

## Made in Saskatchewan: An extension of country-of-origin branding exercise based on corporate social responsibility

### *Purpose*

The literature generally considers country-of-origin as an exogenous variable and examines its main effects on various consumer behaviors, or its interaction effects under diverse conditions. Little is known how certain country image, as a marketing variable, is formulated. The objective of this study is to document an action-based research project that purposefully branding products based on its location of origin. Drawing from Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the authors consider alternative options of branding product of origin based on value, quality, or esteem, and propose that the new product origin branding initiative should incorporate corporate social responsibility, which appeals to the consumers' highest level of needs: self-actualization.

### *Research Methodology*

This paper is primarily qualitative. The authors draw on writings on topics such as corporate social responsibility, social entrepreneurship, and management of not-for-profit organizations to enrich the branding exercise primarily carried out by traditional for-profit businesses. To support their claims, the authors also present empirical evidence from several in-depth personal interviews with 17 senior managers from diverse industry backgrounds in Western Canada.

### *Conclusions*

Country-of-origin, in this case, the product's province-of-origin, is an important aspect of product characteristics. It can potentially serve as a cue to indicate value, quality, and other intrinsic characteristics that are difficult to measure or communicate. As the branding experience in the past have suggested, companies are more likely to enjoy higher level of price premium when their branding communication appeals to higher levels of consumers' needs. Being socially responsible would appeal to consumers' self-actualization need of doing the right thing, and represents future branding opportunities. Businesses can gain both social and financial benefits by becoming socially responsible. Corporate social responsibility provides competitive advantages to the business.

### *Value*

Our findings have both theoretical and managerial implications. First, maintaining corporate social responsibility may generate a net economic cost to the organization in the short term, but one which is outweighed by the social and economic value it creates in the long term. Organizations need to invest some earnings in pursuing societal objectives. Second, depending on the organization's effectiveness in aligning its social and business objectives, and communicating such dual objectives with its stakeholders, including customers, CSR can provide the organization with internal benefits in the form of competitive advantages and external benefits such as brand equity. Third, governments and business association play important roles in providing supports and incentives that encourage and facilitate organizations that create both economic and social value and promote such socially responsible behaviours.

### *Key words*

Branding; country of origin; corporate social responsibility; market orientation; differentiation; competitive advantage; dynamic capabilities