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Impact of Country Personality on Attitude Toward Foreign Products: Self-congruity as a Mediator

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Abstract - This research examines the direct effect of country personality (CP) on consumer product attitude and indirect effect through consumer self-congruity between CP and his/her own self-concept on product attitude in an emerging country- Turkey. We propose an integrated structural equation model to examine the relationships. Measurement scales for CP, self-congruity and attitude are developed whose validities and reliabilities are confirmed by exploratory (EFA) and confirmatory (CFA) factor analyses with data collected from a sample of consumers in Turkey on two countries: USA and China.

The results reveal that four out of the original six dimensions of CP remain after a CFA is completed. The results show a direct effect of CP for two aspects of CP on product attitude as well as an indirect effect for one of the aspects of CP on product attitude through consumer's self-congruity as the mediator. These results also suggest that the CP construct may require further testing in other emerging markets to confirm the generalizability of the construct.

Keywords - Country personality, Self-congruity, Foreign Product attitude

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners

This research confirms the viability of the country personality scale in an emerging market even though the facets used in the scale as well as number of significant CP dimensions that can be verified are clearly different. This indicates that caution must be exercised when applying the same concept developed in western industrialized countries to an emerging market.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, country image (CI) studies reported in the international marketing literature have followed the country-of-origin (COO) research stream (for reviews, see Liefeld, 1993; Peterson and Jolibert, 1995; Phau and Chao, 2008). The vast majority of these studies has focused on identifying the CI dimensions

which may have an impact on consumer evaluations of products from different countries such as economic, political, technological, et al.

Recently, personality constructs have also received some research attention including brand, store, website and tourism destinations, et al. Country personality (CP) as another measure of country image has been identified as a very promising CI perspective which warrants further research (Roth and Diamantopoulos, 2009). Just like brand personality where consumers may perceive a brand to possess certain human personality traits, CP can also be seen as a country perceived to possess a set of certain human personality traits, which in turn can influence consumer attitude toward the country's products.

This research aims to extend the study of congruity between a person's self-concept and brand/product images (Sirgy, 1982) to CP and how this may impact a person's product attitude. According to the theory, the greater the match between a person's self-concept and the brand image, the greater is the propensity for the consumer to prefer the brand and greater is also the likelihood for the consumer to exhibit a better attitude toward the brand. Recent self-congruity studies have focused the research attention mostly on tourist's self-concept and tourist destinations (Hosany and Martin, 2012; Sirgy and Su, 2000; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011), none has addressed the issue from the perspectives of CP and consumer product attitude.

In this research, we examined the direct relationship between CP and consumer product attitude and whether a person's self-congruity may mediate between CP and product attitude. Self-congruity in this study refers to the extent to which a person's self concept matches the country's personality. Since most CP studies have been conducted in western industrialized countries, we conducted a study to test the robustness of CP as another CI construct, develop a valid and reliable scale to measure congruity between a person's self-concept and CP, and test the effects on product attitude in an emerging market – Turkey.

LITERATURE BACKGROUND

The CI research has followed a long and well established tradition in the international marketing literature. However, critiques of some of the earlier research has pointed out the simplistic nature of some of the research designs as consisting of mostly single cue models (Bilkey and Nes, 1982), which also seem rather atheoretical (Obermiller and Spangenberg, 1989). Others have continued to debate the merits of this research stream as to whether the “Made In” labels still matter in consumer product evaluations given the increasing complexities in the multinational production process resulting in hybrid products where a product may be designed in one country, parts sourced from different countries and the final product assembled in yet another country are becoming the standard rather than an exception (Chao 2001; Johansson and Nebenzahl, 1986; Johansson, 1993).

Conceptual Model and Hypotheses

The literature has identified a disparate set of CI dimensions including economic, political developments as well as technological advancement (Martin and Eroglu, 1993); general country attributes, general and specific product attributes (Parameswaran and Pisharodi, 1994); product user profiles and other product related items such as design, style and workmanship (Chao and Rajendran, 1993; Chao, 1998; Haubl, 1996; Roth and Romeo, 1992); work conditions, concerns with the environment, work culture, vocational training and conflict with the home country (Lala, Allred and Chakraborty, 2009). While these studies have provided insights and enhanced our understanding of the CI construct, they lack a unified concept pertaining to CI.

Han (1989) extended the work of Erickson, Johansson and Chao (1984) and confirmed the notion that CI can either serve as a halo influencing product beliefs, which in turn influenced product attitude or as a summary construct of product beliefs influencing product attitude directly depending on the level of consumer familiarity with the country's products. Somewhat consistent with the results reported by Erickson, Johansson and Chao (1984), Knight and Calantone (2000) and Laroche, et al. (2005) extended the Han's models by testing more flexible models in which the results revealed that CI and product beliefs can simultaneously influence product attitude regardless of the consumer's level of familiarity with the country's products.

Country personality first introduced by d'Astous and Boujbel (2007) represents a unified CI concept which is relatively invariant in its applications to a variety of different cultural as well as product and service settings (Roth and Diamantopoulos 2009). Six dimensions of CP were identified: agreeableness, wickedness, snobbism, assiduousness, conformity and unobtrusiveness, some of which are considered positive and others negative. As such positive personality traits can be expected to affect product attitude positively and negative personality traits can be expected to affect product attitude negatively. The following hypothesis can thus be formulated:

H₁: Country personality traits influence consumer product attitude both positively and negatively.

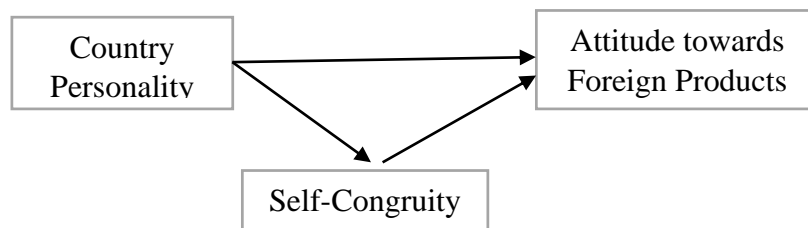
Congruity principle elucidated by Osgood and Tennenbaum (1955) postulates that due to the fact that incongruent information generates dissonance, consumers prefer congruent information. It can be expected therefore that consumer responses to congruent condition will be more positive than incongruent condition. One can presume then that consumer attitude can be influenced by congruence resulting from a psychological comparison between the brand image and the consumer's self-concept. It has been shown that if a person's self-concept matches the brand image, the person's brand attitude is better than if there is no match (Sirgy, 1982; Sirgy, et al., 1997).

Self-congruity theory has also been tested in tourism marketing literature as a key variable affecting tourist attitude and behavior. Self-congruity with the destination has been shown to be significantly correlated with the probability of visiting a destination and the consumer's intention to visit (Litvin and Goh, 2002). Beerli, et al. (2007) also claimed that intention to visit a destination is positively affected by the visitor's self-congruity with the perceived destination image. In the tourism marketing literature, self-congruity has been confirmed as a mediator variable in attitude formation (Litvin and Goh, 2002; Sirgy and Su 2000; Usakali and Baloglu, 2011). In the corollary, the greater the match between a person's self-concept and the CP, the better should be the attitude toward the country's products. One can therefore expect self-congruity to play a mediator role between CP and attitude toward the country's products. We present the following hypothesis:

H₂: Self-congruity with CP mediates the relationship between CP and product attitude toward the country's products.

The model depicting the set of relationships is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Hypothesized relationship



METHOD

The following countries were selected for this study: USA and China. These two countries were selected to ensure that Turkish consumers are generally aware of these countries' products. US products are reasonably well known in Turkey because big multinational US companies have manufacturing facilities in Turkey and export products from the USA are widely available, which are perceived quite positively (Kaynak and Kara, 2002). On the contrary, Chinese products while not being perceived quite as positively as US products by Turkish consumers, its product image has recently improved as the nation has been increasingly perceived to be associated with high tech consumer electronic goods in Turkey (Cengiz and Kirkbir, 2007).

We first developed the research questionnaire in English and then translated the questionnaire into Turkish through a parallel translation process by two Turkish nationals who are both proficient in English and Turkish. The questionnaire was pretested with two Turkish university professors who are also proficient in both languages. The final version of the questionnaire was obtained after removing any ambiguities regarding wording and the questions asked in the

survey instrument. A copy of the research questionnaire is shown in the Appendix.

Country personality was measured by using the original d'Astous and Boujbel's (2007) 24 items scale. Traditionally, self-congruity measure was obtained by examining the discrepancy between the subject's perceptions of the product user image and the subject's perception of his/her own image. Sirgy, et al., (1997) suggested that this approach would be more likely to lead to biased results. They suggested and confirmed that more accurate and less biased results can be obtained by asking the subjects the extent to which their own self-image matched the image of the object, in our case the CP. In this research, we followed this recommendation by using the following items: If I were a country I would be a country as country A, personality of country A is consistent with how I see myself, personality of country A is a mirror image of my personality, if country A were a person, she would be person who is very similar to my personality, personality of country A is very much like my personality and reflects me. Product attitude was measured by using a five items scale (Lee and Ganesh, 1999). Finally all scales were measured by using five point Likert (1- disagree/ 5-agree) scales.

Data collection

Data were collected from 269 (148 on USA and 121 on China) respondents through a survey link on Akademikpersonel.org which is a main information source for presenting and discussing post-graduate issues in Turkey. Out of the total sample of 269 respondents, 131 and 168 of the respondents were female and male respectively. Two hundred and sixty seven respondents achieved an educational level equal to or higher than a bachelor degree and 261 respondents are between the ages of 18-35. The sample statistics are shown in Table 1. This is a more highly educated consumer sample, which should not be surprising as the website is designed to reach this audience.

Table 1: Sample Statistics

Countries	Education	Age	Male	Female	Total	
USA	Bachelor Equivalent	18-23	2	13	15	
		24-29	5	7	12	
		30-35	2	1	3	
		Others	0	1	1	
	Master Phd	18-23	7	9	16	
		24-29	39	47	86	
		30-35	6	5	11	
		Others	3	1	4	
	Total					148
	China	Bachelor Equivalent	18-23	11	5	16
24-29			10	5	15	
30-35			0	1	1	
Others			0	3	3	
Master Phd		18-23	7	3	10	
		24-29	36	26	62	
		30-35	10	3	13	
		Others	1	0	1	
Total					121	

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reliabilities of the scales were tested first before we conducted the exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. All three scales achieved high levels of reliabilities. Cronbach Alphas of the 24 items country personality scale, 5 items self-congruity scale and the 5 items product attitude scales were .71, .93 and .94 respectively.

Both exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were conducted to establish construct validity of the scales and reliabilities for the integrated structural equation model shown in Figure 1 using AMOS 21.0.0. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted for country personality scale. In EFA, direct oblimin rotation and maximum likelihood extraction methods were employed and analysis was iterated to obtain solutions which explained more than 60 % of the total variance. In EFA, 24 items country personality scale was reduced to 13 variables and 4 factors. Factors were named as agreeableness, wickedness, assiduousness and unobtrusiveness as in the original work (d'Astous and Boujbel, 2007). Factors with their factor loadings and reliability scores are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Exploratory Factor Analysis Result of Country Personality

	Agreeableness	Unobtrusiveness	Wickedness	Assiduousness
	α: .853	α: .919	α: .876	α: .851
Total Explained Variance: % 69.326				
Cp1: Bon vivant	.918	.046	.142	-.097
Cp2: Reveler	.871	.082	.074	-.086
Cp3: Amusing	.645	-.064	-.095	.050
Cp22: Wimpy	.019	.974	-.057	.063
Cp21: Cowardly	.004	.891	.041	-.019
Cp9: Haughty	-.002	-.081	.938	.086
Cp10: Snobbish	.089	-.036	.901	.051
Cp11: Mannered	-.139	.109	.704	-.185
Cp8: Offender	-.031	.071	.698	-.130
Cp16: Hard to work	.010	.012	.523	.006
Cp7: Decadent	.323	.014	.518	.123
Cp13: Organized	-.082	.051	.007	.880
Cp14: Rigorous	.019	-.023	-.011	.852

A summary of the four dimensions of country personality construct is presented below:

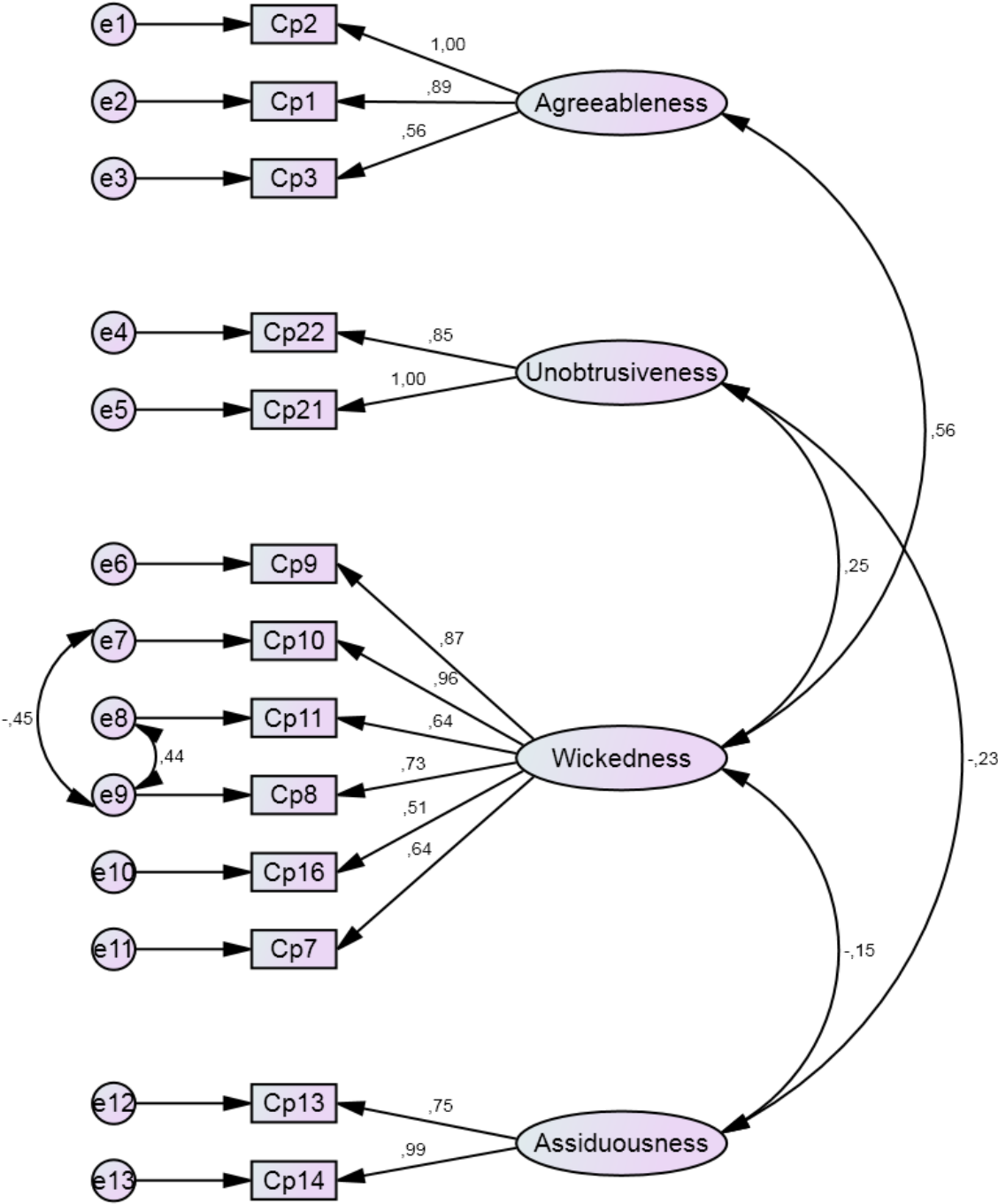
Agreeableness: Cp1: Bon vivant (.918); Cp2: Reveler (.871); Cp3: Amusing (.645) - Cronbach Alpha: .853

Wickedness: Cp9: Haughty (.938); Cp10: Snobbish (.901); Cp11: Mannered (.704); Cp8: Offender (.698); Cp16: Hard to work (.523); Cp7: Decadent (.518) - Cronbach Alpha: .876

Assiduousness: Cp13: Organized (.880); Cp14: Rigorous (.852) - Cronbach Alpha: .851

Unobtrusiveness: Cp22: Wimpy (.974); Cp21: Cowardly (.891) - Cronbach Alpha: .919

Figure 2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Result of Country Personality



Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA) were conducted for all of the constructs. For CFA, country personality showed a good fit with the data ($\chi^2/df = 2.950$; NFI = .922; CFI= .947; RMSEA = .084; GFI=.910; AGFI=.866). However, in CFA, residual error variance of Cp2 and Cp21 were negative and insignificant. This can happen due to multicollinearity between observed variable especially when the latent variable is explained by a few observed variables. This problem can be fixed by constraining error variance to zero or a small positive numbers

(Chen, et al., 2001). We therefore constrained the error variance to 0.01 for both Cp2 and Cp21. CFA of CP with standardized estimates is shown in Figure 2.

In addition, self-congruity with country personality also showed a very good fit with the data ($\chi^2/df = 1.482$; NFI = .996; CFI= .999; RMSEA = .042; GFI=.991; AGFI=.967). The self-congruity scale also showed a high reliability score (*Cronbach Alpha: .932*). Attitude scale also showed a good fit with the data. ($\chi^2/df = 2.839$; NFI = .993; CFI= .996; RMSEA = .083; GFI= .988; AGFI= .939) with a high degree of reliability (*Cronbach Alpha .935*). CFA results for self-congruity and product attitude are not shown because their standardized factor loadings can be seen in the structural model depicted in Figure 3. Furthermore, these two constructs are single dimensional constructs.

Discriminant and convergent validities of the constructs were evaluated by the Average Variance Extracted and the Composite Reliability scores. Convergent validities of all scale items were confirmed as the composite reliability exceeded .7 and the average variance extracted for all of the items was larger than the cutoff point of .5. Discriminant validities were also satisfied as the AVE for each construct was larger than the squared correlation between the construct and every other construct in the model (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). These results are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3: Intercorrelation Matrix

	Ag.	W.	As.	U.	S.C.	At.
Agreeableness (Ag.)	.702	.190	.000	.000	.013	.139
Wickedness (W.)	.436*	.548	.048	.085	.029	.000
Assiduousness (As.)	-.026	-.221*	.771	.030	.077	.100
Unobtrusiveness (U.)	.017	.292*	-.176*	.861	.018	.025
Self Congruity (S.C.)	.118	-.173*	.279*	-.137*	.783	.229
Attitude (At.)	.373*	.006	.317*	-.159*	.479*	.736
Composite Reliability	.870	.875	.869	.925	.946	.933

* $p < .05$

Notes: The AVE for each construct is presented in the diagonal. The numbers below the diagonal are correlations and the numbers above the diagonal are squared correlations.

Finally, we evaluated the goodness of fit of the integrated structural equation model. The model provided a very good fit with the data. ($\chi^2/df = 1.788$; NFI = .927; CFI= .966; RMSEA = .054; GFI= .886; AGFI= .856) Although, AGFI and GFI were close to the margins; CFI, RMSEA and χ^2/df indices showed that the model had a very good fit (Hu and Bentler, 1999). The results are shown in Figure 3. Figure 3 only contains standardized estimates. However, Table 3 displays both standardized and unstandardized estimates of the structural model as well as the significance levels and the respective t-values.

In terms of hypothesis testing, agreeableness, assiduousness factors showed significant direct effect ($p < .001$) on attitude (Table 4). In contrast, unobtrusiveness and wickedness dimensions surprisingly did not have any significant direct or indirect influence on product attitude. Wickedness and unobtrusiveness dimensions can be considered as negative traits which can cause consumers to have negative attitude toward the country's products. Therefore H_1 is partially confirmed since agreeableness and assiduousness remained significant. This result suggests that if a country is perceived to be agreeable and assiduous, Turkish consumers will have more positive attitude towards the country's products.

Table 4: Structural Equation Model Estimates and Hypotheses Tests

	Standardized Beta	Unstandardized Beta	t value
Agreeableness → Attitude	.303	.248	5.963*
Assiduousness → Attitude	.270	.343	4.927*
Assiduousness → Self Congruity	.251	.238	4.050*
Self-Congruity → Attitude	.397	.533	7.358*

* $p < 0.01$ (two tailed)

Similarly unobtrusiveness and wickedness did not show any significant effect on self-congruity. However, they were still retained in the model, due to the fact that it has covariance relations with other country personality dimensions. Lastly, the only mediation role self-congruity played was between assiduousness and attitude constructs. Therefore H_2 was also only partially confirmed.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

This research confirmed four of the six dimensions of country personality with adequate validity and reliability in an emerging market- Turkey. This may suggest that cautions are necessary when using the same construct in different countries. Our results showed that country personality can influence consumer product attitude directly. In this respect, just like brands, country personality traits can affect product perceptions. In addition, one aspect of self-congruity (assiduousness) mediated the relation between country personality and attitude. Both hypotheses were partially confirmed suggesting that marketers may take advantage of strong and positive country personality traits to position the country and products when marketing in Turkey. It may not be surprising that both wickedness and unobtrusiveness did not show any direct impact on product attitude. A similar study has shown that consumers in China may exhibit a strong animosity toward Japan and yet display a favorable attitude toward its products (Klein, et al., 1998).

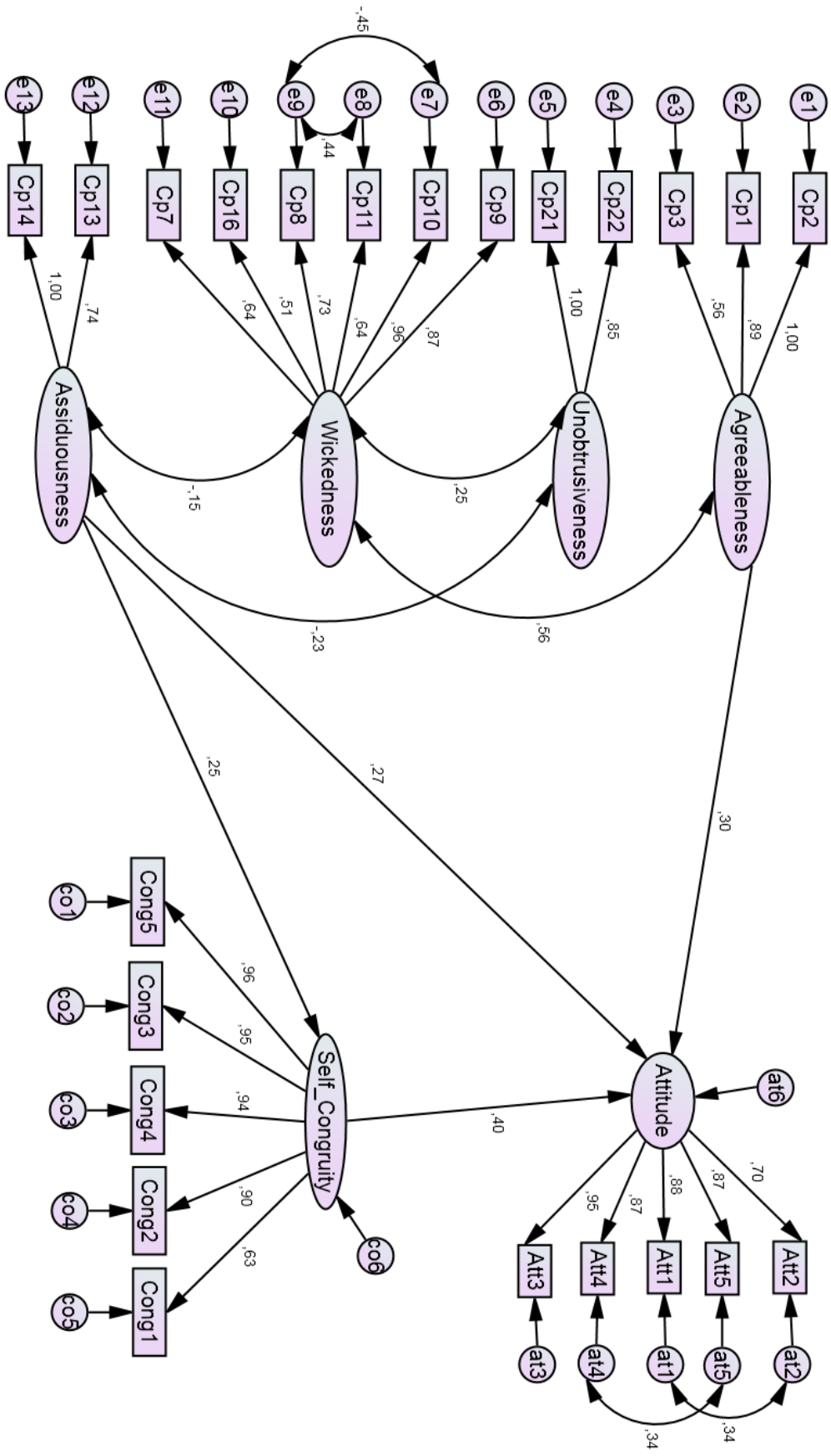


Figure 3: Standardized Estimates for the Integrated Model

With this information, companies can also tailor their marketing campaigns to improve their country personality perceptions. In addition, they can also design their marketing campaigns especially in the short run with consumers who have high congruency with their countries' personality. Attempts to change consumers' CP perception in another country by individual firms can be a very expensive marketing proposition. Many national governments, however, have invested heavily in promoting and seeking to change the country's product images such as the "Very Well Made in Taiwan" campaign sponsored by the Trade Promotion Board of the Republic of China on Taiwan in recent years. Changing CP image campaigns by national governments are indeed rare, but should be seriously considered as various government agencies may have greater financial resources wherewithal to engage in such promotions which will benefit all firms in the country in the long run when engaging in trade with other countries, which in turn will affect consumer attitude toward the country's products as demonstrated by the results of this study.

Limitations and suggestions for further research

Since the data were collected on the website dedicated to discussing academic related issues, respondents tend to be younger and more highly educated and may not represent the population of Turkey as a whole. This study was conducted in one emerging market- Turkey. Research in more than one emerging country market may be warranted to increase the generalizability of the results. We collected data on just two countries: USA and China. More countries can also be included. The study was designed to test the viability of the CP construct and its impact on foreign product attitude with self congruity as the mediator rather than testing perception differences in specific countries perse. Future studies should provide such tests. Additionally, in future research, consideration of other relevant concepts such as ethnocentrism and other country image dimensions including product quality can potentially add greater insights in enhancing our understanding of the impacts of CI and its moderators. CI has been identified as a multidimensional construct including CP and product image. Both may be important in influencing consumer product attitude and should be researched further.

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Appendix: Survey instruments and scale items

Country Personality: If <u>country name</u> can be described as a person with the following personality traits, please check the box which represents your level of agreement/disagreement with each of the following items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Bon vivant (Cp1)					
Reveler (Cp2)					
Amusing (Cp3)					
Agreeable (Cp4)					
Immoral (Cp5)					
Vulgar (Cp6)					
Decadent (Cp7)					
Offender (Cp8)					
Haughty (Cp9)					
Snobbish (Cp10)					
Mannered (Cp11)					
Chauvinist (Cp12)					
Organized (Cp13)					
Rigorous (Cp14)					
Flourishing (Cp15)					
Hard to work (Cp16)					
Religious (Cp17)					
Spiritual (Cp18)					
Traditionalist (Cp19)					
Mysterious (Cp20)					
Cowardly (Cp21)					
Wimpy (Cp22)					
Dependent (Cp23)					
Neutral (Cp24)					

Self-congruity: Please check the box that most closely represents your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following 5 items. (Please refer to the country personality items when you check the boxes)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
If I were a country I would be a country as <u>country name</u> (Cong1)					
Personality of <u>country name</u> is consistent with how I see myself. (Cong2)					
Personality of <u>country name</u> is a mirror image of my personality. (Cong3)					
If <u>country name</u> were a person, she would be a person who is very similar to me. (Cong4)					
Personality of <u>country name</u> is very much like my personality and reflects me. (Cong5)					
Attitude Towards Foreign Products: Please check the box you feel most closely represents your attitude toward products from the <u>country name</u> on each of the following statements.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I like them (Att1)					
I think other people like them (Att2)					
I would be satisfied with owning one (Att3)					
I would recommend them to others (Att4)					
I would be happy to buy one as a gift for someone (Att5)					