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How Brands Highlight Country of Origin in Magazine Advertising: A Content Analysis

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ABSTRACT
In 2014, a classification was proposed of ways in which brands communicate their country of origin (COO). The current, exploratory study is the first to empirically investigate the frequency with which brands employ such COO markers in magazine advertisements. An analysis of about 750 ads from the British, Dutch, and Spanish editions of Cosmopolitan showed that the prototypical “made in” marker was rarely used, and that “COO embedded in company name” and “use of COO language” were most frequently employed. In all, 36% of the total number of ads contained at least one COO marker, underlining the importance of the COO construct.

KEYWORDS
Country of origin; content analysis; advertising; brand positioning strategies; foreign languages

Introduction
Research on the country-of-origin effect started with an empirical study by Schooler (1965) on the evaluations of identical products that were presented as originating from Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico. It has developed into a major field of research in international business and marketing, with over 500 peer-reviewed journal articles (Lu, Heslop, Thomas, & Kwan, 2016), numerous reviews (e.g., Bilkey & Nes, 1982; Peterson & Jolibert, 1995), and critical debates (e.g., Josiassen & Harzing, 2008; Usunier, 2006; Usunier & Cestre, 2008). A product’s country of origin (COO) is an extrinsic product attribute such as brand and price, as opposed to intrinsic attributes such as color and material (Bilkey & Nes, 1982). Consumers use both types of attribute to infer the quality of a product. Numerous studies have shown that the specific COO of a product affects consumers’ evaluations of the product. Consumers are more positive about products if they originate from countries with a favorable image than from other countries with a less favorable image. Statistical meta-analyses based on such empirical studies (Liefeld, 1993; Peterson & Jolibert, 1995; Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999) have confirmed that a product’s COO affects a product’s evaluation, particularly its perceived quality.

The COO effect continues to attract different empirical investigations (e.g., Maier & Wilken, 2017; Spielmann, 2016; Wu, Ju, & Dodoo, 2016). While theoretically driven empirical research provides more detailed information on what mediates and moderates COO effects, there is a lack of insight into the actual brand use of COO cues communicated to consumers. Insight into this use of COO cues is important for two different reasons. First, empirical research may examine COO cues that are hardly used in current brand communication. For instance, Spielmann (2016) investigates combinations of COO cues, but do brands actually use COO cues in combination? Second, there is a long debate about the relevance of COO for consumer decisions (e.g., Josiassen & Harzing, 2008; Samiee, 2011; Usunier, 2006), but it is unclear to what extent consumers are actually exposed to COO cues.

In order to fill this gap, the current article examines brands’ use of COO markers in
advertising. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first empirical investigation of the frequency with which brands use COO markers and, consequently, the frequency with which consumers are exposed to these markers. A brand’s country of origin can be communicated in various ways. One is mentioning the country explicitly, such as in “made in Switzerland.” Researchers have emphasized that other cues are available to indicate or suggest a COO, such as a country’s typical landscape (e.g., the Eiffel tower for France or the Alps for Switzerland) and the language used in advertising (e.g., “Auto emoción” to indicate that the car manufacturer is Spanish) (e.g., Aichner, 2014; Herz & Diamantopoulos, 2013; Thakor & Kohli, 1996). The exploratory content analysis presented in this paper assesses the relative frequency with which advertisers in the magazine Cosmopolitan in the Netherlands, Spain, and the U.K. use the COO markers identified in the classification of Aichner (2014). One of the COO markers is the language used in advertising. A foreign language in advertising, however, is not by definition a COO marker, but may have a different role. In particular, the English language may not be a marker of a specific English-speaking country (e.g., the U.S.), but may also be a marker of globalness, since English is considered a global language (Alden, Steenkamp, & Batra, 1999). Therefore, in our content analysis we investigate whether English in advertising is a COO marker or not.

Markers of country of origin

There are different ways to increase awareness among consumers about the brand’s country of origin. Aichner (2014) differentiates between regulated and unregulated markers. Regulated COO markers can only be used by companies if they adhere to legal requirements, which is relevant for the use of “made in” labels and quality and origin labels. Sometimes, “made in” labeling is required, such as for foreign goods imported to Canada, Japan and the U.S. (Samiee, 2010), or for American automobiles and textiles on the U.S. market (Aichner, 2014). Quality and origin labels are employed to protect the origin of agricultural products, such as wine, sausage, and cheese. The use of the label “Appellation Chablis contrôlée” on wine, for instance, means that the product officially originates from the vineyards surrounding the village Chablis in Burgundy. Researchers empirically examining the COO effect have in most cases restricted themselves to manipulating the brand’s country of origin by varying the “made in” label (Thakor & Kohli, 1996).

Unregulated COO markers can be used unconditionally by any brand. This unregulated use can best be understood against the background of the complexity of the COO construct. Literally, “made in” refers to where the product is manufactured. In the early days, the design, development, production, and assembly usually took place in a single country. As this has become rare in the globalized economy, researchers have underlined the need to distinguish between different dimensions of COO, including country of design, country of assembly, and country of brand (Aichner, 2014; Hamzaoui & Merunka, 2006; Phau & Prendergast, 2000; Thakor & Kohli, 1996). If a product is designed in Spain, produced in Vietnam, and marketed as a product from a German brand, what is the country of origin? This complexity also underlines the importance of the perceptions that consumers have (Thakor & Kohli, 1996): what do consumers perceive as the country of origin? This may well be the country of brand rather than, say, the country of design or assembly. In order to link consumers’ perceptions to a country of origin that is relevant to the brand, unregulated COO markers come into play. The use of such unregulated markers is not dependent on whether companies adhere to legal requirements. These markers serve to suggest a COO rather than to indicate explicitly that the brand or product actually originates from the suggested COO.

Going beyond the use of the regulated markers “made in” and quality labels, researchers have mentioned other unregulated strategies to mark a COO: famous people from a given country (Herz & Diamantopoulos, 2013), country flags (Herz & Diamantopoulos, 2013; Thakor & Kohli, 1996), cultural symbols (Alden et al., 1999; Snyder, Willenborg, & Watt, 1991), references to COO in a brand name (Leclerc, Schmitt, & Dubé, 1994; Thakor & Kohli, 1996), and the use of foreign
languages (Alden et al., 1999; Hornikx & Van Meurs, 2017; Melnyk, Klein, & Völckner, 2012; Ray, Ryder, & Scott, 1991; Snyder, et al., 1991). The most comprehensive and systematic account is the classification that Aichner (2014) proposed (see Table 1).

Aichner (2014) identifies a number of unregulated markers. The third type of COO marker, following the regulated markers “made in” and quality and origin labels, is using the country of origin in the brand name, exemplified by the brands Alitalia (Italy), Air France (France), and Deutsche Bank (Germany). This label also includes references to cities (e.g., Vienna Insurance Group), states (e.g., Texas Instruments), and adjectives (e.g., Swisscomm). In the fourth place, brand names may include (typical) COO words, such as in Lincoln National (U.S.) or Dr Oetker (Germany) (cf. references to persons and places, in Arora, Kalro, & Sharma, 2015). This strategy assumes a certain level of prior knowledge on the part of consumers (Where was Lincoln from?) and may therefore be risky (consumers may incorrectly link Dr Oetker to Switzerland, in which German is also an official language). The fifth strategy consists of foreign language display in the advertising copy. An example of foreign branding that is often cited is “Vorsprung durch Technik” used by Audi (Head, 1988; Kelly-Holmes, 2005). The three last categories consist of visual COO markers: the use of well-known or stereotypical persons (e.g., Italian people at a marketplace), landscapes (e.g., displaying typical Paris housing), or flags and symbols. As well as the two regulated and the six unregulated COO strategies, Aichner (2014) also refers to subtle hints to COO, such as “enjoy the Italian way” for an Italian cookie brand advertised in Germany, and “betting like the British” for an English bookmaker advertising in Germany. In the present study, we also included these hints as a category of their own (“reference to COO or its inhabitants”).

Whereas researchers have classified different COO markers and employed them in empirical studies investigating the COO effect, it is unknown to what extent brands actually use COO markers. There are two reasons why insights into brands’ use of COO markers are important. In the first place, it is unclear whether COO markers used in the vast number of empirical studies on the COO effect reflect the actual manifestations of COO markers that consumers encounter. In the second place, insights into brands’ use of COO markers provides novel evidence for the degree to which the COO construct is a relevant construct for consumers. Vast numbers of empirical studies underline the COO effect in laboratory settings, assuming that COO cues also matter for consumers in reality. However, researchers have questioned this assumption. For example, Samiee, Shimp, and Sharma (2005) revealed that consumers have low levels of knowledge of the COO of brands, and Liefeld (2004) showed that most consumers are unaware of the COO of products they purchase. However, more recent research indicates that consumers are reluctant to admit that COO affects their decisions. In two studies, Herz and Diamantopoulos (2017) showed that consumers whose brand evaluations demonstrate that they have been affected by the product’s country of origin explicitly state that they were not influenced by this origin. Thus, the relevance of COO may be much higher for consumers than may be concluded based on studies of COO knowledge and awareness. An angle overlooked in the debate on the actual relevance of COO for

| Table 1. Examples from the corpus of the types of COO markers identified by Aichner (2014). |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| COO marker                      | Example from corpus             | COO referred to  |
| "Made in …"                    | Made in U.S.A.                  | USA             |
| Quality and origin labels      | n/a                             | n/a             |
| COO embedded in company name   | L’Oréal Paris                  | France          |
| Typical COO words in company name | Kangaroo                     | Australia       |
| Use of COO language            | Original de Brasil              | Brazil          |
| Use of famous/stereotypical people from COO | Kate Moss                | U.K.            |
| Use of COO flags and symbols   | Swiss flag                      | Switzerland     |
| Use of typical landscapes/famous buildings | Skyscrapers of New York | USA             |
| Reference to COO or its inhabitants | With Australian Ginseng       | Australia       |
consumer decisions (e.g., Josiassen & Harzing, 2008; Samiee, 2011; Usunier, 2006) is the viewpoint of brands. The current article’s purpose of examining brands’ use of COO cues in advertising addresses this side of the debate: the more ads contain COO cues, the more the COO construct can be said to be relevant in practice in two ways. First, the occurrence can be argued to be an indication of the importance brands attach to the COO construct. Secondly, the more ads contain COO markers, the more consumers can use these to evaluate products. The article examines COO use in advertising, the primary communication outlet for brands. The first research question addresses the issue of the extent to which COO markers are used at all in advertising:

RQ1: To what extent are COO markers used in magazine advertisements?

In those cases in which COO markers are used, it is important to know which of the markers identified in Aichner (2014) are used, and in what combinations. Aichner’s (2014) classification of COO markers is based on examples taken from real life. Whereas there is therefore no reason to doubt that all of the nine categories of COO markers are actually used by brands, it is unknown what the relative frequency is with which brands employ these types of marker. Therefore, since this relative frequency serves as an indication of the importance of COO markers in practice, the following research question was formulated:

RQ2a: To what extent are different types of COO markers used in magazine advertisements?

In experimental studies on the COO effect, “made in” is the prototypical manipulation of the COO cue (Thakor & Kohli, 1996). The question is whether this manipulation reflects the extent to which consumers are confronted with this marker in advertising practice. Aichner (2014) argues that for brands the “made in” label is also the most frequently used: “The use of the phrase ‘Made in …’ is the most frequent and easiest strategy used to communicate the COO of a product” (Aichner, 2014, p. 84). However, Aichner (2014) has not substantiated this claim with research evidence. In addition, there is reason to expect relatively little use of this marker because, as a regulated marker, it can legally only be used when the country the brand wishes to refer to is the actual country of origin (e.g., “Made in Italy” for pasta sauce can only be used when the actual COO is Italy). Therefore, this article examines the frequency of the “made in” label in advertising:

RQ2b: Is the “made in” strategy the most frequently used type of COO marker?

Aichner (2014) also makes a claim related to the combinations of the different COO strategies. He remarks that “Often, these strategies are used in combination with each other” (p. 88) and that “most companies combine two or more COO strategies” (p. 91). An empirical test of this expectation is important because the impact of COO cues has been examined both through manipulation of one cue in advertising (e.g., Wu et al., 2016) and through a combination of two cues (e.g., Spielmann, 2016). Again, the question is to what extent the experiments reflect actual advertising practice when it comes to the frequency of single COO markers or combinations of markers. Also, the results of the current study may be seen as an indication of the importance that brands attach to COO: the higher the number of COO cues, the more importance brands may be taken to attach to these cues. This led to the following research question:

RQ2c: Are combinations of COO markers more frequently used than single COO markers?

**English as a COO marker or a marker of globalness**

When brands communicate their country of origin to consumers, they either refer to a country that is the consumers’ home country or to a foreign country. If a positive COO effect occurs in the first case, this may appeal to ethnocentrism, with consumers preferring goods and services from their own country (see Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2004; Sharma, Shimp, & Shin, 1995). If a positive COO effect occurs in the second case, consumers appreciate goods and services because they value their foreignness: the foreign country in general or the goods and...
service from that foreign country. Alden et al. (1999) use the terms “local consumer culture positioning” (LCCP) and “foreign consumer culture positioning” (FCCP) to label the two strategies of referring to a brand’s COO as the consumers’ own country or a foreign country (see also Akaka & Alden, 2010). In addition, they distinguish “global consumer culture positioning” (GCCP), which is a strategy that “identifies the brand as a symbol of a given global culture [...] featuring the idea that consumers all over the world consume a particular brand or appealing to certain human universals might invest the brand with the cultural meaning of being a conduit to feeling at one with global culture” (Alden et al., 1999, p. 77).

Alden et al. (1999) stress the role that language can play in all three consumer positioning strategies: the local language can be used to indicate that a brand is local, and a foreign language can be used to indicate that a brand is foreign, what Aichner (2014) calls the “use of the COO language” as a COO marker. English is the most frequently used foreign language in advertising in non-English-speaking countries (Gerritsen et al., 2007; Piller, 2003; Raedts et al., 2015). The role of English in the consumer positioning strategies is ambiguous. On the one hand, it can be a foreign language signaling that the brand is from a specific English-speaking country. On the other hand, the use of the English language in advertising has been closely linked to the concept of globalness (Gerritsen et al., 2000; Haarmann, 1984; Piller, 2001). Alden et al. (1999, p. 77) remark that “one way for a brand to communicate GCCP is to use English words, written and/or spoken, in its communications.” Sociolinguists have stressed that English in advertising is hardly used to express stereotypes of specific English-speaking countries (Kelly-Holmes, 2003; Piller, 2003). Gerritsen et al. (2007) showed that English in product ads in Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Spain was rarely used for products that were advertised as being typically British or American. This occurred in only 1% of the ads containing English. From the perspective of examining COO markers in advertising, this means that the use of English can hardly be expected to be a marker of a brand’s country of origin:

H1: When English is used as a foreign language, it is used less frequently to mark a COO than to highlight the globalness of the brand.

Method

Sample

The use of COO markers in advertising was examined in print advertisements from three different countries to increase the robustness of the findings. Given the exploratory nature of this study, two practical selection criteria guided our country choice: the three countries included both smaller and larger countries in Europe, and they represented languages that the team was familiar with in order to reliably code the advertisements on the relevant variables. The three European countries selected were the Netherlands, Spain, and the United Kingdom. The dataset for the U.K. was discarded for testing H1 about the use of English as a foreign language, as will be explained in more detail in the coding procedure.

The magazine Cosmopolitan was chosen as the source of advertisements. The choice for one specific magazine title reduces the generalizability of the findings (i.e., limited to the corresponding products and target consumers), but this magazine was chosen intentionally because an informal analysis suggested that it carried advertising for a large number of product categories that are considered ethnic products, such as cosmetics, watches, and shoes (Usunier & Cestre, 2007). This suggestion was corroborated in the main analysis: the majority of the ads in the corpus referred to a product that Usunier and Cestre (2007) classify as ethnic products. Table 2 provides a description of the product categories and brands referred to in the advertisements. Ethnic products have a prototypical COO in the minds of consumers (e.g., cosmetics—France), which makes it likely that the COOs are highlighted through the use of COO markers.

Cosmopolitan is an international magazine that has different local editions in the three countries. The magazine, which is targeted at younger women (18–35 years old), reaches more than three million young women per month through its online, social, and print platforms in the Netherlands (Hearst Netherlands, 2016); it has
about 517,000 readers per month in Spain (PrNoticias, 2016) and about 1.18 million readers per month in the U.K. (Hearst Magazine U.K., 2016).

The sample consisted of all advertisements from all monthly issues that appeared in 2016 in the three countries. This whole-year cluster was selected so as to prevent potential seasonal influences (Neuendorf, 2002). In total, the corpus consisted of 745 advertisements, of which 111 were from the Dutch, 367 from the British, and 267 from the Spanish Cosmopolitan. Two categories of ads were excluded in the selection process: (a) advertisements for subscription to Cosmopolitan itself; and (b) advertisements that were identical to ads that had appeared in another issue in one of the three countries. As a result, each advertisement was unique.

**Coding procedure**

For all advertisements, four variables were coded: product type, presence of types of COO markers, COO referred to, and the use of English as a COO marker. In the first place, product type was assessed by the two coders. Coders classified each product as one of the 32 product types. In order to assess the reliability of the codings, 10% of the ads were independently coded by a second coder. The interrater reliability of the variable product category was good ($\kappa = .97$, $p < .000$, 97.33% agreement between both coders). Table 2 lists the most frequent product types; the label “other” covers 17 types of product, including charity, education, and furniture.

In the second place, it was recorded whether one or more of the COO markers occurred in a given ad. In the third place, if a marker was identified, it was assessed to which COO the markers referred. Table 1 lists the nine possible COO markers defined by Aichner (2014) and the COOs referred to, with examples taken from the current content analysis. The interrater reliability for the type of COO marker was very good ($\kappa = .80$, $p < .000$, 96.30% agreement between the coders), and the interrater reliability for COO referred to was excellent ($\kappa = 1.00$, $p < .000$).

After the independent assessments of the two coders, the coders decided on the best coding for all cases for which they made a different initial choice. On the basis of these resulting codings, the fourth and final variable was assessed: the English language as a COO marker. Only if an ad contained the English language and at least one other type of COO marker referring to an English-speaking country was the English language coded as a true COO marker. An example is a Dutch ad using the English language and featuring a British model. If, as in most cases, an ad contained the English language but no other marker was found that referred to an English-speaking country, the English language was not considered to be a COO marker but a marker of globalness (e.g., “Because sometimes, a girl’s gotta walk” in an ad for Skechers in the Spanish corpus). This procedure to disentangle the English language as a true COO marker and a marker of globalness was only followed in the Dutch and Spanish sample. In the U.K. sample, the English language was not considered to be either a COO marker or a marker of globalness, since English is the first language of the U.K. Similarly, neither the Dutch language in the Dutch sample nor the Spanish language in the Spanish sample were considered COO markers since these languages are both countries’ first language.

**Statistical treatment**

For all research questions and the hypothesis, descriptive statistics were generated presenting frequencies and percentages of the categories that
The current content analysis aimed to examine the frequency with which COO markers are used in magazine advertisements. The analysis showed that COO cues were found in 36% of the ads (RQ1). In relation to RQ2a, an analysis of variance demonstrated that brands did not use the nine types of COO markers equally frequently in ads in Cosmopolitan ($F(5, 3325) = 52.45, p < .001$, $n^2 = .07$ (Greenhouse-Geisser correction). Table 3 summarizes the frequency of occurrence of the types of COO marker.

### Table 3. Occurrence of types of COO markers (categories taken from Aichner, 2014).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COO marker</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage of markers (N = 361)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COO embedded in company name</td>
<td>107a</td>
<td>29.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of COO language</td>
<td>105c</td>
<td>29.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference to COO or its inhabitants</td>
<td>69d</td>
<td>19.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of famous/stereotypical people from COO</td>
<td>38b</td>
<td>10.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typical COO words in company name</td>
<td>18c</td>
<td>4.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of typical landscapes/famous buildings</td>
<td>17b,c</td>
<td>4.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of COO flags and symbols</td>
<td>5a</td>
<td>1.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Made in…”</td>
<td>2a</td>
<td>0.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality and origin labels</td>
<td>0a</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Markers differ significantly in frequency of occurrence when they have different superscripts (Sidak pairwise comparisons).

### Table 4. Occurrence of the English language in body copy and slogans in the Dutch and Spanish sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English language use</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage of ads (N = 378)</th>
<th>Percentage of ads with English (N = 281)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No English</td>
<td>87e</td>
<td>25.66%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English as COO marker</td>
<td>13a</td>
<td>3.44%</td>
<td>4.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English as global marker</td>
<td>268b</td>
<td>70.90%</td>
<td>95.37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Types of use of the English language differ significantly when they have different superscripts (non-parametric $\chi^2$, $p < .001$).

The COO marker that was used most frequently (29.64% of all markers) was “COO embedded in the company name,” such as “Maybelline New York” and “Lancôme Paris.” Inspection of Table 3 shows that the COO marker “made in” is not the most frequently used type of COO marker (RQ2b), as has been suggested in the literature (Aichner, 2014). On the contrary, it is one of the least employed COO markers (0.55%), with only two occurrences (“Made in the USA” for Wunderbrow cosmetics and for Ardell lashes). The COO marker “quality and origin labels” was not observed at all in the sample.

The second most used type of COO marker was the “use of COO language” (29%); for example, “C’est la vie” for Tena liners. Earlier analyses showed a dominant use of the English language in advertising (e.g., Gerritsen et al., 2007; Piller, 2001), claiming globalness as its intended purpose rather than to signal the brand’s COO. Hypothesis (H1) revolved precisely around this claim. About three-quarters of the advertisements in the Dutch and the Spanish editions of Cosmopolitan were found to contain English language (see Table 4). Results show that when English is used as a foreign language in the ads in the Netherlands or Spain, it is used significantly less to mark a COO than to highlight the
globalness of the brand. As can be seen from Table 4, about 95% of the occurrences of the English language were classified as a global marker (such as “Cold hunter” for Marta Hazas shoes), whereas only about 5% could be interpreted as a marker of a relevant COO such as the U.K. or the U.S. An example of English as a COO marker for the U.S. is the phrase “The world’s best selling lashes” in an Ardell ad in the Spanish corpus, supporting the American origin of the brand, also signaled by the “made in” COO marker in the ad (“Made in the USA”).

Based on Aichner (2014), the current analysis also aimed to address the question as to whether combinations of COO markers are more frequently used than single COO markers (RQ2c). As can be seen in Table 5, there were significantly more occurrences of ads with one single COO marker than with multiple COO markers (non-parametric $\chi^2$, $p < .05$). Of all ads in the corpus containing a COO marker, about 70% had one single COO marker. If ads contained multiple COO markers, they usually featured two markers. An example of an ad with two COO markers is an ad for the French brand Lancôme (“COO embedded in company name”) taken from the Spanish corpus, which also contains the use of COO language (“La vie est belle”). Combinations of more than four COO markers were not observed in the ads in the corpus.

### Conclusion and discussion

The current article reports on a study that, to the best of our knowledge, is the first to examine the frequency of occurrence of different COO markers in advertising. The current empirical study analyzed the extent to which different COO markers identified by Aichner (2014) were found in ads published in the 2016 issues of *Cosmopolitan* in the Netherlands, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

Overall, the results obtained in the corpus analysis showed that 36% of the advertisements featured at least one COO marker (RQ1). Brands have multiple options in terms of designing advertising copy, including the use of endorsers such as celebrities and experts, and humor. Compared to the almost 10% of ads featuring endorsers, as documented in the content analysis of Schimmelpfennig (in press), the percentage of COO markers found in this study can be considered to be relatively high. Therefore, the extent to which COO markers were found to be employed in the current corpus can be seen as evidence for the relevance of the COO construct in advertising. In the debate about the relevance of COO for businesses and consumers (e.g., Josiassen & Harzing, 2008; Usunier, 2006), this research evidence supports the view that COO is a strategy that businesses appear to consider important. As a matter of fact, in one-third of the ads, COO information is available to consumers to potentially use as a cue for brand and product evaluation.

The current study also examined the relative frequency of various types of COO markers in advertising. Except for “quality and origin labels,” all categories of COO markers described by Aichner (2014) were employed in our corpus of advertisements (RQ2a). The frequency with which these categories were observed was different from one marker to another. In contrast to Aichner’s (2014) expectation, “made in” was hardly ever used in the ads (RQ2b). Absent in the corpus were “quality and origin labels.” This means that regulated markers of COO (“quality and origin labels” and “made in”) are not popular ways of expressing a product’s or service’s country of origin in advertising. For quality and origin labels, a straightforward explanation for this study would be that the ads in *Cosmopolitan* featured products and services for which such quality and origin labels are not available. Aichner (2014) only provides examples of such labels for agricultural products and foodstuffs, while the ads in *Cosmopolitan* are mostly for clothes, perfume, and makeup (see Table 1). For the near
absence of the “made in” marker, an explanation is that “made in” indicates that the product is manufactured in the COO—which is often not the case, certainly not in the kinds of products advertised in Cosmopolitan (e.g., clothes from European brands are often manufactured outside Europe). As noted in the introduction, the notion of “origin” is broader than the location of manufacture, and includes, for instance, country-of-brand and country-of-design. If brands desire to circumvent mentioning non-Western countries in a “made in” label, they simply do not mention such a label. Instead, results show that they prefer to highlight their origin in different ways. In particular, a large proportion of brands (35% of the ads in which COO markers are used) refer to their COO in their brand name, either through “COO embedded in company name” (e.g., L’Oréal Paris) or through “typical COO words in company name” (e.g., Kangaroo), thus highlighting the country of brand.

“COO embedded in company name” is the most frequently used category in the corpus (representing a third of all COO markers). Because this marker is a brand strategy rather than an advertising strategy, it could be argued that “use of COO language” is the dominant strategy to mark the COO in advertising (representing almost a third of all COO markers). The prominent use of foreign languages as a COO marker underlines that an important function of foreign language display in advertising is indeed to suggest a COO (as has been argued elsewhere; see Hornix & Van Meurs, 2017; Leclerc et al., 1994; Melnyk et al., 2012). The category “reference to COO or its inhabitants” was the third most frequent. While Aichner (2014) refers to instances of this strategy, he does not include it as one of the eight COO markers he distinguishes. The frequent use of this category in this corpus underlines that it warrants a category of its own in Aichner’s classification.

Research question RQ2c revolved around the question as to how many COO markers are used in a single advertisement. In contrast to the claim made by Aichner (2014), the results clearly show that, in the present corpus, most COO markers appear in isolation in advertising. This may imply that advertisers assume that one COO marker suffices to inform consumers about the country of origin. For researchers, the dominant use of single COO cues underlines the realism of the way in which experimental COO studies have manipulated COO markers.

The final aim of the current study was to examine the marker “use of COO language” in detail. Studies in applied linguistics and international advertising have documented the long-time and widespread use of the English language in advertising (Gerritsen et al., 2007; Piller, 2001; Raedts et al., 2015). While its use has been suggested to be a marker for globalness rather than for a specific English-speaking COO (e.g., Kelly-Holmes, 2005; Piller, 2003), the present study empirically investigates this suggestion. The results of the content analysis demonstrate that English in advertising is a globalness marker (95% of the non-U.K. ads featuring this language) rather than a COO marker (5% of the ads). For the overview of COO markers provided by Aichner (2014), this result adds a cautionary note: the English language observed in advertising is not necessarily a COO marker—on the contrary, it is most likely to be a globalness marker.

For advertisers, our findings may inspire companies in the use of COO markers in two ways. First, the insights about the most frequently used COO markers may be used by brands to make a strategic choice which is in line with the choices made by other brands. Second, the insights may also be used to make a different strategy choice, which is to adopt COO markers that are only rarely used, as a way to stand out.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

The current study has a number of limitations. The first limitation is a theoretical assumption, which is typical of content analysis of advertising, namely that the unit classified as an instantiation of a specific category (i.e., type of COO marker) is also considered as such by the advertiser. For instance, in an ad for Rimmel London, Kate Moss was used as an endorser. Her presence was coded as “use of stereotypical/famous people from COO,” namely the U.K. The question is whether the advertiser indeed intended to present...
her in the ad as a COO marker. The intention behind the choice for her picture could also be to highlight globalness (Kate Moss is a global fashion icon), to prove product effectiveness (the product increases the model’s looks), or to benefit from a credible and likeable source (consumers may easily accept her endorsement). For future research, it is therefore important to explore the advertisers’ views on using COO markers through surveys and interviews asking under what circumstances they consider using a particular type of COO marker or a combination of COO markers, and what motivations underlie their considerations.

A second limitation of the present study, which is also inherent in content analyses, is that it cannot establish how consumers perceive and evaluate the different COO markers. For instance, if Kate Moss was indeed employed as a COO marker for the U.K., one may wonder whether consumers also perceive her presence in the ad as an indicator of the brand’s origin. The results of this analysis showed that some COO markers were more frequently used than others. Does this mean that more commonly used markers are also more effective in suggesting a COO to consumers? For example, is a reference to “COO or its inhabitants” more effective than depicting “flags and symbols”? And why would this be so? Following the results for RQ2c, if an ad contains multiple markers for a specific country of origin, does this mean that it strengthens consumers’ links between the brand and its country of origin more than an ad containing a single COO marker, or is a single cue enough (as may be suggested by the finding in our study that single COO markers were used more frequently than combinations of COO markers)? These kinds of questions should be addressed in experimental research.

Finally, the results of this exploratory study are indicative of the use of COO markers for products advertised in Cosmopolitan in European countries, and provide first insights into how advertisers highlight the brands’ country of origin and, thus, also into how consumers are exposed to COO markers. Future research may examine the COO markers in advertising in different contexts: in samples taken from different countries and continents, in a sample consisting of multiple magazine titles, in magazines targeting other kinds of consumers, featuring ads for different product types, or in a different advertising medium (for instance, television commercials). Multiple content analyses will provide a fuller picture of the use of COO markers in advertising.

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