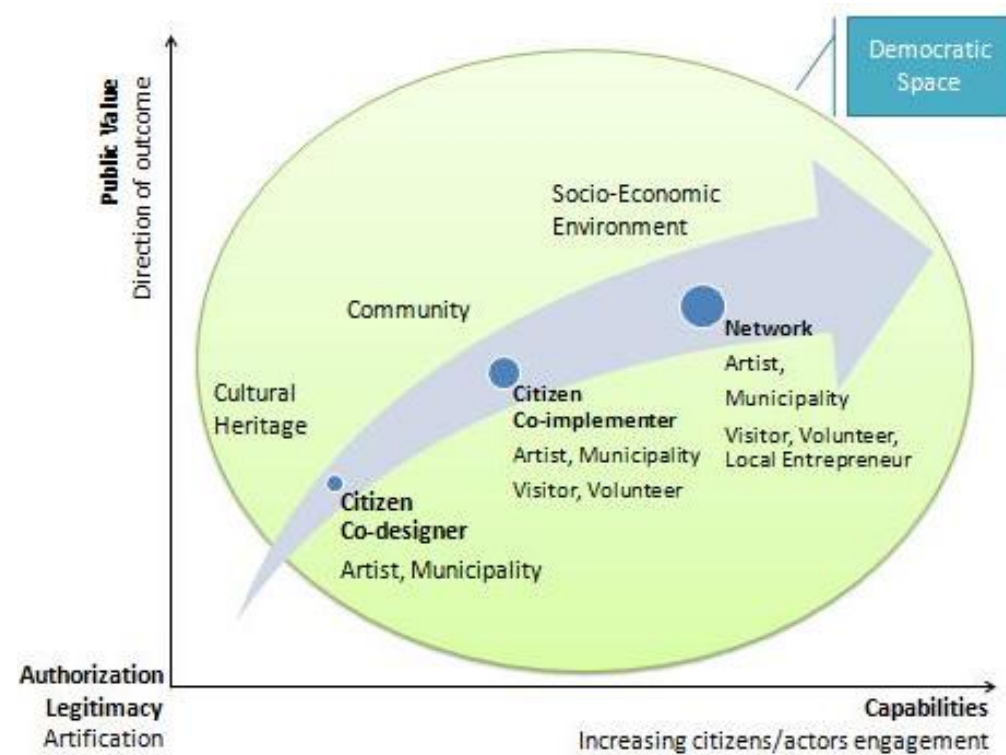


Figure 4. Artification co-creation model.

perspective (managerial one included).

The definition of artification as a process of processes has made it interesting to explore the co-creation of value within this complex environment.

The contribution of this study is summarised by the conceptual model which extends the effectiveness of the “Strategic Triangle” framework also in the context of cultural policies. Artification is able to activate co-creation processes of public value through multi-actor engagement. The prerequisites of this artification co-creation model are: partly attributable to the talent and popularity of the main actor of the artification process (the artist), but also to the capability of the local authority (the Councillor of Cultural Heritage) to understand the cultural inclinations of the community in order to support and stimulate them, legitimizing artification project. These conditions boost artification as a co-creation process, with practical implications in the field of art, business, and cultural policies.

Relating to the former, if the artist would like to enhance the work art-like, it is necessary to adopt managerial logics (networking, business planning) and tools (project plan, accountability practice). These capabilities are useful to achieve legitimation and authorization by the local government and, consequently, to activate the co-creation of public value.

On the entrepreneurial side, artification can trigger cross-fertilization processes based on innovation in cultural and creative sector, as well as in the third sector.

Moreover, in relation to the type of object transformed in art-like, the artification co-creation process can open up new opportunity of social-economic revitalization of provincial areas.

With regard to the cultural policy, artification enables policy makers to provide the extended outcome of public value by legitimating the artification proposals of artists capable to interpret, with modern sensitivity, the signs of the times of the local community.

The implications underpin the limitations of this research, identified in the biases implicated in the interviews and the content analysis, as well as in the use of a single case study. Therefore, the conceptual model requires more investigations, in different kind of artification practices, in order to extend its generalisation. Further research on value co-creation within other cross-setting environment is also welcomed.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author is grateful to Marcella Milani, art-photographer, and all the interviewees (the volunteer, the Pavia Municipality Councillor of Cultural Heritage,

Tourism, Events and Territorial Marketing, the Cooperativa Progetti Co-founder, and the photographer/video maker) who provided an important contribution to the development of the research. Special thanks also go to the reviewers and the editors of AJBM for the insightful recommendations and suggestions provided in order to improve the manuscript for publication.

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Full Length Research Paper

African-ingredient branding as a marketing strategy: Examining the evaluations of export-market consumers

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Received 4 February, 2020; Accepted 10 June, 2020

Previous research demonstrated that the marketing strategy of *ingredient branding* can enhance brand value, whilst enlarging outcomes for the value chain. Although, African-ingredient branding—using commodities produced/grown in Africa as a product attribute—has been considered theoretically, it has never been explored experimentally. It is therefore unclear whether this particular marketing strategy could increase brand equity. By conducting two experimental studies, this research work explores whether *African-ingredient branding* can enhance the evaluation of food items by export-market consumers and examines whether the strength of host brands and/or attitudes towards specific African countries of origin might also influence consumer evaluation processes with regard to African-ingredient branded products. The results reveal that *African-ingredient branding* is a valuable marketing strategy, which can have a positive influence on the evaluation of food items by export-market consumers. They further illustrate that evaluations of these products are only affected by the strength of the host brand, suggesting that the strategy is more effective for strong brands than for weak brands. Consumer attitudes towards specific African countries are apparently not decisive for their evaluations of hedonic products branded according to African ingredients. The research work provides primary experimental evidence of the positive effects of African-ingredient branding as a valuable marketing strategy, indicating theoretical and practical-normative implications, as well as suggestions for future research.

Key words: Marketing, ingredient branding, African-ingredient branding, export-market consumer.

INTRODUCTION

Globalisation has grown rapidly, making it possible for consumers to buy products and goods from all over the world (Kotler and Keller, 2016). In particular, food items are often produced or at least processed in several countries before reaching their end-users. These developments in the value chain are rooted predominately in technological innovations (particularly in

the area of agriculture), advances in the field of transportation and organisational innovations (Ietto-Gilles, 2019: 155). Whereas these advancements have translated into increased revenue, profit and return on investment for intermediaries and manufactures, the producers and farmers in developing countries who work hard to produce the commodities for a globalised

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market receive only a small fraction of the realised retail prices (Sigué, 2012). Accordingly, alternatives are needed to increase the overall value shares of products and goods, especially in frontier-country markets, including those in many African countries (Dadzie and Sheth, 2020).

Against this background, previous studies have suggested various marketing strategies for adding value to brands, including *ingredient branding* (Ponnam et al., 2015a), which can generate opportunities for improving the welfare of farmers and reducing poverty whilst increasing overall profit throughout the value chain (Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2010; Sigué, 2012). *Ingredient branding* can be defined as a form of co-branding, in which critical attributes (ingredients or commodities) of one brand are incorporated into another brand, with the branded ingredients appearing on the product (Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2010; Leuthesser et al., 2003). In line with existing evidence (Desai and Keller, 2002) that *ingredient branding* is an appropriate marketing strategy for strengthening added value for consumers whilst increasing the overall value of a product, service or good, the present research work investigates whether commodities grown/produced in Africa could also be used as an *ingredient branding* marketing strategy for positively influencing the *perceptions* and *evaluations* of *export-market consumers* with regard to food items and hedonic products; thus adding value to the host branded product or good. The *export-market consumers* are defined as high-income consumers in developed markets.

Accordingly, the current research aims to experimentally investigate whether the *ingredient branding* of commodities grown/produced in Africa could be used to have a positive influence on the ways in which export-market consumers evaluate food items and hedonic products. To this end, two studies were conducted. The first study (study 1) investigates whether *African-ingredient branding* can influence the evaluation and perception of food items by export-market consumers, as theoretically assumed (Papadopoulos and Hamzaoui-Essoussi, 2015; Sigué, 2012). The second study (Study 2) explores the impact factors that influence the evaluation processes of export-market consumers. Specific attention is focused on the impact of the strength of the host brand and consumer attitudes towards the specific African countries in which the commodities are grown or produced.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Branding, co-branding and ingredient branding

Brands have been identified as a key influencing factor that determines success in a global economy (Sigué, 2012, Kathuria and Gill, 2013; Lee, O’Cass and Sok, 2017; Keller and Brexendorf, 2019). One fundamental marketing

instrument is brand equity, which is defined as the added value that a brand can give to a product, service or good (Faquhar, 1989). More generally, *branding* can be defined as the process by which manufacturers help consumers to differentiate offerings on a highly dynamic market, thereby enabling consumers to develop specific associations and feelings towards a brand and its associated product (Webster and Keller, 2004).

Co-branding involves the combination of two or more brands in a single product (Desai and Keller, 2002). It is known to be effective in leveraging strong brands (Leuthesser et al., 2003). As a form of co-branding, *ingredient branding* involves the incorporation of critical attributes of one brand into another (Ghodeswar, 2008; Ponnam et al., 2015a). For example, displaying the ingredients that have been used can strengthen a product and improve its brand equity (Desai and Keller, 2002; Keller, 1998). According to Kotler and Pfoertsch (2010), labelling or even simply marking the components of a product is sufficient to be qualified as ingredient branding. The success of ingredient branding is, however, dependent on the consumer’s values, the consumers’ involvement and fit between the host brand and the branded ingredients (Desai and Keller 2002; Dalman and Puranam, 2017; Vaidyanathan and Aggarwal, 2000). Previous studies have demonstrated that ingredient branding facilitates the transfer of the positive associations and goodwill of an ingredient to the host brand, thus enhancing the equity of the brand, and therefore the product (Desai and Keller, 2002; Ponnam, Sreejesh and Balaji, 2015a). The host brand can, consequently, integrate the features and capitalise the brand associations of the ingredient to increase the market competitiveness and market shares. The strength of a branded (or ingredient-branded) product has, therefore, a significant influence on the intra-individual value of the product and, consequently, the consumers’ product evaluations and the associated decision-making process (Dalman and Puranam, 2017; Radighieri et al., 2014). A fact that has been confirmed by a recently conducted survey, indicating that 73% of export-market consumers (American, European and Asian consumers) expressed that they would pay more for a product with ingredients they know and trust (Gore-Langton, 2016). Suppliers and/or producers thus have an incentive to make these ingredients visible to consumers as means of increasing the value of their products (Keller, 2003; Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2010). Moreover, in light of the current societal demand for sustainable products and goods, it might be even more important to help consumers make sustainable decisions by displaying both the ingredients used and the way in which they were produced and traded. Against this background, it should be evident that ingredient branding enhances brand awareness and the image for host products, thereby leading to favourable brand evaluations (Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2010). Considerable research attention has

been devoted to investigate ingredient branding in various contexts (in the food market (Kanama and Nakazawa, 2017) or for luxury brands (Moon and Sprott, 2016) whilst promoting the application of innovative technology to develop and manage brands (Rodrigue and Biswas, 2004; Tepic et al., 2014; Ponnam et al., 2015a). To date, however, little is known about the specific influence of *commodities grown and produced in Africa* as part of a marketing strategy based on *African-ingredient branding* (Papadopoulos and Hamzaoui-Essoussi, 2015; Sigué, 2012).

African-ingredient branding

The process of globalisation and the associated expansion of global trade flows (especially in the agricultural and food markets) have made the origin of food items a crucial attribute in the evaluations of consumers, as well as in their subsequent buying decisions (Al-Sulaiti and Baker, 1998; Beverland and Lindgreen, 2002; Aichner, 2014; van Ittersum, Candel and Meulenberg, 2003; Oberecker and Diamantopoulos, 2011; Herz and Diamantopoulos, 2017; Verlegh, Steenkamp and Meulenberg, 2005; Winit, Gregory, Cleveland and Verlegh 2014). In the past, the country of origin tended to be particularly important in the absence of other information about a product, good or service (Al-Sulaiti and Baker, 1998; Bilkey and Nes, 1982; Keller, 1998; Luomala, 2007). Currently, however, the country of origin is likely to act as an indicator (or factor in the evaluation) of the quality, social impact or sustainability of specific products or goods (Lorenz et al., 2015; Hsu et al., 2017). In this regard, based on the fact that the African continent is home to a diversity of natural and cultivated agricultural products and goods, due to its varied climatic, edaphic and topographical features (Goldblatt, 1997), African commodities might be associated with various positive attributes, whilst having a potentially positive influence on the perceptions that consumers have of specific products. This could help to infuse the positive attributes of African ingredients into a host brand, thus strengthening and enhancing the value of the brand's products (Kanama and Nakazawa 2017; Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2010).

Despite the potentially positive influence of African commodities, they might also be subject to negative connotations, due to the association of some African countries with crime, war and social/environmental disasters. One example in this context is offered by Mali, which has recently been the centre of negative media attention. Following its civil war (2012-2013), Mali has suffered from severe attacks by Islamic fundamentalists, leading to the closure of more than 500 schools and causing people to flee from their towns. It is thus likely that some specific African countries could elicit negative associations in consumers, and this could

affect their product evaluations. In addition to the impact of specific countries of origin (Aichner, 2014; Al-Sulaiti and Baker, 1998; Kinra, 2006; Luomala, 2007; Verlegh and van Ittersum, 2001), the characteristics of host brands apparently have an influence on consumer-evaluation processes (as mentioned before).

Theory of consumption values

In addition to the influencing factors mentioned above (such as specific countries of origin, strength of the host brand), consumers obviously judge quality according to a variety of informational cues that they associate with specific products, goods and services (Keller, 1993; Zeithaml, 1988). Therefore, consumers use an inferential transfer process by which they evaluate a new offering based on what they already know, feel or have experienced with the brand or the ingredient (Vaidhyanathan and Aggarwal, 2000; Czellar, 2003; Desai and Keller, 2002; Jongmans et al., 2019). More precisely, consumers use values as implicit criteria for forming preferences and evaluations, and these values serve to guide their actions, attitudes, judgments and comparisons between specific objects and situations (Holbrook, 1999; Long and Schiffman, 2000; Gallarza et al., 2011).

One theoretical model that is frequently applied to investigate the consumer-evaluation process and its associated values is the '*theory of consumption values*' proposed by Sheth et al. (1991). The theory distinguishes *five* dimensions that have an impact on consumer-choice behaviour with regard to products, goods and services: (i) *social*, (ii) *epistemic*, (iii) *emotional*, (iv) *functional* and (v) *conditional values*. The *social values* of a product, good or service are defined as the perceived utility acquired from a product, as associated with one or more specific social groups (Sheth et al., 1991). The *epistemic value* of a product, good or service refers to its capacity to arouse curiosity, provide novelty or satisfy a desire for knowledge (Sheth et al., 1991). A product's capacity to arouse feelings, moods and emotions are related to its *emotional values* (Sheth et al., 1991). This is composed of the utility derived from the perceived quality and expected performance of a product (Sheth et al., 1991; Van Riemsdijk et al., 2017). *Functional values* have been identified as the primary determinant of consumer choices (Gonçavles et al., 2016).

The fifth dimension proposed by Sheth et al. (1991), *conditional values*, refers to the perceived utility of a product, good or service in a *specific situation* or *set of circumstances*. It has therefore not been taken into consideration for this study, given that the experimental situations of the participants remained the same. The four other dimensions of the theory of consumption (Sheth et al., 1991) are considered when estimating the effects of African-ingredient branding and its associated repercussions on the perception levels of export-market consumers.

Research approach and hypotheses

Based on the results of previous researches (Aichner, 2014; Keller, 2003; Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2010; Luomala, 2007; Sigué, 2012; Papadopoulos and Hamzaoui-Essoussi, 2015), the overarching research question for the current investigation concerns whether *African-ingredient branding* can influence the perceptions of export-market consumers, thereby shaping their evaluations of food items and hedonic products. The investigation focuses on the effects of such branding on both *general* and *specific* dimensions (Sheth et al., 1991). The first study in this investigation explores the impact of *African-ingredient branding* on the *general* product evaluations and *specific* consumption-value evaluations of export-market consumers, according to a questionnaire-based experiment.

Study 1: African-ingredient branding as a valuable marketing strategy

Previous studies have suggested that *ingredient branding* (Rodrigue and Biswas, 2004; Tepic et al., 2014) is effective in enhancing brand equity. To the authors' best knowledge, however, the impact of *African-ingredient branding* on the general product evaluations of export-market consumers has been investigated only at a theoretical level (Sigué, 2012), with no experimental examination. The first study in this research work therefore applies an online questionnaire-based experiment to explore whether African-ingredient branding increases brand equity. The underlying hypothesis is as follows:

H1: African-ingredient branding has a significant influence on consumers' general evaluations of food items.

METHODOLOGY

Study 1

Stimuli

The stimuli used in Study 1 were two fast-moving consumer goods (coffee and pineapple), either with or without additional information about the African origin of the ingredient (thus, acting as a proxy for *African-ingredient branding*). More precisely, coffee and pineapples produced in eastern, western and southern parts of Sub-Saharan Africa were selected as target products, as they are produced primarily for the European or other export markets (CBI, 2020). The stimuli also consisted of four brands, thus making it possible to explore the robustness of effects across different brands and to increase the statistical power, in addition to increasing the number of the trials. To investigate the *effect of African-ingredient branding*, all of the products were first displayed to the export-market consumer *without* the African-ingredient brand ('pre'; Figure 1, left), after which they were displayed with the additional African ingredient information ('post'; Figure 1, right). This procedure is referred to as 'pre-post'

measurement in the rest of this article.

Procedure

Data were collected through the online provider Qualtrics (<https://www.qualtrics.com/>). Each participating consumer assessed the same product 'pre-post' treatment (without and with African-ingredient branding), resulting in a within-experimental design. The online questionnaire was composed of three parts. The first part consisted of a short introduction integrating the instructions. In the second part, the stimuli were displayed, and consumers were asked to evaluate the 'pre' and subsequently the 'post' (African-ingredient branded) images of the food items along a seven-point Likert scale. Each consumer was randomly assigned to one of the four blocks. Existing and validated evaluations scales were used to measure the dependent variables. Three questions were used to assess the consumers' *general evaluation* of the food products, and three items were used to represent *each* of the four *consumption values* (Sheth et al., 1991), in order to measure the consumers' respective *specific* evaluations (Table 1). The items were adapted from studies by Sheth et al. (1991), by Bruner et al. (2005), and by Pham and Avnet (2004). All items displayed sufficient reliability (Cronbach's alpha values at or above 0.7). After conducting the main tasks, the attention and involvement of the consumers were verified according to answer five control questions about the origin of the ingredients. The consumers were further asked to indicate where the commodities had been grown/produced, in addition to indicating their general level of interest in Africa. The third and final part of the online experiment consisted of a short demographic questionnaire on nationality, age, gender, education and employment status.

Participants

In all, 86 export-market consumers completed the online questionnaire. Of these respondents, 32 failed to answer at least one of the five control questions concerning the origin of the relevant African ingredient correctly, and they were excluded from the data analysis. The final sample consisted of 54 middle-aged participants (14 male). Of these participants, 33 were of Dutch nationality, 6 were of another European nationality and 8 were of non-European nationality. Given that the respondents had been recruited within a university environment, the average level of education in the sample was high, with 25 participants holding a Bachelor's degree and 27 participants holding a Master's degree.

Study 2

Stimuli

Study 2 is intended to explore whether the strength of a brand and/or the consumer's attitude towards a specific African country have an effect on the consumer's evaluation of an *African-ingredient branded hedonic product*. The brands are defined as either *strong* or *weak*. For the strong brand 'The Body Shop' was chosen, based on the fact that *The Body Shop* is a large chain, with approximately 2000 stores in more than 50 countries (Sinclair and Agyeman, 2005). Moreover, the wide variety of products offered by *The Body Shop* allows them to expand their brand equity. Based on the range of the brand, therefore, it is assumed that *The Body Shop* is a well-known and thus *strong* brand. In contrast, brands that are unfamiliar to consumers are generally defined as *weak*, given that consumers have no experiences that would allow them to build a brand image (Keller, 1993). For the purposes of this study, the fictitious brand 'SkinCare' was, therefore, created for use as a weak-brand

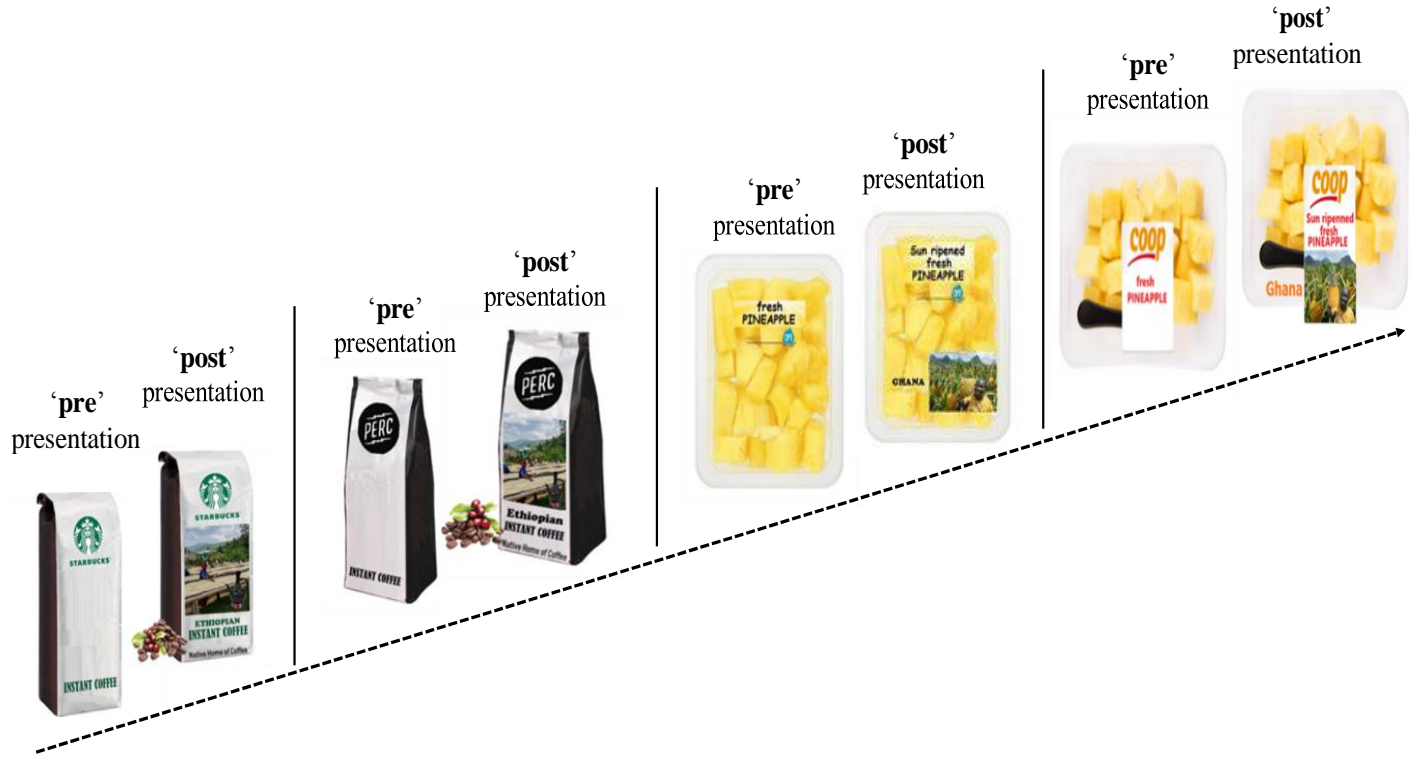


Figure 1. Stimuli representation of the four products, 'pre' and 'post' presentation (presented in randomised order).

Table 1. Used constructs and related questionnaire items to measure the consumption values (Sheth et al., 1991).

Construct	Item	Sources
Product evaluation Cronbach's alpha=0.851	The product is of high quality. I trust the product.	Pham and Avnet (2004)
	I would recommend someone to buy the product.	Klein and Dawar (2004); Zeithaml (1988)
Functional Cronbach's alpha=0.801	The product possesses unique characteristics desirable to consumers (e.g. good taste).	Sheth et al. (1991)
	The product looks natural.	Sweeney and Soutar (2001); Suki and Suki (2015); Goncalves et al. (2016); Koschmann and Bowman (2018).
	The product has health benefits.	
Social Cronbach's alpha=0.803	Buying this product gives a good image of being socio-economic and environmentally responsible.	Sheth et al. (1991)
	Buying this product would help me to feel acceptable socially. Buying this product would express social approval of its suppliers.	Suki and Suki (2015); Sweeney and Soutar (2001); Van Riemsdijk (2017)
Epistemic Cronbach's alpha=0.776	The product presentation and information make me want to use it. The uniqueness of the product evokes my curiosity.	Sheth et al. (1991)
	The product shows originality and innovation.	Suki and Suki (2015); Sweeney and Soutar (2001); Goncalves et al. (2016).
Emotional Cronbach's alpha=0.878	Buying this product gives me a good feeling of being socially responsible.	Arvola et al. (2008)
	Buying this product gives me a good image of being environmentally responsible.	Goncalves et al. (2016)
	This product brings back happy memories (e.g. from a vacation).	Koschmann and Bowman (2018); Sheth et al. (1991); Suki and Suki (2015); Sweeney and Soutar (2001).

stimulus.

In this study, Ghana and Mali were selected as the specific African countries to be used to investigate the influence of the attitudes of consumers towards specific countries of origin on their evaluations of *African-ingredient branded hedonic products*. Based on previous media reporting, Ghana was selected as a 'positively' perceived African country, which is expected to evoke more positive associations in the minds of consumers. In contrast, Mali is expected to evoke more negative associations amongst consumers, given that media recent reporting has focussed predominantly on the unstable situation in that country.

To ensure that only the influence of the host brand and the country of origin is measured, each stimulus was designed to have the same appearance. This is fundamental given the between-subject design of Study 2. The information on each hedonic product provided to the consumers was therefore exactly the same, adjusting only the independent variables-emphasising either a strong brand ('The Body Shop') or a weak brand ('SkinCare') and/or the specific African country of origin (Ghana or Mali). The African ingredient used in this study is *Shea butter*, a crucial ingredient in the food and cosmetic industry (Hatskevich et al., 2011). In this study, *African-ingredient branding* is thus operationalised as the name of the African ingredient displayed on the product's package, along with a picture (Figure 2).

Procedure

Similar to Study 1, the first part of the experimental questionnaire consisted of instructions, asking consumers to evaluate several hedonic products. In the second part of the experiment, consumers were exposed to the stimuli and asked to evaluate the respective products along a seven-point Likert scale, utilising the same validated scales that were used in Study 1. The third and final part of the experiment consisted of a brief series of demographic and control questions. In the control questions, consumers were asked to indicate the origin of the products' key ingredient, their perceptions of the specific African country (for each specific African country) and their general involvement with regard to Africa.

Participants

In all, 159 consumers completed the questionnaire for this experiment. Of these respondents, 43 failed to answer all of the control questions relating to the origin of the products' key ingredients correctly. These participants were excluded from the dataset, resulting in a total sample size of 116 participants (48 male), which were used for the data analysis. The respondents ranged in age from 25 to 75 years. All participants were of Dutch nationality, and their average level of education was high (similar to Study 1). Measured as the lowest level of education completed, the respondents' educational level ranged from 'secondary school diploma' to 'post-graduate degree'.

RESULTS

Study 1

In order to investigate whether *African-ingredient branding* influenced the consumers' evaluations across all products and goods, a mixed-factor repeated analysis of variance (ANOVA) was calculated with the within-subject factor *product evaluations over time* (*pre* and *post product evaluation*) and the between-subject

factors *brand*. The results of this analysis revealed no significant interaction effects for *product evaluations over time*brand* ($F[1,53] = 3.130, p = 0.083, \eta p^2 = 0.057$). They did reveal a significant main effect for *product evaluations over time* ($F[1,53] = 6.355, p < 0.015, \eta p^2 = 0.109$), applying a *p*-value threshold of $p < 0.05$.

In order to explore whether the consumption values (*functional, social, epistemic and emotional*) influenced the relationship between *African-ingredient branding* and the consumers' specific product evaluations, a mixed-factor repeated ANOVA was conducted for each consumption value separately. For all consumption values (*functional, social, epistemic and emotional*), the within-subject factor *product evaluations over time* (*pre* and *post product evaluation for the separate product value*) and the between-subject factors *brand* revealed no significant effects for the interaction effects *product evaluations over time*brand* or for *product evaluations over time*, applying a *p*-value threshold of $p < 0.05$. The sample indicated a *high level of involvement* with Africa, as indicated by a mean of $M = 5.58$ ($SD = 1.02$) on a seven-point Likert scale.

Study 2

In order to investigate whether the *strength of the host brand* (*strong* vs. *weak*) and/or the *specific African country of origin* (*Ghana* vs. *Mali*) have an influence on consumers' evaluations across all products and goods, a between-subject analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted, with the dependent variable being *product evaluations*, the fixed factors being *strength of the host brand* (*strong* vs. *weak*) and *specific African country of origin* (*Ghana* vs. *Mali*). The results revealed no significant interaction effect between *host brand* and *country of origin* ($F[1,115] = 1.323, p = 0.253, \eta p^2 = 0.012$). They did reveal a significant main effect for the *strength of the host brand* ($F[1,115] = 15.092, p < .000, \eta p^2 = 0.119$), but no significant main effects for *specific African country of origin* ($F[1,115] = 1.121, p = 0.292, \eta p^2 = 0.010$).

In order to estimate the effect size of the consumption values proposed by Sheth et al. (1991), a two-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANCOVA) was conducted, with the four dimensions of product value (*functional, social, epistemic and emotional*) as the dependent variable, and with the two fixed factors *host brands* (*strong* vs. *weak*) and *country of origin* (*Ghana* vs. *Mali*). Analysis of the between-subject effects indicates that the *specific African country of origin* had no significant influence on any of the product-value dimensions of *African-ingredient branded products*. The *strength of the host brand* (*weak* vs. *strong*) had a significant influence on *functional* product value ($F[2, 115] = 7.498, p = 0.007, \eta p^2 = 0.063$), with a tendency for the epistemic product value ($p < 0.10$), ($F[2, 115] = 3.510$,



Display of the *strong* brand for the specific African countries – Ghana and Mali



Display of the *weak* brand for the specific African countries – Ghana and Mali

Figure 2. Graphical display of the stimuli generated for Study 2, using the African ingredient Shea butter.

$p = 0.064$, $\eta p^2 = 0.030$). Moreover, the interaction effect between *host brand* and *African country of origin* had a significant effect on the *emotional* dimension of product value ($F[4, 115] = 10.328$, $p = 0.002$, $\eta p^2 = 0.084$).

The results indicate that consumer evaluations were more positive for the ingredients from Ghana ($M=3.67$) than for ingredients from Mali ($M=3.05$; $F[2, 115] = 6.596$, $p = 0.012$, $\eta p^2 = 0.055$). The export-market consumers apparently expressed a reduced *general interest in/involvement with Africa*, with no significant difference between the two specific African countries ($F[2, 115] = 2.004$, $p = 0.160$, $\eta p^2 = 0.017$).

DISCUSSION

Study 1

The results of Study 1 demonstrate that, as hypothesised in $H1$, *African-ingredient branding* can have a positive influence on evaluations of food items by export-market consumers. More precisely, the results of the *general* evaluations of food items in the 'pre' condition (in comparison to the 'post' condition) indicate that additional information about *African ingredients* significantly increases the evaluations of involved export-market consumers with regard to the 'post' condition, in comparison to the 'pre' condition.

Taking a closer look at the four consumption values (functional, social, epistemic and emotional) proposed in the theory of consumption by Sheth et al. (1991), the results indicate a tendency in which the strength of the host brand influences consumer evaluations of *African-ingredient branded food items* ($p < 0.10$). These results

nevertheless failed to meet the significance threshold of $p < 0.05$.

The results of Study 1 add to the body of evidence, indicating that *ingredient branding* can enhance consumer product evaluations, whilst strengthening brand equity. *African-ingredient branding* follows this path, and it could therefore be seen as a valuable marketing strategy for increasing the overall profit throughout the value chain within a globalised market. Contrary to previous studies (Keller, 2003; Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2010), the results of Study 1 did not demonstrate any host-brand effect with regard to food items. This finding calls for further consideration.

Study 2

African-ingredient branding with strength of the host brand and consumer attitudes towards specific African countries

Study 2 was intended to specify the results of Study 1, which indicated that *African-ingredient branding* is a valuable marketing strategy. Thereby, it is intended to explore the influence of host-brand strength and consumer attitudes towards specific African countries, utilising *African-ingredient branded hedonic products*. The applied research approach consists of two components. First, it investigates whether the strength of the host brand has an impact on the evaluations of export-market consumers concerning *African-ingredient branded hedonic products*, with the host brands characterised as either strong or weak. Second, the study investigates whether consumer attitudes towards specific African countries, defined dichotomously as either negative or positive, affect their evaluations of

African-ingredient branded hedonic products.

Based on the results of Study 1, which demonstrated that *African-ingredient branding* has a positive influence on consumers' general evaluations of food items (consistent with *H1*), the overarching aim of the second study is to provide a detailed examination of whether the strength of the host brand (*strong* vs. *weak*) or attitudes towards specific African countries of origin (*negative* vs. *positive*) affect the evaluations of export-market consumers with regard to *African-ingredient branded hedonic products*. In comparison to Study 1, the given study focuses on a different product category (that is, hedonic products instead of food items) and is based on a sample composed purely of 'real' export-market consumers/shoppers.

A brand is one of a company's most valuable intangible assets, since it operates as a powerful differentiator for businesses, manufactures, suppliers and retailers, in addition to and serving as a decision-making tool for consumers (Norris, 1992; Pinar and Trapp, 2008). Moreover, brands represent promises and build loyalty through trust, which results (at least theoretically) in continued demand and profitability (Reichheld, 2001). It should nevertheless be evident that brands themselves are differentiated according to several attributes (Carpenter et al., 1994), which could potentially affect their popularity and/or the likelihood that consumers will 'like' them. In turn, the likelihood that consumers will be more or less affected by a particular brand depends on the extent to which they are aware of the brand or its image. Against this background, previous studies have demonstrated that consumer perceptions of a particular host brand are of crucial influence on ingredient branding (Keller, 2003; Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2010). For this reason, whether the host brand is considered *weak* or *strong* might also have an essential effect on *African-ingredient branding*. Study 2 therefore investigates the influence of the strength of the host brand on *African-ingredient branded products*. The hypothesis in this regard (*H2*) is as follows:

H2: The strength of the target brand (whether it is weak or strong) has a significant influence on the evaluations of export-market consumers with regard to African-ingredient branded hedonic products.

The product perceptions of consumers also seem to be influenced by the product's country of origin (Aichner, 2014; Al-Sulaiti and Baker, 1998; Bilkey and Nes, 1982; Kinra, 2006; Keller, 1998; Luomala, 2007; Verlegh and van Ittersum, 2001) and media (or other) reporting (Havard et al., 2019). Based on the press coverage of specific African countries, in this case, Mali and Ghana, it is therefore expected that the African country of origin and the associated media reporting have a significant influence on the evaluations of export-market consumers concerning *African-branded hedonic products*. Given that

Mali has frequently been associated with crime, war and social/environmental disasters in media reporting, it is expected that Mali elicits negative associations in export-market consumers (in this case, Dutch consumers).

In contrast, Ghana, which is regarded as a safe place and is known for its upsurge in tourism (Owusu-Frimpong et al., 2013) is likely to elicit more positive associations in consumers. The attitudes of export-market consumers towards specific African countries of origin, whether they are perceived positively or negatively, could therefore be expected to have an influence their evaluations of *African-ingredient branded products*. This reasoning leads to the following hypothesis (*H3*):

H3: The perceptions of export-market consumers towards an African country of origin (negative or positive) have a significant influence on their evaluations of African-ingredient branded products.

Similar to Study 1, export-market consumers were asked to evaluate products in general, in addition to rating them according to specific dimensions of product value (Sheth et al., 1991), using the same validated scales that were used in Study 1. The questionnaire-based experiment was conducted using the service provider Qualtrics (<https://www.qualtrics.com/>). Each consumer was randomly assigned to one of the experimental groups, resulting in a 2x2 between-subject design (2 [strong brand vs. weak brand] x 2 [country of origin {Mali vs. Ghana}]).

As indicated by the results of Study 2, the *strength of the host brand* has a significant effect on consumer product evaluations of *African-ingredient branded hedonic products*, thus supporting *H2*. More precisely, the results demonstrate that *strong brands* apparently foster positive consumer evaluations of *African-ingredient branded hedonic products*, as evidenced by the more positive evaluations of *African-ingredient branded products* associated with *strong brands* relative to those associated with *weak brands*. These findings suggest that *strong brands*, which are highly familiar to consumers and that are embedded within the consumer value perceptions, are particularly likely to benefit from *African-ingredient branding*. These results are also in line with those of previous studies demonstrating that, when an existing brand is used to introduce a new product, consumers tend to use their existing value perceptions (of the known brand or ingredient) to evaluate the new offering (Aaker and Keller, 1990; Vaidyanathan and Aggarwal, 2000). In an earlier study, Simon and Sullivan (1993) define brand equity in terms of the incremental discounted future cash flows resulting from a product associated with a brand name, in comparison to the same product without the brand name. In this vein, *African-ingredient branding of strong brands* might indeed generate greater financial benefits, thus acting as a valuable marketing strategy for increasing overall profits throughout the value chain.

Focusing more specifically on the *value dimensions of export-market consumers* (Sheth et al., 1991), the *general consumer evaluations* appear to be particularly driven by *functional* and *epistemic consumption values*. In this regard, the *functional values*, which focus on the utility derived from the perceived quality and expected performance of the product (Sheth et al., 1991; Van Riemsdijk et al., 2017), appear to be the main driver of this effect (explaining 6.3% of the variance). This finding is in line with previous research demonstrating that *functional values* tend to be the main factors influencing consumer choice (Gonçalves et al., 2016). Likewise, *epistemic values*, which refer to the capacity of a product to arouse curiosity, provide novelty or satisfy a desire for knowledge (Sheth et al., 1991); also seems to have an influence on the strength of the host brand in *African-ingredient branded hedonic products*. It is interesting to note that previous studies have reported similar results when using the theory of consumption values (Sheth et al., 1991) to predict consumer evaluations and, most importantly, buying behaviour with regard to green food products (Gonçalves et al., 2016; Suki and Suki, 2015).

As mentioned before, the results demonstrate that *functional values* are particularly decisive in the purchase of green products (Gonçalves et al., 2016), whereas *functional, epistemic* and *social values* affect the environmental concerns of consumers with regard to these products (Suki and Suki, 2015). These results clearly suggest that the consumers' *consumption-value* evaluations of *African-ingredient branded products* and their associated brand strength support the promising idea of combining *African-ingredient branding* with *strong brands*, whilst enhancing brand equity by focusing on the *functional values* of the African ingredient. African farmer organisations and policy-makers might therefore do well to focus more on the functional attributes that are associated with Africa, building on the specific biological and environmental conditions. This finding is consistent with the observations of Ingenbleek (2019; 2020), who argues that the most important comparative advantages of African countries are rooted in their biogeographic environments.

In response, Papadopoulos and Hamzaoui-Essoussi (2015) called for investigation of the interaction between consumer image of the African continent and those of specific African countries and regions. The results of Study 2 suggest that consumers' attitudes towards specific African countries have no significant effect on their evaluations of *African-ingredient branded products*. This is in line with recent research demonstrating that the African continent is poorly understood (Matiza and Oni, 2013), consumer perceptions of Africa might therefore metaphorically be described as an 'amorphous grey mass of poverty ... corruption ... pestilence ... and several other inauspicious features' (Osei and Gbadamosi, 2011; Papadopoulos and Hamzaoui-Essoussi, 2015). Against this background, and

given the hierarchical structure of the consumers' mental schemes, consumers (especially those who are uninformed or have a reduced involvement) might have a more general image of specific African countries, thereby interpreting the *African-branded hedonic products* at a more general 'continental level'. This effect is known as the 'continent effect' (Papadopoulos and Hamzaoui-Essoussi, 2015; Wanjiru, 2006), and it involves ignoring country-specific associations related to particular African country.

The continent effect (Wanjiru, 2006) is supported by the results of the current study with regard to the two control variables, which were presented to the participants at the end of the experiment to examine the consumers' *general involvement* with regard to the African continent and their *specific perceptions of the countries* (Mali and Ghana). The results revealed significant differences in the consumers' specific perceptions of the two countries (when asked directly), as evidenced by the more positive evaluations expressed for Ghana, in comparison to their evaluations for Mali. However, at the same time, the consumers apparently expressed less *general interest in*, and therefore *involvement with* regard to, Africa, and no differences were observed between the two specific African countries.

Based on these results, it would be reasonable to conclude that, although consumers perceive specific African countries as more positive or more negative in comparison to other specific African countries (when asked directly), these perceptions do not affect their evaluations of *African-ingredient branded products*. The tendency to perceive specific African countries as positive or negative might therefore not act as a catalyst for an advanced cognitive thinking process, which is instead based on an initial 'continental' impression of Africa (Wanjiru, 2006). Against this background, it might be concluded that export-market consumers are not very interested in specific African countries, instead considering Africa as a single coherent entity, ignoring the diversity of African countries and the environmental conditions associated with them.

Implications

Several studies have investigated *ingredient branding* in general (Rodrigue and Biswas, 2004; Tepic et al., 2014), demonstrating that, in theory, *African-ingredient branding* might be a valuable marketing strategy (Papadopoulos and Hamzaoui-Essoussi, 2015, Sigué, 2012). To date, however, there have been no empirical examinations of ingredient branding within the context of commodities grown/produced in Africa. The concept of *African-ingredient branding* nevertheless seems to be a promising marketing strategy for increasing return on investment for several stakeholders, as well as for integrating farmers and intermediaries from frontier

markets. This strategy involves depicting positive product attributes and specific images of the host product, based on the natural and heritage features of African commodities (Verlegh and van Ittersum, 2001; Sigué, 2012; Papadopoulos and Hamzaoui-Essoussi, 2015). Against this background, the current empirical investigation of the evaluations of export-market consumers with regard to *African-ingredient branded products* provides initial experimental insight into how consumer perceptions of food items and hedonic products might be influenced by additional information about ingredients grown/produced in Africa, as well as by the strength of host brands and the consumer attitudes towards specific African countries.

The results of Study 1 support the idea of applying *African-ingredient branding* as a valuable marketing strategy for increasing brand equity. Moreover, as indicated by the results of Study 2, the strength of the host brand has a significant influence on consumer product evaluations. At the same time, however, the attitudes that export-market consumers have towards specific African countries of origin do not have any significant influence on their evaluations of *African-ingredient branded products*, whether in general or at the level of consumption values (Sheth et al., 1991).

The current research makes a theoretical contribution to the existing body of research on *ingredient branding* by examining ingredient branding within the context of agricultural commodities grown/produced in Africa. Through its experimental assessment, this study also contributes to the marketing and branding literature by providing an experimental framework for measuring the effect of *African-ingredient branding* with regard to agricultural commodities. The marketing strategy of *African-ingredient branding* was formulated, operationalised and validated to depict product attributes and a specific image of the product's place of origin. These aspects determine the *functional attributes* of a product (quality and taste), in addition to highlighting its *epistemic values*. The experimental investigation of the evaluations of export-market consumers therefore provides initial insight into how branded food items and hedonic products from Africa influence export-market consumer evaluations.

From a managerial point of view, the results indicate that *African-ingredient branding* has the potential to increase revenue, profit and return on investment for intermediaries, manufacturers, producers and farmers, including those in frontier-country markets. More precisely, the results provide the following practical-normative implications: First, most importantly, the results suggest that *African-ingredient branding* could be a useful and valuable marketing strategy for building brand equity, whilst having a positive influence on the evaluation processes of export-market consumers with regard to food items. Given that *functional* and *epistemic*

consumption values seem to be particularly likely to drive the effects of the *strength of the host brand* displayed, efficient and effective product presentations should evoke curiosity in consumers, in addition to enhancing the utility derived from perceived quality and consumer (emotional) attachment to the product. In this vein, African farmers might do well to concentrate on the functional attributes of African-grown commodities in their marketing strategies, in addition to cooperating with brand/market leaders. Second, given that *specific African countries of origin* apparently have no effect on the evaluations of export-market consumers, and in line with existing evidence of a 'continent effect' (Wanjiru, 2006), marketers seeking to apply *African-ingredient branding* might benefit from focusing more on Africa as a coherent continental entity. It should nevertheless be evident that further research is needed in order to examine whether overall perceptions of Africa as a continent might be more likely to affect consumer perceptions than are perceptions of specific African countries, even in light of current media reporting with reference to Africa. Third, farmers and producers might benefit from the insights into what consumers in developed markets are interested in, which could help them to adapt their production to the needs of export-market consumers, thereby improving their ability to serve these markets. Fourth, the knowledge that *African-ingredient branding* add value to products and/or goods can be used to develop innovative product or service concepts that could enhance differentiation on a dynamic market or that could increase the value of commodities that are grown/produced in Africa and, by extension, African agricultural products.

Limitations and future research directions

The limitations of this study suggest several avenues for future research. The current studies were limited to the use of food items and hedonic products. Extending the research scope to include other product categories might therefore provide a better representation of *African-ingredient branding*, thereby leading to innovative research findings. In addition, the research findings concerning the hypotheses about African ingredients might be limited, as they were examined using only two countries of origin. Further research based on several African countries or the integration of Africa as a 'continent (effect)' might therefore be able to provide advanced evidence of the patterns of *African-ingredient branding* observed in this study. The measurement items in the current research work were derived largely from the consumption values proposed by Sheth et al. (1991). Future studies could address a broader array of consumption values in addition, to incorporating other theoretical constructs in order to measure the '*perceived values of consumers*' (Sweeney and Soutar,

2001). Future studies could also address behavioural intention variables, like the willingness to pay or the willingness to accept, in order to investigate the naturalistic, marketing-relevant effects of *African-ingredient branding*. Such studies could also implement additional control variables (such as age, income, cognitive capacity, product knowledge), possibly reinforcing the current research results.

Conclusion

This research work contributes to the large body of literature focusing on *ingredient branding*. The result of the first study demonstrate that African-ingredient branding, utilising commodities grown/produced in Africa, has a positive influence on the evaluations of export-market consumers with regard to specific food items. The results of the second study suggest that the *strength of the host brand* is particularly likely to influence the evaluations of export-market consumers with regard to hedonic products. In terms of the theory of consumption values (Sheth et al., 1991), the results of this study further suggest that *functional values* and, to a lesser extent, *epistemic values* affect the evaluations of consumers; thus potentially influencing their behaviour as well. The findings reported here have theoretic and practical implications for researchers, marketing practitioners, intermediates and farmers, suggesting that *African-ingredient branding* could be used as a valuable marketing strategy for increasing overall profits throughout the value chain.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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