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European Expert Buyers' Perceptions of New Zealand Agri-food Products and Businesses: An Explanation of the Theory of Buyer-Seller Relationships and Country of Origin Theory

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ABSTRACT

With agrifood export earnings so pivotal to New Zealand (NZ)'s economy, understanding how expert buyers perceive the country's agrifood products and businesses is imperative. This holds particularly true for the European Union (EU), being one of NZ's main trading partners. This research draws on the key theories centering on buyer-seller relationships and Country of Origin (CoO) theory, investigating specifically the perceptions of NZ agrifood products and businesses held by European expert buyers who have different levels of knowledge and experience. A quantitative survey was conducted which investigated these perceptions held by the European expert buyers accessed in-person at a trade show in 2015 in Germany. Bipolar adjective scales were used to test product and business attributes. One-way ANOVA's were adopted to test for perceptual differences between European buyers with high/medium/low experience with New Zealand's agrifood products and/or businesses. Overall, New Zealand agrifood products and businesses were viewed positively from the perspective of European expert buyers, with the degree of positivity increasing as the level of experience increased. This study also highlighted the need for future research on how CoO affects buyer-seller relationships, especially via the concept of the "halo effect".

INTRODUCTION

For decades the wealth of New Zealand has been built upon its export earnings, particularly those from agrifood products and services (Chellew, 2008; Maughan, 1978; New Zealand Trade and Enterprise, 2008). New Zealand's total exports of goods and services were valued at NZD $67.7 billion for the year ended December 2014; this figure has now grown to NZD $78.2 billion at the end of 2020 (Statistics New Zealand, 2015, 2021). Meat and dairy-based products contribute to more than 30 percent of New Zealand's total export earnings (Statistics New Zealand, 2021; Treasury, 2015).

To maintain such prosperity, however, New Zealand has to overcome the obstacle of geographical isolation from its key markets. As one of these important markets, the European Union (EU) is the fourth most exported-to region from New Zealand in the world (New Zealand Foreign Affairs &

Trade, 2020). Of all the products exported to Europe, over 60 percent were food and beverage products, such as meat, fruits, fish, and wine (New Zealand Foreign Affairs & Trade, 2020).

One way to overcome this geographical isolation is to better understand these export markets and their customer needs, which provides the justification for investigating European expert buyers' perceptions of New Zealand agrifood products and businesses. The term "expert buyers" refers to those who are more experienced than novices at judging and processing information in an analytical fashion whilst also possessing the ability to perform product related tasks (Brucks, 1985; Johnson & Russo, 1984; Rao & Monroe, 1989; Shanteau, 1992; Wagner, Klein, & Keith, 2001). Compared to a novice, these expert buyers are more capable of structuring the criteria that they adopt for their decision-making, and making accurate summaries of both businesses and products (Perkins & Rao, 1990; Spence & Brucks, 1997). Sometimes interchangeable with the names "industrial buyers" (Sheth, 1973) or "retail buyers" (Insch, Prentice, & Knight, 2011), expert buyers often purchase on behalf of retailers, and therefore have great influence on both the type and range of products that are available to end consumers due to limited market space (Hansen & Skytte, 1998; McGoldrick & Douglas, 1983; McLaughlin & Rao, 1991; Sternquist, 1994). Researchers have found that these expert buyers are capable of making quick decisions on what to purchase, but the specific criteria upon which they make their judgement calls remains understudied and unclear (Insch et al., 2011).

Given the importance of the agrifood sector to New Zealand's economic prosperity, it would benefit exporters immensely if they could gain a deeper understanding on how European expert buyers perceive New Zealand agrifood products and businesses. Additionally, it is also pertinent to be able to understand whether individual buyers' different knowledge frameworks and personal experiences would be lead to variation on their perceptions. Such an in-depth understanding would enable exporters to target their resources in focused areas to better meet their customer needs and build stronger relationships with their buyers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To understand expert buyers' decision-making criteria, it is important to investigate buyer-seller relationships. Given the credence attributes that New Zealand agrifood products are often intended to deliver (Dalziel, Saunders, Tait, & Saunders, 2018), Country of Origin (CoO) theories are also highly relevant, and warrant a systematic review.

Buyer-Seller Relationships

Previous research has been focused on understanding buyer-seller relationships, and how to develop successful ones (Akrout, Diallo, Akrout, Chandon, & Marketing, 2016; J. C. Anderson & Narus, 1990; Cannon & Perreault, 1999; Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987; Fischer, 2013; Wilson, 1995). Buyer-seller relationships develop over time, during which buyers and sellers build trust through their interactions with a product or service. These relationships are also highly strategic in today's complex business world, through which firms strive to achieve their own goals (Glavee-Geo, Engelseth, & Buvik, 2021; Wilson, 1995). To contribute to a successful buyer-seller relationship, information sharing is important for increasing the commitment and enhancing the relationship between both parties (Anderson & Weitz, 1992) .

In buyer-seller relationship studies, scholars have identified commitment and trust as the most common dependent variables (Anderson & Weitz, 1992; E. Anderson, Lodish, & Weitz, 1987; Moorman, Zaltman, & Deshpande, 1992). Commitment within the context of these types of

relationships is defined as the long-term continuation of a relationship which is mutually beneficial to both parties; this commitment also goes hand-in-hand with cooperation (Gupta, Polonsky, & Lazaravic, 2019; Wilson, 1995). On the other hand, trust is the "willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence" (Wilson, 1995, p. 315). Trust is defined as the ability of both parties to coordinate and fulfil their obligations whilst also pulling their respective weight in the relationship (Dwyer et al., 1987). As a result, trust is an important component when considering product quality attributes (Knight, Holdsworth, & Mather, 2007a). In order to establish trust, both reliability and reputation in production and exporting processes are the key determinants (Knight et al., 2007a; Knight, Holdsworth, & Mather, 2007b).

Country of Origin (CoO) Theories

Country of Origin (CoO) has been found to be a possible, but not paramount, determinant in establishing trust for expert buyers (Insch, Williams, & Knight, 2016; Knight, Holdsworth, & Mather, 2005). Whether a country's marketing image aligns with a certain category of products impacts on the perceptions of those who are the buyers of such products (Roth & Romeo, 1992). Consumers and expert buyers tend to relate their opinions towards the citizens of a particular country to their views of the products which come from that country (Heslop, Papadopoulos, Dowdles, Wall, & Compeau, 2004). When it comes to business relationships, CoO theory stipulates that the relationship which exists between manufacturers and their foreign clients is largely built on national stereotypes (Knight et al., 2007a; Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). Whilst CoO is not a primary reason for selection of products in many circumstances, the image of the country can either make or break the degree of trust which buyers have for businesses from that country (Knight et al., 2007b). For expert buyers in particular, CoO information influences their decisions on food product purchases (Skaggs, Falk, Almonte, & Cárdenas, 1996). As the agrifood industry provides the backbone of the New Zealand economy (Savory, 2020), it is clear that the country's image is important for the success of both the industry and the country itself with export markets (Ballingall & Lattimore, 2004).

European Buyers' Decision-Making Criteria in Relation to New Zealand

The most prominent attributes that European buyers use as their decision-making criteria when purchasing appear to be traceability, the quantity of the product that is available, and whether long-term business relationships are likely to be made (Wongprawmas, Canavari, Haas, & Asioli, 2012). This indicates that product characteristics are not the only factors considered; this view is also supported by Skytte and Blunch (2006) who discovered that supplier characteristics, relationship building, marketing strategies and traceability were all used as key criteria for decision-making in the evaluation of international food products by Western European food retailers.

Despite New Zealand's dependence on its agrifood exports for its wealth, the country has not been seen as a sufficiently effective exporting nation to the EU when it comes to food and beverage products and businesses (Chellew, 2008). Research by Chellew (2008) has shown that New Zealand's reputation for high quality products needs to be supported with marketing which is of equally high quality. As a country, New Zealand is portrayed as being clean, green, and environmentally conscious, with an emphasis on the creation of high quality raw materials (New Zealand Trade and Enterprise, 2008). This national image is the basis for the "halo effect" which positively influences the perception of New Zealand's food and beverage products (Han, 1989). Being "naturally beautiful" and "clean and green", however, does not necessarily lend itself to New Zealand being deemed technologically advanced, or as a country with a collectively successful CoO branding

image (Chellew, 2008; Insch et al., 2016; New Zealand Trade and Enterprise, 2006; Saunders, Barber, & Sorenson, 2009).

Together with this 'not as effective' view of New Zealand's exporting effort to the EU, these previous findings on buy-seller relationships, trust and expert buyer decision making has exposed one area that deserves further investigation. As a result of this previous research, a research gap in terms of investigating how European expert buyer's perceptions about New Zealand agrifood products and businesses would vary according to the level of experience they possess has been found. This is the particular area that this study focuses on.

Therefore, the exploratory research objectives for this study are threefold:

1) Determine how professional buyers in Europe perceive New Zealand's agrifood products and businesses.
2) Identify the types of agrifood products and business activities in which New Zealand is reported to be performing well, and those that could be improved.
3) Determine whether the buyer's level of experience with New Zealand's agrifood products and businesses influences their perceptions.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research questions were analysed using questionnaires to collect data from participants of the 2015 Anuga trade show in Cologne, Germany. Anuga prides itself to be the world's leading trade fair for food and beverage industry, with 100 years of experience (Anuga, 2021). In 2015, this trade fair was completed booked with over 7,000 exhibitors from over 100 countries, and was known as the world's biggest and most important business platform for the international food industry (Comunicaffe International, 2015). The importance of this trade event for the food and beverage sector made it an ideal place to conduct survey questionnaires in order to answer the questions set out for this research.

Although this data collection took place in 2015, it is important to note that there are still no prior studies in existence that systematically elicit the views and opinions of professional overseas buyers towards New Zealand products and/or New Zealand businesses. It had been hoped to gather further data in order to extend this study to form a longitudinal time-series study in 2020, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic gathering further data became problematic. As a result, this study focuses purely on the 2015 data, with a view to adding value to the research presented through the addition of a survey time series which will occur once the situation regarding the Covid-19 pandemic allows such research to take place.

First, the data was analysed and descriptive statistics of the respondents were produced. This included their nationality, and characteristics of their products, businesses, and primary industry. This enabled abroad range of respondents to contribute to this research. A multitude of views towards New Zealand was seen as a strength of the researcher design. Following the sample description, the three research objectives were examined.

To examine the research objectives, mean scores were calculated for the business and product attributes. High scores generally indicate high perceived performance and low scores show low performance.

Sample Description and Respondent Profile

Data collection (recruiting/interviewing) lasted 5 days, inviting 251 attendees or participants of the trade fair to participate. Roughly 52% (132) agreed and completed the questionnaire. Males accounted for most of the sample (87%), but this was consistent with other research involving trade Fairs and/or industrial expos (EnvaPack, 2015; Shoham, 1999). The sample included a large number of different countries of origin for both participants (26) and businesses (d27). Two respondents were non-European, but both had lived and/or worked there for many years. The largest nationality represented was Germany (30%), followed by Holland, United Kingdom, France and Poland. Many (47%) of the participating businesses were small (1-49 employees), and this is consistent with other research on European businesses, especially those involving trade shows (EnvaPack, 2015; Eurosat, 2016). Most (>80%) of the businesses were had direct involvement with the food and beverage industry.

For the purposes of comparison, three groups (low, medium and high) were formed representing level of New Zealand product and experiences. The reason for separating product and business experiences was because that product experiences are more likely to be linked to product reputation, whereas business experiences are more likely linked to the ease of doing business, hence why it is known as a buyer-seller relationship. Break points for each of the groups were created for the four experience criteria (Table 1). Thus experience with NZ products was classified into low score (2 or less), medium (3-6), and high (7+) and experience with NZ businesses were classified as low (1 or less), medium (2-5), and (6+). The difference in cut-off scores was employed to keep group frequencies as similar as possible. The final groupings are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Respondents grouped by level of experience for NZ products and businesses

Group	Experience with NZ Products		Experience with NZ Businesses	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Low	33	25.0	43	32.6
Medium	75	56.8	52	39.4
High	24	18.2	37	28.0
Total	132	100.0	132	100

Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire was drawn from previous research. Specific indicators were developed for country image and product image. These employed seven-point bipolar adjective scales, where one equalled negative and seven equalled positive; these scales were derived from Elliot, Papadopoulos, and Kim (2011) and consistent with the country image measurement used by Laroche, Papadopoulos, Heslop, and Mourali (2005), whose scale for country image was adapted from Li, Fu, and Murray (1998); Papadopoulos et al. (1988). The product belief and evaluation indicators was based on previous studies by Nagashima (1977); Papadopoulos et al. (1988). The use of product image sub-constructs of workmanship, design, innovativeness, and prestige draw from Li et al. (1998), who bipolar adjective scales coupled with the four sub-constructs (Roth and Romeo, 1992) to measure the product image. The four scale items and bipolar scales have been widely used (Bennett (1991); Parameswaran and Pisharodi (1994). Similar to the current study, Heslop et al. (2004) tested the CoO image along with the perceptions of the image people and products from that country. Also, experience and familiarity can be found in numerous CoO studies (Erickson, Johansson, & Chao, 1984; Han, 1989; Liu & Johnson, 2005; Verlegh, Steenkamp, & Meulenberg, 2005). All of these

constructs were considered useful for analysing perception variations according to the level of knowledge or experience that European expert buyers had.

RESULTS

Product attributes scores are reported in Table 2. Scores ranged from 1 (poor) to 7 (excellent). Across the total sample, New Zealand product image attributes were favoured by the Europeans, with only 2 of the 14 attributes valued below 5.10. The innovativeness of New Zealand's products had the lowest score (4.57), followed by price (4.86). The highest scoring was proud to own (5.85). This was followed by willingness to buy (5.77), satisfaction (5.73), and the quality of products (5.72).

Table 2. NZ Product Attribute Scores by Experience with NZ Products

NZ Product Attributes	Total		Low		Medium		High		ANOVA
	Mean	Std. Dev	Mean	Std. Dev	Mean	Std. Dev	Mean	Std. Dev	P-value
Proud to own	5.85	.929	5.58	1.001	5.88	0.885	6.13	0.900	N.S.
Willing to buy	5.77	1.152	5.30	1.380	5.87	0.963	6.08	1.213	0.020
Satisfaction	5.73	.966	5.24	1.032	5.80	0.885	6.17	0.868	0.001
Quality	5.72	.927	5.42	.867	5.80	0.944	5.88	0.900	N.S.
Reliability	5.51	1.156	5.27	1.353	5.61	0.957	5.50	1.414	N.S.
Prestige	5.48	1.007	5.36	1.141	5.43	0.989	5.83	0.816	N.S.
Traceability	5.46	1.149	5.06	1.144	5.40	1.103	6.21	0.977	0.001
Workmanship	5.31	.974	5.33	1.051	5.28	0.924	5.38	1.056	N.S.
Environmentally conscious	5.27	1.210	5.36	1.270	5.19	1.099	5.38	1.469	N.S.
Consumer demand	5.16	1.277	4.61	1.391	5.27	1.223	5.58	1.060	0.008
Marketability	5.11	1.309	4.91	1.156	5.04	1.380	5.58	1.213	N.S.
Technically advanced	5.10	1.118	5.21	1.166	4.92	1.062	5.50	1.142	N.S.
Reasonably priced	4.86	1.120	4.73	1.206	4.87	1.119	5.00	1.022	N.S.
Innovative	4.57	1.332	4.30	1.357	4.49	1.309	5.17	1.239	0.030

Table 2 shows that New Zealand products seem to be well received by European buyers. The high scores of Proud to Own, Willingness to Buy, Overall Satisfaction and Quality is a good indication that they performing well. Only 5 of the 14 product attributes were significantly different (one-way ANOVAs) across the experience groups, but the trends can been seen in Figure 1 with the significant differences likely to represent large differences between medium and high experience groups.

Figure 1 graphically presents the product attribute scores by low, medium, and high level of experience. Most (10/14) of the attributes have lower scores for the low experience group. For these ten attributes, higher experience means higher attribute scores. For the other four, three (Environmentally Conscious, Technically Advanced and Workmanship) followed a different trend. For these three, scores were lowest for the medium experience group. Finally, for the remaining attribute (Reliability), the medium experience group scored it the highest. It should be noted that for these four attributes, the scores across groups were not significantly different across the groups.

For the most part, business attributes were higher than for the product attributes, with 6.08 (Friendly) the highest mean score and 5.15 (Technologically Advanced) the lowest (Table 3). With a low score of 5.15, it seems that European buyers had a positive image of New Zealand businesses. The top scores were 5.74 (Businesses being Pleasant), 5.75 (Trustworthy), 5.89 (Likeability), 5.92 (Business Reputation), and 6.08 (Friendly). Seemingly Europeans find New Zealand businesses satisfying to deal with and enjoy a good reputation. Table 3 also shows that 12 of the 14 business

attributes differed significantly (one-way ANOVAs) across experience groups. These differences seem to be most dramatic between the medium and high experience groups (Figure 2).
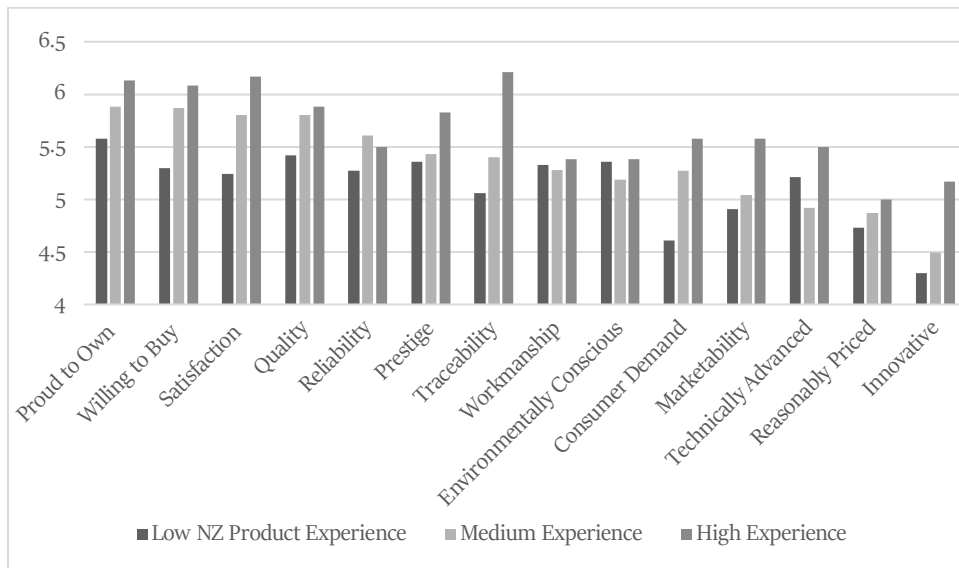

Figure 1. NZ product attribute scores by experience with NZ products

Figure 2 shows that like the product image attributes, when considering most business attributes (11/14) New Zealand businesses have lower scores from those with low experience, and higher scores from those with higher experience. The three attributes that did not follow this trend were Hard-working, Reputation and Technologically Advanced which had the lowest scores for the medium experience group, medium score for the low experience group and the highest score for the highest experience group. Interestingly, these three had significant one-way ANOVAs but this could attributed to the elevated High experience group scores. Nevertheless, it is encouraging to see so many high experience scores near the maximum score of seven. These results capture just how well New Zealand businesses are believed to perform from the perspective of experienced European buyers.

While it appears that image of New Zealand businesses scored better than their products, direct comparisons across different attributes is problematic. However, when combined, 17 of the 28 attributes showed significant differences (one-way ANOVAs). This indicates that the greater the experience buyers had, whether with New Zealand products or businesses, the higher they scored New Zealand's image, especially when comparing the medium and high experience groups.

DISCUSSION

A preliminary assessment of the perception of New Zealand products and businesses amongst expert buyers from Europe formed the first research objective for this study. The results were generally positive with average scores across the product attributes ranging from 4.57 to 5.85 and business scores from 5.15 to 6.08 (7-point poor-excellent scale). This suggests that New Zealand products and business are viewed at the very least neutrally and largely in a positive light. An examination of the overall performance of New Zealand products and businesses provided the catalyst for the second research objective; this was designed to highlight where the country was performing well, and also

to highlight areas that might warrant attention in order to ensure that improvements could be made. The top three product attributes were Proud to Own, Willing to Buy, and Satisfaction; while the bottom three were Technically Advanced, Reasonably Priced, Innovative., These results show that although Europeans appear to like and buy the products that New Zealand produces, they do seem to think that New Zealand products are a bit lacklustre in terms of their technical innovation and pricing. Finally, the third research objective was to examine whether European expert buyers' perceptions improved or declined with experience. The results show that the key drivers regarding how European expert buyers view New Zealand products and businesses predominately come down to two attributes. Firstly, the level of experience of a buyer is shown to be important; secondly, the existing knowledge frameworks that European buyers have towards New Zealand products and businesses is also fundamental for shaping buyers' perceptions. In fact, 17 of the 28 significant group comparisons showed these attributes increased with experience.

Table 3. NZ business attribute scores by experience with NZ businesses

NZ Product	Total		Low		Medium		High		ANOVA
Attributes	Mean	Std. Dev	Mean	Std. Dev	Mean	Std. Dev	Mean	Std. Dev	P-value
Friendly	6.08	1.012	5.98	1.012	6.00	1.103	6.32	.852	N.S.
Reputation	5.92	.938	5.91	.971	5.71	.977	6.24	.760	0.029
Likability	5.89	.993	5.65	1.044	5.87	.991	6.19	.877	N.S.
Trustworthy	5.75	1.037	5.51	1.009	5.67	1.115	6.14	.855	0.020
Pleasant to deal with	5.74	1.130	5.37	1.254	5.77	1.059	6.14	.948	0.010
Honesty	5.66	.956	5.42	.932	5.52	.874	6.14	.948	0.001
Reliability	5.61	.947	5.40	.821	5.56	.978	5.92	.983	0.042
Satisfaction	5.55	.968	5.16	1.022	5.50	.897	6.05	.780	0.000
Understanding of international markets	5.48	1.162	5.23	1.231	5.40	1.015	5.86	1.206	0.045
Business expertise	5.47	1.022	5.23	1.065	5.40	.891	5.84	1.068	0.024
Business capability	5.42	1.127	5.09	1.151	5.44	.998	5.78	1.182	0.022
Hard working	5.39	1.068	5.26	.978	5.17	1.150	5.84	.928	0.010
Ease of doing business	5.33	1.258	5.05	1.068	5.27	1.345	5.76	1.256	0.036
Technologically advanced	5.15	1.081	5.12	1.028	4.92	1.118	5.51	1.017	0.030

Confirmation of the "halo theory" (Han, 1989) occurring was found through the high mean scores which indicated a greater degree of experience with both New Zealand agrifood products and businesses. This finding is important because New Zealand products and businesses can utilise this halo image as a point of difference with European expert buyers. This was demonstrated by a positive image which was put forward by respondents when they described their feelings towards New Zealand products and businesses. Beliefs surrounding product or business attributes improved depending on the level of knowledge or experience that respondents possessed. A positive view of New Zealand's CoO image was indicated through the low experience mean scores which were found for both products and businesses by expert buyers within the European food and beverage industry. Buyers' expectations have been positively influenced by the favourable nature of New Zealand's CoO cues. These results not only support existing CoO theories (Insch et al., 2011; Knight et al., 2005, 2007a; Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009; Roth & Romeo, 1992; Skaggs et al., 1996), but also suggest that views which centre purely on attribute-related information concerning New Zealand agrifood products or businesses are not totally accurate i.e. they are based on CoO cues. This finding shows that there appears to be a disconnect between the reality of how New Zealand is performing from

the perspective of European expert buyers and the perceptions that these buyers have of New Zealand agrifood product or businesses.
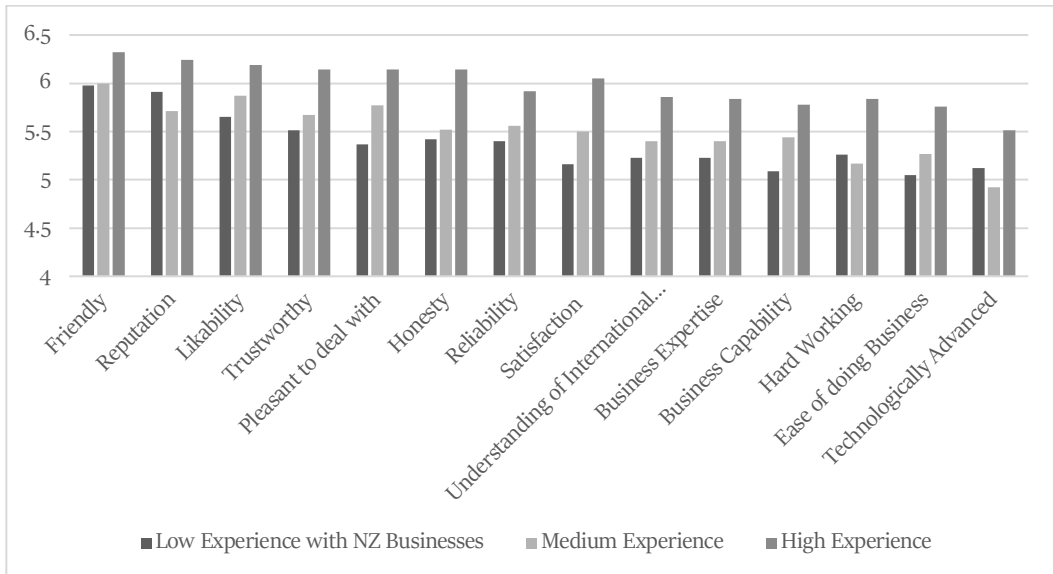

Figure 2. NZ business attribute scores by experience with NZ businesses

These results also confirm that buyer-seller relationships are built upon a level of trust and commitment which evolves over time, and also increases the more a buyer deals with particular products or services (Anderson & Weitz, 1992; Cannon & Perreault, 1999; Dwyer et al., 1987; Gupta et al., 2019; Moorman et al., 1992; Wilson, 1995). As trust is central to building perceptions of product quality (Knight et al., 2007a), it makes sense that the more experience that an expert-buyer has with a New Zealand agrifood product or business, the better the perception he/she has about the product or business. A question that is yet to be answered, however, given the understanding on CoO theory and "halo effect", is to what extend the buyer-seller relationships are linked to CoO cues of the sellers' products' country of origin. This would be of particular relevance to export buyers, whose decisions greatly influence the buyers' purchases of the sellers' products that are on offer (Hansen & Skytte, 1998; McGoldrick & Douglas, 1983; McLaughlin & Rao, 1991; Sternquist, 1994).

CONCLUSION

This study showed that European expert buyers who possessed lower levels of product knowledge or experience with New Zealand agrifood products and businesses were significantly more likely to utilise CoO effects in their product evaluations. For those buyers who possessed a higher level of knowledge it was found that information which focused on attributes was the core focus of the buyers' initial evaluation and decision-making process. The mean scores centred on low experience indicated that CoO effect resulted in New Zealand agrifood products and businesses being viewed in a positive light by the European food and beverage sector. This viewpoint also exerted influence on the expectations of buyers as well; however, attribute-related performance was still regarded as being of greater importance for buyers than CoO cues which focused on New Zealand. The results of this study by and large confirm existing theories on CoO and buyer-seller relationships, while suggesting a need to explore the relationship between these two concepts.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATION

This research has meaningful and practical implications for New Zealand agrifood companies as well as those from other countries that are wanting to explore the European food and beverage market. It has shown that improvement is needed in order to increase European expert buyers' knowledge and experience about New Zealand agrifood products and businesses. As the current level of awareness is low, the likelihood of growth occurring in terms of trade is low. Having a presence with the European market has been noted by Skytte and Blunch (2006) as crucial for allowing trade to flourish.. The building of relationships and networks through having a physical presence on the ground also helps to overcome the issue of distance between the seller and their buyers in an overseas market (Skytte and Blunch (2006) . In a world that is still waking up to the reality of COVID-19, where travel restrictions are still largely in place for many countries, this seems even more relevant. It would be plausible to predict that developing new customers in Europe for New Zealand agrifood companies would particularly difficult since the travel restrictions have been put in place.

Increasing awareness of New Zealand products could also be facilitated through the attendance of New Zealand agrifood business at European trade shows. Only seven New Zealand businesses attended the Anuga trade show, which clearly shows that an opportunity exists for increasing the attendance of New Zealand agrifood businesses at these trade shows in order to grow awareness of national brand within the European market. Such opportunities also point towards the need to increase the current level of advertising which focuses on the New Zealand brand within European market. This advertising could also help to allay the environmental concerns that customers might possess regarding buying a product from New Zealand through assuring consumers that the processes used to get products from pasture to plate are well documented, thereby demonstrating that a clear line of traceability is able to be proven in terms of the carbon footprint of New Zealand products.

The goal of increasing trade within the European marketplace does not appear to be an insurmountable task when considering the results of this study. As this research has shown, European expert buyers who have a low level of knowledge regarding New Zealand products and businesses still carry positive perceptions of the New Zealand as the Country of Origin. This bodes well for any future endeavours that are designed to increase the existing level of trade between New Zealand and their European counterparts.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While the study presents some interesting and importing findings, it also has several limitations. The first of these is the size of the sample which was used; this was largely because the data collection was limited to five days of a large international food and beverage expo in Germany. The use of a larger sample size would have yielded the possibility of more precise statistical tests with greater external validity. Second, the survey was brief to maximise the number of respondents. For example, the questionnaire could have been expanded to test the objective knowledge that participants had of New Zealand agrifood products and businesses rather than just focusing on their own self-assessment of this. The development of a test which focused on the actual knowledge which buyers had rather than simply focusing on their perceptions may have garnered different conclusions. Further research could have then been conducted through grouping European buyers based on their knowledge levels, which would have also test whether the CoO effect was still different under this condition. Testing the prior knowledge that European participants have of New Zealand could be an

area for future research. As this study was also largely exploratory in nature, the use of previous empirical research into the relationship that European buyers had with New Zealand products could have helped to provide the foundation for further testing using predictive models. Due to data only being collected from just one food and beverage expo the sample also excluded any New Zealand-based companies which participated in other European expos that were held.

Examining New Zealand's image within the European market is an area that presents many opportunities for further research. This could also potentially incorporate studies which look at how New Zealand is performing across a spectrum of industries in order to provide a clearer perspective on how the country's image is viewed as a whole within the European market. Although this market is very important to New Zealand exporters, it is also pertinent to note that the Asian market continues to play a vital role as well, accounting for almost 50 per cent of all of New Zealand's exports (Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, 2015). With this in mind, replication of the current study would be well worthwhile undertaking in the Asian market in order to compare how New Zealand's country image is currently viewed by expert buyers within this particular market.

In order for New Zealand's current position within the European marketplace to grow it is important that the changing needs of consumers within this market are taken into account. Restrictions placed on New Zealand products within this market only serve to hamper progress; however, in the event of restrictions being lifted there is also the risk that consumers may no longer demand New Zealand products. Future research examining specific target marketing techniques designed to effectively appeal to consumers in European markets would not only help increase sales, but also would be able to potentially focus in on consumer perceptions of country image and product quality attributes. Prior research has highlighted the discerning nature of expert buyers in the European market (Chellew, 2008; Knight et al., 2005; McGoldrick & Douglas, 1983) as they will not purchase products which have missed their window of opportunity when it comes to consumer demand. Therefore, examination of the potential linkages between the CoO theories and buyer-seller relationship theories via the concept of "halo effect" has real value and deserves further in-depth investigation to see exactly how these linkages function across these sets of theories.

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