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A Comparative Analysis of Changes in Finnish Consumer Attitudes Toward the Products and Associated Marketing Practices of Various Selected Countries, 1975 to 2000

ABSTRACT

This study provides a longitudinal analysis of the attitudes of Finnish consumers toward the products and associated marketing practices of eight countries – England, Finland, France, Germany, Japan, Russia, Sweden, and the USA. The initial research study was conducted in 1975 and was replicated in 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995 and 2000. In addition to questions related to products and marketing practices, a major issue of the study focussed on the importance to Finnish consumers of a product's country of origin in their actual purchasing process. The most significant conclusion from the study is

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that there are continuing, consistent and significant differences in the attitudes of Finnish consumers with regard to the products and marketing practices of the eight countries. Throughout the twenty-five year period covered by the study, the most positive consumer responses were to the products and associated marketing activities of Finland, Sweden and Germany. The findings of this continuing study demonstrate both the importance of the country of origin in the decision-making of consumers, and the difficulties faced by marketers and policy makers in the international market positioning of products.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization of business decision-making and internationalization of strategic business operations have emerged as among the most pervasive influences in today's economic environment (1). The marketplace for virtually all products has thereby become a competitive international arena influencing business decisions in every corner of the globe (2). This is true whether the products are being acquired for personal consumption or for business use, or a firm is involved in selling products in either category in a single country or several different national markets (3).

As a result of this globalization process, it has also become increasingly important that the marketing practices associated with products in the international marketplace be developed with the appropriate global perspective. This affects all aspects of marketing such as decisions relating to product services, branding, packaging, pricing, advertising and promotional activities, and distribution and logistics. To compete successfully in the international arena requires the management of today's business firm to have a profound understanding and empathy for the varying needs and demands of customers in the various markets in which its firm competes (4).

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN AND CONSUMER ATTITUDES

Purchase behavior in the international consumer marketplace is strongly influenced by attitudes toward products and the marketing practices associated with products (5). In international marketing, the country-of-origin is a particularly important influence on the development of consumer attitudes toward products and services. An extensive array of research, dating from the early 1970s has shown consistently that ″made in″ labels and other corresponding sources of information serve as important cues in product evaluation by consumers (6).

This cue serves the buyer as a predictor of product quality and suitability, and in addition is itself an attribute which stimulates attitudinal reactions. In some cases, as is true for member countries of the European Union, the product label cannot designate country of production origin for these member states. However, there are other ways by which consumers become aware of country of product origin, and it is this information base that then provides these attitudinal reactions.

Related research has shown that country of origin interacts with foreign name branding, advertising and promotional practices in the development of product attitudes (7). Other research has shown that country of origin fosters attitudes toward foreign suppliers and in this way influences buyer responses (8). Thus, country of origin becomes an important factor in determining buyer response in the marketplace and in the ultimate marketing success of a firm's product in a foreign market (9).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

A major study was initially conducted in 1975 to evaluate the impact of the country of origin label on the attitudes of Finnish consumers toward the products of various economically or politically important countries (10). Finland was chosen as the market for analysis because of its neutral political stance and the importance and rapid growth of imported products in its economy. Familiar foreign brand names were common in numerous categories of consumer goods and Finnish consumers were familiar with products from many diverse sources.

Subsequent studies conducted in 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995 and 2000 replicated the 1975 study, utilizing the same questionnaire and similarly selected random samples of consumers. These repeated cross sectional studies permit the measurement and comparison of attitudes over time (11).

These studies also provide a longitudinal analysis of the impact of country of origin information on Finnish consumers' attitudes and highlight significant changes in these attitudes toward several dimensions of the products and the marketing practices associated with them. Specifically, this longitudinal analysis addresses the following questions:

1. What are the general attitudes of Finnish consumers toward the products of various selected countries? In addition, how consistent have these been over time? With regard to these questions, consumer attitudes were analyzed in terms of the following comparative attributes: suitability to the market, competitiveness, workmanship, quality, technological advancement, creativity, imitativeness, product variety availability, outward appearance, use of color and design, reliability and luxuriousness.
2. What are the general attitudes of Finnish consumers toward the marketing practices associated with products from various selected countries? In addition, how consistent have these been over time? The various marketing practices analyzed in response

to these questions included: warranties and guaranties, repair and maintenance services, product packaging, package labeling and directions for use, expensiveness of products, reasonableness of price, product branding, product availability, reputation of stores and dealers who handle the products, display and merchandising of products in retail stores, and advertising and promotional activities.

3. How important to Finnish consumers is a product's country of origin in the consumer's purchase process? In addition, has the perception of this importance changed over time? In an effort to answer these questions, data were gathered and analyzed regarding the following aspects of the purchase process: the degree to which consumers look for the products from various countries on shopping trips, the extent to which the products are used for comparative shopping, the preferences consumers have for the products when they actually make purchases, the degree to which consumers have been pleased with the products after purchase, and the pride of ownership in the products of various countries.

The countries selected for the study were England, Finland (primarily for comparative purposes), France, Germany, Japan, Russia, Sweden, and the U.S.A. These countries were chosen because they are all important industrialized countries, major trading partners of Finland, and have recognizable products and product brands in the Finnish consumer market (12). The inclusion of additional countries was considered inadvisable due to the time and effort required for respondents to complete the questionnaire and the researcher's desire to achieve a high response rate.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is a repeated cross-sectional survey, with observations collected from consumers living in the Helsinki, Jyväskylä, Oulu, Tampere, Turku and Vaasa areas of Finland during 1975, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995 and 2000. These locations were selected because they are the six major urban areas in the country. About three-fourths of the sample was composed of employees randomly selected from local banks, retail, wholesale and manufacturing firms, with the remainder also selected randomly from university faculty, staff and students in the urban areas mentioned. The proportion of respondents between the two major groups, and within each of these groups, remained relatively constant over the six data collection points.

An announcement regarding the research study was made within each of the organizations, and potential respondents invited to participate. The number of participating respondents (as noted below) increased over the twenty-five year period due, in large part, to growing interest in the study on the part of the Finnish respondents. Questionnaires were hand-delivered and picked up, resulting in very high response rates. The number of questionnaires distributed and collected, and the number of those that were usable for each of the six data collection years, are noted below.

Research Questionnaires	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000
Number of questionnaires distributed	350	480	450	580	690	950
Number of questionnaires collected	328	442	397	518	626	843
Percentage collected response rate	93.7	92.1	88.2	89.3	90.7	88.7
Number of usable questionnaires	303	433	377	490	603	722
Percentage usable return rate	86.6	90.2	83.8	84.5	87.4	85.6

The questionnaire used for the data collection included 31 itemized rating scale (Likert type) statements applied once to each one of the eight countries. The first 13 of the 31 statements dealt with various product characteristics (noted above), 13 with marketing practices, and five with the importance of country of origin as a cue or attribute in the purchasing process. The final statement concerned the respondent's overall preference for products from the eight countries.

Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with each statement on a five-point scale based upon the following: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Uncertain, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. Space was provided on the questionnaire for comments by the respondents, and many of them took the opportunity to explain the bases for their opinions. The one-way Analysis of Variance test was used to indicate the statistical significance among the responses received for the eight countries in each of the six surveys. The consistency of rankings over the six survey periods was tested with Kendall's coefficient of concordance.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The results of the study are presented in the order of the major questions posed as the purpose of the research study.

Attitudes Toward the Products of Various Countries

Table 1 presents the average responses to each of the product-related statements for each of the eight countries in each of the six cross sectional studies. A one-way Analysis of Variance test indicates significant differences (at the .001 level) among the eight countries in their re-

TABLE 1. Attitudes of Finnish Consumers Toward the Products of Various Selected Countries.

			Mean average level of response by country*								
Research Statements	Year	F Ratio	England	Finland	France	Germany	Japan	Russia	Sweden	USA	Total
1. Products made in ____ are generally very well suited to the needs of the Finnish consumer.	1975	227.81	3.55	4.68	2.99	3.98	3.24	2.40	4.31	3.12	3.53
	1980	530.97	3.50	4.80	3.07	4.00	3.29	2.16	4.37	3.35	3.57
	1985	462.92	3.44	4.74	3.12	3.93	3.63	1.92	4.29	3.39	3.56
	1990	734.13	3.42	4.68	3.25	4.10	3.69	1.79	4.31	3.44	3.59
	1995	958.12	3.42	4.75	3.07	4.13	3.77	1.80	4.30	3.67	3.61
	2000	868.49	3.34	4.78	3.11	3.95	3.56	1.94	4.17	3.67	3.56
2. The suitability of products made in ____ to the Finnish consumer seems to have improved over the past several years.	1975	82.36	3.20	4.24	2.98	3.53	3.65	2.95	3.80	2.96	3.41
	1980	153.80	3.11	4.28	3.00	3.55	3.64	2.76	3.69	3.14	3.40
	1985	165.44	3.04	4.22	3.03	3.41	3.80	2.48	3.59	3.10	3.33
	1990	192.29	3.06	3.84	3.09	3.52	3.78	2.27	3.45	3.12	3.27
	1995	261.12	3.12	3.88	2.98	3.54	3.75	2.18	3.43	3.33	3.28
	2000	292.71	3.12	3.99	3.03	3.43	3.54	2.22	3.47	3.28	3.26
3. Products made in ____ occupy a very strong competitive position in comparison to the products of other countries.	1975	154.73	3.25	4.02	2.85	4.05	3.86	2.22	4.04	3.18	3.43
	1980	272.64	3.16	4.11	2.90	4.00	3.96	2.09	3.88	3.40	3.44
	1985	331.19	2.96	4.17	2.90	3.82	4.14	1.72	3.74	3.47	3.37
	1990	433.41	2.90	3.82	3.04	4.02	4.12	1.56	3.55	3.38	3.30
	1995	684.65	2.87	3.98	2.90	4.10	4.15	1.44	3.65	3.64	3.34
	2000	640.78	3.03	4.08	2.97	3.85	3.77	1.58	3.64	3.68	3.33
4. Products made in ____ are carefully produced and have a fine workmanship.	1975	221.27	3.22	4.37	3.08	4.36	3.26	2.17	4.32	3.22	3.50
	1980	464.23	3.10	4.62	3.19	4.33	3.51	1.93	4.31	3.50	3.56
	1985	431.45	3.26	4.53	3.23	4.16	3.89	1.67	4.12	3.35	3.53
	1990	611.17	3.19	4.36	3.37	4.31	3.83	1.58	4.03	3.29	3.51
	1995	932.45	3.41	4.45	3.22	4.35	4.03	1.47	4.08	3.59	3.58
	2000	764.48	3.40	4.42	3.22	4.08	3.65	1.65	3.94	3.40	3.47
5. Products made in ____ are generally of a lower quality than similar products available from other countries.	1975	161.02	2.50	1.65	2.68	1.73	2.69	3.67	1.78	2.60	2.41
	1980	348.82	2.61	1.49	2.64	1.73	2.48	4.00	1.76	2.43	2.39
	1985	318.55	2.63	1.61	2.66	1.88	2.15	4.27	1.89	2.47	2.45
	1990	602.15	2.58	1.58	2.52	1.67	2.16	4.40	1.95	2.48	2.42
	1995	770.37	2.55	1.57	2.65	1.69	2.00	4.48	1.92	2.29	2.39
	2000	650.85	2.52	1.57	2.63	1.92	2.32	4.26	2.09	2.43	2.47
6. Over the past several years, the quality of most products made in ____ seems to have improved.	1975	61.43	3.15	4.09	3.09	3.64	3.87	3.17	3.71	3.09	3.48
	1980	120.17	3.10	4.07	3.14	3.60	3.79	2.84	3.67	3.19	3.43
	1985	132.65	3.05	3.93	3.11	3.43	3.97	2.60	3.49	3.12	3.34
	1990	120.72	3.09	3.61	3.19	3.42	3.83	2.50	3.31	3.07	3.25
	1995	231.52	3.13	3.69	3.15	3.47	3.77	2.21	3.37	3.25	3.26
	2000	241.52	3.15	3.86	3.13	3.41	3.57	2.28	3.38	3.20	3.25
7. Products made in ____ show a very high degree of technological advancement.	1975	137.60	3.25	3.82	3.10	4.42	4.05	2.78	4.17	3.90	3.69
	1980	332.52	3.15	3.97	3.16	4.38	4.28	2.37	4.14	3.93	3.67
	1985	430.06	3.01	3.98	3.10	4.25	4.61	1.92	3.92	3.98	3.60
	1990	712.96	2.93	4.01	3.19	4.30	4.61	1.72	3.80	3.70	3.53
	1995	1069.61	3.00	4.26	3.12	4.31	4.67	1.57	3.93	3.84	3.59
	2000	1202.51	2.87	4.59	2.92	4.02	4.48	1.61	3.86	3.75	3.51

* Respondents were asked to indicate their opinion of each of the statements along a five-point scale on the following basis: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Uncertain, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. The Analysis of Variance statistical test indicates a significant difference in the mean average responses between the eight countries for each of the thirteen statements at the .001 level of significance.

sponses for all 13 product characteristic statements in each of the six studies (1975, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995 and 2000). These results demonstrate that Finnish consumers perceive significant differences in products based on their country of origin.

Ratings for all thirteen product characteristic statements were summed and averaged to provide a single scale score for the thirteen product items. Since items 5, 8, 10, and 13 were negatively worded to avoid response bias, the data for these four statements were reversed for statistical purposes. These scale scores of each individual statement were then averaged to obtain an overall average response for each of the eight countries. The identical approach was

TABLE 1. Continued

	Research Statements	Year	F Ratio	Mean average level of response by country*: England	Finland	France	Germany	Japan	Russia	Sweden	USA	Total
8.	Products made in ____ generally lack creativity and are very imitative of products make in other countries.	1975	60.20	2.84	2.21	2.53	2.34	3.58	3.18	2.43	2.69	2.72
		1980	138.35	2.96	1.96	2.58	2.34	3.45	3.48	2.34	2.58	2.71
		1985	70.45	2.86	2.23	2.43	2.46	2.81	3.62	2.50	2.57	2.68
		1990	63.82	2.89	2.54	2.44	2.45	2.94	3.54	2.66	2.65	2.76
		1995	137.71	2.91	2.35	2.54	2.46	2.64	3.81	2.53	2.52	2.72
		2000	149.31	2.91	2.19	2.66	2.54	2.72	3.69	2.53	2.60	2.73
9.	Products made in ____ are generally available in a wide choice of sizes and models.	1975	126.31	3.54	3.97	3.14	3.94	3.69	2.18	4.01	3.56	3.50
		1980	259.53	3.43	4.21	3.13	3.95	3.79	2.06	3.93	3.49	3.50
		1985	223.86	3.33	4.05	3.23	3.84	3.94	1.90	3.87	3.65	3.48
		1990	372.06	3.35	3.89	3.30	4.00	4.09	1.76	3.68	3.68	3.47
		1995	448.69	3.15	3.95	3.12	3.96	4.09	1.81	3.69	3.92	3.46
		2000	362.57	3.20	3.82	3.14	3.78	3.85	2.06	3.66	3.98	3.44
10.	Products made in ____ are produced by firms that are more concerned with the outward appearance of the product than with the product performance.	1975	67.98	2.93	2.36	3.28	2.41	3.29	2.50	2.54	3.56	2.86
		1980	97.72	2.98	2.15	3.27	2.28	3.03	2.59	2.44	3.30	2.76
		1985	68.66	2.92	2.27	3.32	2.47	2.75	2.50	2.59	3.39	2.78
		1990	75.98	3.00	2.49	3.30	2.44	2.88	2.52	2.70	3.31	2.83
		1995	99.27	2.90	2.35	3.37	2.43	2.74	2.85	2.59	3.37	2.83
		2000	126.37	3.00	2.31	3.34	2.48	2.78	3.01	2.72	3.46	2.89
11.	Products made in ____ usually show a very clever use of color and design.	1975	162.04	2.97	4.25	3.68	3.34	3.15	1.94	4.02	3.08	3.30
		1980	293.55	2.93	4.35	3.75	3.51	3.27	1.83	3.94	3.26	3.36
		1985	304.98	2.95	4.02	4.05	3.34	3.41	1.51	3.84	3.44	3.32
		1990	380.14	3.01	3.71	4.15	3.50	3.50	1.53	3.64	3.49	3.32
		1995	419.85	2.93	3.55	3.91	3.36	3.63	1.55	3.60	3.74	3.28
		2000	315.83	3.01	3.54	3.71	3.15	3.57	1.88	3.54	3.66	3.26
12.	Products made in ____ are usually quite reliable and seem to last the desired length of time.	1975	174.76	3.27	4.25	2.90	4.28	2.90	2.47	4.24	3.11	3.43
		1980	346.44	3.06	4.42	3.01	4.27	3.19	2.16	4.20	3.36	3.46
		1985	343.66	3.20	4.39	3.02	4.24	3.69	1.91	4.10	3.32	3.48
		1990	444.71	3.20	4.29	3.16	4.34	3.53	1.86	4.05	3.32	3.47
		1995	643.61	3.36	4.40	3.08	4.35	3.60	1.67	4.07	3.50	3.51
		2000	579.71	3.35	4.39	3.05	4.19	3.50	1.86	3.94	3.45	3.47
13.	Products made in ____ seem to be more in the nature of luxury items than necessary items.	1975	140.77	2.82	2.41	3.60	2.61	2.80	1.82	2.90	3.92	2.86
		1980	183.79	2.86	2.26	3.62	2.57	2.73	1.80	2.77	3.58	2.77
		1985	242.25	2.94	2.51	3.83	2.68	2.79	1.48	2.92	3.55	2.84
		1990	266.30	2.91	2.64	3.84	2.83	2.85	1.47	2.88	3.42	2.86
		1995	243.05	2.98	2.62	3.79	2.74	2.98	1.74	2.82	3.38	2.88
		2000	205.40	3.11	2.67	3.70	2.77	3.01	1.99	2.88	3.38	2.94

* Respondents were asked to indicate their opinion of each of the statements along a five-point scale on the following basis: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Uncertain, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. The Analysis of Variance statistical test indicates a significant difference in the mean average responses between the eight countries for each of the thirteen statements at the .001 level of significance.

used with the data for each of the six survey years. These average scale (overall) responses and their corresponding ordinal ranking for each of the six years are as noted in Table 2.

The grand mean of the average product category ratings for each of the eight countries can be seen to have decreased since 1975, though going against this trend is the general increasing positive rating of products from Japan and the U.S.A. Attitudes toward the products of Finland have generally declined since a high in 1980, while attitudes toward the products of France and Germany were mixed. Attitudes generally became less positive at each data collection point from 1975 to 2000 with regard to the products of Sweden, England and Russia.

Although several changes in the overall attitude toward products of the eight countries occurred over the twenty-five year period covered by the study, the relative relationship of the ratings are remarkably consistent. Kendall's coefficient of concordance (W = .92) indicates

TABLE 2. Average Responses for All Product Statements.

	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000
1. Finland	4.08(1)	4.23(1)	4.11(1)	3.92(1)	4.00(1)	4.06(1)
2. Germany	3.88(3)	3.90(3)	3.76(3)	3.86(2)	3.87(2)	3.70(2)
3. Sweden	3.92(2)	3.91(2)	3.78(2)	3.66(4)	3.71(4)	3.64(3)
4. Japan	3.33(4)	3.47(4)	3.74(4)	3.70(3)	3.78(3)	3.59(4)
5. U.S.A.	3.11(7)	3.29(5)	3.30(5)	3.28(5)	3.46(5)	3.40(5)
6. England	3.26(5)	3.16(6)	3.15(6)	3.13(7)	3.16(6)	3.15(6)
7. France	3.13(6)	3.13(7)	3.12(7)	3.20(6)	3.10(7)	3.07(7)
8. Russia	2.70(8)	2.49(8)	2.29(8)	2.20(8)	2.06(8)	2.16(8)
Grand Mean	3.43	3.45	3.41	3.37	3.39	3.10

that the ratings are 92 percent consistent. Nevertheless, the overall level of the ratings diminished from a grand mean of 3.43 in 1975 to only 3.10 in 2000, suggesting a more critical response by consumers in the most recent survey year.

In 1995, Finland became a member of the European Union. The products marketed in Finland, but produced in one of the other EU countries, by policy cannot be identified as to country of origin on product labels. However, the data from the study in 2000 would indicate that Finnish consumers continue with their distinct opinions with regard to "country of origin" of products purchased.

In fact, it is interesting that EU member countries – Finland, Germany, Sweden, England and France – remain very closely and similarly related in 2000 as they were in 1975 according to the attitudes expressed by Finnish consumers. Products from Finland, which is rather obvious given the location of the research, Germany and Sweden remain highly rated, while the products from England and France are rated relatively low in an ordinal ranking.

A review of the changes in ratings of each of the thirteen product characteristics is very informative. The product variables that contributed to the positive relative change in Finnish consumer attitudes toward products from Germany from 1975 to 2000 included suitability to consumer needs, competitive position, quality, creativity, and reliability.

Positive product attributes that affected attitudes toward Swedish products during this same period included suitability to consumer needs, competitive position, workmanship, technological advancement, size and model choice availability, use of color and design, and reliability. The positive relative change from 1975 to 2000 in attitudes regarding products from the U.S.A. involved suitability to consumer needs, competitiveness, quality, technology, creativity, size and model availability, appearance, use of color and design, reliability, and necessity versus luxury.

Finns have historically taken a great deal of pride in products produced in Finland, and this point is verified by the first-place ranking consistently maintained by Finnish products throughout the twenty-five years covered by this extended study (13). However, there has been some volatility with regard to various attributes of Finnish products as perceived by Finnish consumers. The greatest amount of variation over the twenty-five year period has occurred in such aspects as improvement in product suitability, quality improvement, creativity, use of color and design, and practicality of products. The relative decline in attitudes toward Swedish products from 1975 to 2000 was influenced by a reduction in improvement of product suitability over time, competitiveness, workmanship, quality, quality improvement, technology, size and model availability, and use of color and design.

Attitudes toward products from England were negatively influenced by such variables as suitability to consumer needs, competitiveness, improvement in suitability over time, competitiveness, quality, technological advancement, and size and model availability. It is interesting how consistently the Finnish respondents viewed the products from France over the period of study. On the other hand, attitudes toward Russian products experienced a dramatic decline, although maintaining the same relative position in comparison to the other seven countries.

The decline in consumer attitudes toward Russian products was influenced by perceptions regarding suitability to consumer needs, improvement in suitability over time, competitiveness, workmanship, quality, quality improvement over time, technology, creativity, size and model availability, use of color and design, and reliability. Throughout the period from 1975 to 2000, Russian products received the poorest ratings, accounting for successively poorer evaluations from one survey to the next, except between 1995 and 2000.

Considering all of these changes in ratings, the author believes that the most noteworthy changes in attitudes discovered by this study were the general decreases in attitudes toward Finnish, Swedish, English, and Russian products, while attitudes toward products from Japan and the U.S.A. generally increased over the twenty-five year period.

Attitudes Toward Marketing Practices Associated with the Products of Various Countries

Responses by Finnish consumers to the 13 statements regarding the marketing practices associated with products from the eight countries are shown in Table 3. Using the one-way Analysis of Variance statistical test for comparative purposes, it can be concluded that the responses for the various countries are significantly different at the .001 level of significance for all of the statements in 1975, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995, and 2000. As was true for the characteristics of products, Finnish consumers perceived significant differences in marketing practices among the eight countries.

TABLE 3. Attitudes of Finnish Consumers Toward Marketing Practices Associated with the Products of Various Selected Countries.

	Research Statements	Year	F Ratio	Mean average level of response by country*								
				England	Finland	France	Germany	Japan	Russia	Sweden	USA	Total
14.	The warranties and guaranties of products made in ____ are generally not adequately backed by the firms that sell the products.	1975	50.13	2.81	2.26	3.00	2.35	3.07	3.22	2.32	2.94	2.74
		1980	62.26	2.91	2.21	3.01	2.41	2.95	3.28	2.43	2.94	2.77
		1985	83.68	2.83	2.04	2.95	2.27	2.52	3.40	2.30	2.87	2.65
		1990	113.06	2.82	2.13	2.91	2.28	2.60	3.55	2.36	2.84	2.69
		1995	212.65	2.74	2.04	2.92	2.19	2.51	3.87	2.26	2.66	2.65
		2000	174.95	2.79	2.06	2.91	2.29	2.59	3.74	2.33	2.70	2.68
15.	In general, repair and maintenance services provided for products made in ___ are adequate.	1975	93.33	3.31	3.99	2.91	3.81	3.05	2.52	3.85	3.07	3.31
		1980	216.34	3.31	4.33	2.98	3.93	3.32	2.51	4.02	3.26	3.46
		1985	278.82	3.21	4.36	2.95	3.94	3.71	2.17	4.01	3.21	3.45
		1990	311.22	3.16	4.23	3.08	3.98	3.67	2.15	3.88	3.19	3.42
		1995	487.68	3.18	4.30	3.07	4.01	3.70	1.86	3.93	3.41	3.43
		2000	373.62	3.23	4.16	3.03	3.85	3.58	1.96	3.77	3.42	3.38
16.	The packages of products made in ____ are well-designed and are available in an adequate number of sizes.	1975	145.78	3.42	4.13	3.39	3.79	3.27	2.17	4.02	3.45	3.46
		1980	244.28	3.38	4.24	3.36	3.83	3.45	2.17	3.99	3.46	3.48
		1985	279.88	3.38	4.17	3.55	3.84	3.73	1.89	4.01	3.64	3.52
		1990	368.17	3.43	3.94	3.71	3.89	3.73	1.82	3.86	3.65	3.50
		1995	414.60	3.34	3.95	3.52	3.89	3.81	1.88	3.83	3.86	3.51
		2000	286.01	3.31	3.81	3.41	3.66	3.69	2.07	3.72	3.74	3.43
17.	The package labels and directions for use of products made in ___ are usually understandable and informative.	1975	117.30	3.59	4.05	2.84	3.81	3.13	2.29	4.03	3.51	3.40
		1980	254.55	3.61	4.40	2.84	3.88	3.32	2.28	4.08	3.54	3.49
		1985	275.96	3.73	4.43	2.97	3.96	3.75	2.14	4.17	3.63	3.60
		1990	288.91	3.72	4.28	3.04	4.07	3.66	2.20	4.11	3.79	3.61
		1995	479.87	3.75	4.39	2.96	4.01	3.74	1.93	4.08	4.03	3.61
		2000	376.32	3.66	4.22	2.92	3.85	3.48	2.07	3.90	3.88	3.51
18.	Products made in ____ are usually quite inexpensive in comparison to similar products from other countries.	1975	53.97	3.01	2.82	2.59	2.65	3.74	3.45	2.53	2.55	2.92
		1980	192.90	3.23	2.28	2.60	2.48	3.82	3.83	2.30	2.78	2.92
		1985	162.51	2.96	2.22	2.55	2.56	3.62	3.91	2.26	2.72	2.85
		1990	230.53	3.07	1.89	2.66	2.61	3.61	3.87	2.33	3.01	2.88
		1995	234.68	2.87	2.17	2.62	2.54	3.46	4.00	2.35	2.91	2.87
		2000	230.58	2.78	2.18	2.61	2.59	3.53	3.83	2.59	2.99	2.89
19.	Products made in ____ are usually reasonably priced in comparison to similar products from other countries.	1975	42.90	3.56	3.30	2.81	3.28	3.84	3.41	2.93	2.87	3.25
		1980	61.74	3.54	2.93	2.86	3.21	3.76	3.51	2.87	3.08	3.22
		1985	43.05	3.36	2.93	2.86	3.24	3.78	3.36	2.89	3.10	3.19
		1990	138.79	3.43	2.21	3.00	3.25	3.81	3.46	2.77	3.27	3.15
		1995	63.26	3.36	2.79	2.95	3.24	3.72	3.47	2.99	3.30	3.23
		2000	58.74	3.23	2.85	3.02	3.29	3.71	3.30	3.18	3.39	3.25
20.	The brand names of products made in ____ are easily recognizable and generally quite well-known.	1975	141.38	3.74	4.12	3.07	4.02	3.67	2.13	3.93	3.69	3.55
		1980	201.98	3.59	4.13	3.07	4.05	3.92	2.20	3.91	3.66	3.56
		1985	220.51	3.57	4.22	3.27	3.96	4.08	1.98	3.89	3.85	3.60
		1990	262.25	3.51	3.85	3.43	4.10	4.18	1.88	3.61	3.93	3.56
		1995	451.66	3.32	3.87	3.24	4.12	4.28	1.74	3.61	4.26	3.56
		2000	529.75	3.35	3.88	3.27	3.94	4.19	1.79	3.66	4.31	3.55

* Respondents were asked to indicate their opinion of each of the statements along a five-point scale on the following basis: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Uncertain, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. The Analysis of Variance statistical test indicates a significant difference in the mean average responses between the eight countries for each of the thirteen statements at the .001 level of significance.

The responses to the thirteen marketing practice items were summed and averaged to provide a scale value for the marketing practices in the same way as for the product characteristics. Data for the negatively worded statements (items 14 and 26) were reversed. The ordinal ranking of the scaled responses were determined. These are as noted in Table 4.

The ratings for the marketing practices of the eight countries over the six surveys was consistently very high, with a Kendall's coefficient of concordance of W = .89. Thus, the marketing practices were rated almost as consistently as were the product characteristics. The overall relative ranking of marketing practices remained relatively constant for France at 7 and for

TABLE 3. Continued

	Research Statements	Year	F Ratio	England	Finland	France	Germany	Japan	Russia	Sweden	USA	Total
				Mean average level of response by country*								
21.	Products made in ____ are usually available in the retail stores in which one expects to find them.	1975	124.96	3.63	4.25	3.02	3.94	3.91	2.56	3.98	3.36	3.58
		1980	219.52	3.48	4.43	2.95	3.94	3.96	2.54	3.84	3.27	3.55
		1985	185.24	3.40	4.47	3.05	3.89	4.05	2.54	3.91	3.45	3.60
		1990	247.71	3.31	4.32	3.21	3.94	4.10	2.28	3.73	3.50	3.55
		1995	382.37	3.22	4.25	3.11	4.07	4.20	2.22	3.77	3.87	3.59
		2000	419.06	3.20	4.20	3.16	3.84	4.04	2.24	3.81	3.88	3.54
22.	The retail stores that carry products made in ____ usually have a good reputation.	1975	112.35	3.75	4.03	3.62	4.05	3.15	2.54	4.06	3.53	3.59
		1980	246.93	3.52	4.29	3.50	4.08	3.23	2.27	4.07	3.54	3.56
		1985	277.23	3.62	4.31	3.77	4.01	3.65	1.98	4.01	3.64	3.62
		1990	364.99	3.59	4.16	3.82	4.19	3.65	1.86	3.92	3.66	3.61
		1995	567.16	3.63	4.30	3.65	4.20	3.73	1.73	3.97	3.81	3.63
		2000	579.88	3.61	4.30	3.60	4.02	3.57	1.84	3.89	3.73	3.57
23.	Products made in ____ are usually well-displayed and merchandised in retail stores.	1975	112.70	3.50	3.98	3.04	3.79	3.61	2.26	3.83	3.39	3.42
		1980	184.59	3.32	4.16	3.00	3.86	3.76	2.30	3.75	3.30	3.43
		1985	161.23	3.31	4.15	3.26	3.70	3.85	2.08	3.68	3.27	3.44
		1990	269.89	3.19	4.03	3.40	3.85	3.94	1.87	3.55	3.57	3.43
		1995	491.71	3.13	4.11	3.31	3.92	4.04	1.74	3.63	3.96	3.48
		2000	449.79	3.18	4.03	3.21	3.72	3.82	1.89	3.62	3.91	3.42
24.	The advertisements of products made in ____ are usually believable and provide a reliable source of product information.	1975	71.39	3.30	3.71	2.82	3.66	2.84	2.67	3.70	2.66	3.17
		1980	176.17	3.23	4.17	2.91	3.83	3.18	2.48	3.87	2.96	3.33
		1985	195.93	3.41	4.19	3.10	3.88	3.65	2.32	3.91	2.95	3.43
		1990	202.00	3.33	4.00	3.21	3.94	3.53	2.24	3.76	3.05	3.39
		1995	371.62	3.42	4.14	3.12	4.02	3.60	1.98	3.88	3.10	3.41
		2000	382.03	3.30	4.12	3.06	3.83	3.52	2.05	3.73	3.04	3.33
25.	More advertising and promotion is needed for products made in ____ in order to better inform consumers about product availability.	1975	35.19	3.27	3.50	3.49	2.96	2.91	3.94	2.94	3.11	3.26
		1980	43.20	3.37	3.34	3.69	2.95	2.84	3.76	3.11	3.38	3.30
		1985	63.47	3.49	2.81	3.61	2.87	2.59	2.76	2.95	3.17	3.16
		1990	108.58	3.58	2.82	3.57	2.77	2.54	3.97	3.18	3.13	3.19
		1995	151.64	3.77	3.15	3.69	2.84	2.60	4.04	3.22	2.86	3.27
		2000	130.75	3.66	3.17	3.57	3.03	2.74	3.96	3.13	2.81	3.26
26.	The advertising and promotion of products made in ____ is usually very poor in comparison to that for the products of other countries.	1975	97.82	2.68	2.59	3.05	2.30	2.32	3.96	2.36	2.50	2.72
		1980	149.42	2.88	2.41	3.18	2.33	2.32	3.99	2.48	2.65	2.78
		1985	183.05	3.05	2.22	3.09	2.40	2.09	4.19	2.51	2.50	2.76
		1990	244.96	3.05	2.51	2.91	2.34	2.07	4.32	2.73	2.40	2.79
		1995	381.79	3.16	2.56	2.97	2.25	2.05	4.39	2.63	2.10	2.76
		2000	322.54	3.00	2.54	2.93	2.43	2.35	4.19	2.55	2.13	2.77

* Respondents were asked to indicate their opinion of each of the statements along a five-point scale on the following basis: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Uncertain, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. The Analysis of Variance statistical test indicates a significant difference in the mean average responses between the eight countries for each of the thirteen statements at the .001 level of significance.

TABLE 4. Average Responses for All Marketing Practice Statements.

	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000
1. Finland	3.54(3)	3.85(1)	3.84(1)	3.62(3)	3.76(1)	3.72(1)
2. Germany	3.62(2)	3.63(2)	3.63(3)	3.69(1)	3.61(2)	3.61(2)
3. Japan	3.36(5)	3.48(4)	3.68(2)	3.67(2)	3.59(3)	3.61(3)
4. U.S.A.	3.21(6)	3.28(6)	3.35(6)	3.42(5)	3.59(4)	3.56(4)
5. Sweden	3.62(1)	3.60(3)	3.61(4)	3.51(4)	3.57(5)	3.55(5)
6. England	3.43(4)	3.36(5)	3.36(5)	3.34(6)	3.31(6)	3.29(6)
7. France	3.04(7)	3.04(7)	3.15(7)	3.25(7)	3.18(7)	3.16(7)
8. Russia	2.67(8)	2.66(8)	2.51(8)	2.44(8)	2.33(8)	2.39(8)
Grand Mean	3.31	3.36	3.39	3.37	3.37	3.36

Russia at 8, and nearly so for Germany between l and 3 but primarily at 2. However, some distinct changes can be seen in the relative ranking of marketing practices for Finland, Japan, and the U.S.A. (which improved), and for Sweden and England (which declined).

A comparison of the survey data in 2000 with 1995 offers an interesting observation. With the exception of attitudes toward Swedish products, the relative overall ratings of the eight countries remained the same in both of these points in time for marketing practices as well as products. This is particularly meaningful as it relates to the five countries that are members of the European Union.

With Finland becoming a member of the EU in 1995, one might have hypothesized that Finnish consumer attitudes toward both products and associated marketing practices might have improved with regard to the countries that are members of the EU – Finland, Germany, Sweden, England and France. However, that did not occur and, in fact, with the exception of products from Finland and marketing practices associated with products from Germany, the attitudes of respondents declined.

From 1975 to 2000, Finnish marketing practices were relatively ranked quite high. The examination of ratings on individual questionnaire items shows that this can be attributed primarily to product repair and maintenance services, package design and size availability, package labeling and directions for use, brand names that are recognizable and well-known, availability of products in retail stores, reputation of retail stores that handle Finnish products, product display and merchandising in stores, and the believability and reliability of product advertising.

It is interesting to note the generally consistent relative improvement in consumer attitudes toward the marketing practices associated with products from Japan and the U.S.A. Attitudes toward Japanese marketing practices were strongly influenced by the improvements in product repair and maintenance services, package design and size availability, package labeling and directions for use, recognizable and well-known brand names, reputation of retail stores, product display and merchandising, believability and reliability of advertising, and comparative product advertising and promotion.

Major strengths of the marketing practices associated with the products of the U.S.A. were the repair and maintenance services, package design and size availability, package labeling and directions for use, reasonableness of product prices, recognizable and well-known brand names, product availability in retail stores, product display and merchandising, believability and reliability of advertising, and comparative quality of product advertising and promotion.

The relative decline in attitudes toward marketing practices associated with products from England resulted from problems attributed to product repair and maintenance services, package design and size availability, comparative expensiveness of products, reasonableness of price, recognizable and well-known brands, availability of products, product display and merchandising in retail stores, and the amount of advertising that consumers believe is needed. The marketing practices associated with Russian products consistently received poor ratings from Finnish consumers with regard to all of the items noted in Table 3.

The average ratings of products and marketing practices seem to have developed a rather consistent trend over the twenty-five year period. During the earlier years of the study, the comparison between these two groupings of average ratings were quite mixed. However, since 1985 the products for Finland, Germany, Japan and Sweden have consistently been rated higher than the corresponding marketing practices associated with these products, with the exception of Japan during the 1995–2000 comparative period. On the other hand, the marketing practices associated with products from the U.S.A., England, France and Russia have consistently been rated higher than the products from these four countries.

It is interesting to note what has occurred during the 1995–2000 period when Finland, Germany, Sweden, England and France have all been members of the European Union and thereby considered to be on a more common basis with regard to market competition. All five of these countries maintained their same relative ranking with regard to consumer attitudes toward marketing practices associated with their products. In addition, with the exception of Germany that remained relatively even, the marketing practices of the countries experienced a decline from 1995 to 2000.

This followed the general consumer attitudes toward the products from these EU member countries which also experienced a decline in consumer attitudes. It therefore could be hypothesized that this study provides a basis for considering the fact that EU membership creates a much more rigorous competitive environment, and critical consumer in the marketplace, for the products and associated marketing practices from member countries even though these products cannot be identified as to country of origin.

Historically, Finland has been known as a country that produces products of superior quality and design, but that product marketing has been an area of business that lagged far behind. It is reassuring to note from this study that, with the exception of 1990, from 1980 to 2000 the marketing practices associated with Finnish products have been consistently ranked above those involved with products from the seven other countries. From the Finnish consumer point of view, it appears that the marketplace is responding quite positively, at least in a relative sense, to the marketing activities associated with the products from that country.

Importance of Country of Origin in the Consumer's Purchase Process

The data in Table 5 show the attitudes of Finnish consumers regarding how important they consider products from each of the eight countries to be to them. As was true for the data in

TABLE 5. Attitudes of Finnish Consumers Regarding the Importance to Them of the Products of Various Selected Countries.

	Research Statements	Year	F Ratio	England	Finland	France	Germany	Japan	Russia	Sweden	USA	Total
				Mean average level of response by country*								
27.	During my shopping trips, I usually look for products made in ____.	1975	167.34	3.10	4.48	2.74	3.57	2.81	1.97	3.67	2.76	3.14
		1980	302.74	2.78	4.55	2.61	3.58	2.89	1.74	3.48	2.93	3.07
		1985	283.65	2.91	4.46	2.90	3.61	3.26	1.45	3.56	3.05	3.15
		1990	323.19	2.90	4.18	3.11	3.78	3.28	1.38	3.33	3.21	3.16
		1995	471.30	2.86	4.33	2.75	3.84	3.39	1.36	3.48	3.48	3.19
		2000	498.43	2.85	4.30	2.77	3.53	3.23	1.42	3.47	3.43	3.13
28.	Using products made in ____ for comparison purposes helps me to make more intelligent buying decisions.	1975	48.95	3.37	3.88	3.10	3.66	3.30	2.75	3.59	3.06	3.34
		1980	94.41	3.12	3.92	2.92	3.63	3.30	2.58	3.54	3.21	3.28
		1985	126.01	3.14	4.00	3.06	3.62	3.46	2.19	3.60	3.19	3.28
		1990	134.89	3.04	3.84	3.12	3.67	3.39	2.16	3.41	3.24	3.25
		1995	239.74	3.08	3.99	3.01	3.75	3.58	2.10	3.49	3.45	3.31
		2000	219.80	3.11	3.90	3.00	3.51	3.44	2.22	3.43	3.35	3.25
29.	Whenever available, I would prefer to buy products made in ____.	1975	183.05	3.09	4.60	2.75	3.59	2.76	2.04	3.58	2.75	3.14
		1980	352.98	2.89	4.70	2.78	3.65	2.87	1.82	3.60	3.04	3.17
		1985	348.97	3.02	4.61	3.02	3.69	3.29	1.52	3.70	3.11	3.25
		1990	392.26	3.02	4.35	3.27	3.90	3.26	1.49	3.57	3.26	3.27
		1995	585.64	3.07	4.57	2.98	3.99	3.46	1.45	3.64	3.41	3.32
		2000	628.41	3.03	4.54	2.91	3.71	3.26	1.43	3.61	3.36	3.24
30.	In comparison to the products from other countries, as a general rule I have not been very pleased with the products made in ____ that I have purchased.	1975	85.29	2.62	2.01	2.84	2.14	3.02	3.45	2.17	2.80	2.63
		1980	174.80	2.84	1.83	2.86	2.13	2.82	3.65	2.22	2.72	2.63
		1985	147.12	2.77	1.86	2.69	2.13	2.38	3.78	2.20	2.75	2.57
		1990	162.02	2.79	2.11	2.63	2.15	2.51	3.80	2.37	2.62	2.62
		1995	297.14	2.66	1.91	2.79	2.03	2.37	3.92	2.25	2.50	2.55
		2000	252.64	2.75	1.94	2.78	2.23	2.59	3.74	2.35	2.59	2.62
31.	I take a great deal of pride in the ownership of products made in ____.	1975	75.30	3.02	3.85	2.96	3.43	2.68	2.17	3.41	2.89	3.05
		1980	219.98	2.83	4.26	2.99	3.45	2.76	1.93	3.40	3.12	3.09
		1985	190.29	2.94	4.18	3.25	3.50	3.09	1.70	3.40	3.12	3.15
		1990	209.46	2.88	3.85	3.31	3.55	2.91	1.63	3.23	3.12	3.06
		1995	334.90	2.97	4.12	3.03	3.68	3.05	1.58	3.29	3.25	3.12
		2000	331.92	2.90	4.23	2.99	3.41	2.93	1.68	3.23	3.14	3.07

* Respondents were asked to indicate their opinion of each of the statements along a five-point scale on the following basis: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Uncertain, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. The Analysis of Variance statistical test indicates a significant difference in the mean average responses between the eight countries for each of the thirteen statements at the .001 level of significance.

the preceding tables, the Analysis of Variance statistical test was used to analyze differences in responses between the countries. A significant difference in the responses between the eight countries was found for each of the statements in Table 5 at the .001 level of significance for 1975, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995 and 2000. A significant difference in consumer perceptions regarding "country of product origin" as desirable cues was thereby further demonstrated.

An overall average response rating and ordinal ranking among the countries can be derived by averaging each country's rating for all of the statements. In doing this, the data for statement 30 should be reversed due to the negative nature of this statement. The relative ordinal rankings among the various countries for each of the years and average response rates for the statements in Table 5 are noted in Table 6

It is notable that the grand mean of the ratings of the country of origin as a shopping cue changed relatively little over the 25 years, in spite of the dramatic decrease in the perception of Russia as a positive cue. A better indicator of the actual importance of the country of origin name as a shopping cue can be had by examining the standard deviation of the ratings of the

TABLE 6. Average Responses for All Importance of Country of Origin Satements.

	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000
1. Finland	4.16(1)	4.32(1)	4.28(1)	4.02(1)	4.22(1)	4.21(1)
2. Germany	3.62(3)	3.63(2)	3.66(2)	3.75(2)	3.85(2)	3.59(2)
3. Sweden	3.62(2)	3.55(3)	3.61(3)	3.43(3)	3.53(3)	3.48(3)
4. U.S.A.	2.93(6)	3.12(4)	3.15(5)	3.24(6)	3.42(5)	3.34(4)
5. Japan	2.91(7)	3.00(5)	3.34(4)	3.27(4)	3.42(4)	3.25(5)
6. England	3.20(4)	2.96(6)	3.05(7)	3.01(7)	3.06(6)	3.03(6)
7. France	2.94(5)	2.89(7)	3.10(6)	3.24(5)	3.00(7)	2.98(7)
8. Russia	2.30(8)	2.08(8)	1.82(8)	1.77(8)	1.71(8)	1.80(8)
Grand Mean	3.21	3.19	3.25	3.22	3.28	3.21

country of origin information for all countries. The fact that the standard deviation of the ratings of the importance of the country of origin as a guide in shopping actually increased from 1975 to 2000 suggests that there is greater shopper discrimination based on country of origin than in the initial study in 1975. For this reason the increasing similarity of rankings of product characteristics and marketing practices is not surprising as a result of the likely stereotyping phenomenon.

There was a high consistency across the six surveys regarding the rankings of the importance of individual countries of origin as shopping cues, with a Kendall coefficient of concordance of W = .89. However, in spite of the high consistency of these rankings some rather interesting changes in ratings occurred over the twenty-five year period. Of course, the strong relative position of Finnish products is understandable, particularly in light of the intense national loyalty and pride of the Finnish people (14).

In general, in 1975 Finnish consumers apparently were more favorably impressed than in 2000 with European products, despite the fact that several product attributes and marketing practices associated with the products were rated more favorably (see Tables 1 and 3). On the other hand, between 1975 and 2000 consumer attitudes regarding the overall importance of products from Japan and the U.S.A. improved, with those toward Sweden, England and France declining in the relative ranking of the eight countries (15).

Between 1975 and 2000, consumer attitudes regarding the importance of products from Finland, the U.S.A., Japan and France generally increased while they declined for Germany, Sweden, England and Russia. However, within the twenty-five year period the relative rankings of Germany, Sweden, England and France were somewhat volatile. Russia remained the lowest ranked, and continuously declined in ratings throughout the first twenty years of study.

It's interesting to note Russia's increased rating in 2000, perhaps indicating a change in Finnish consumer perceptions of Russia as a country of product origin.

During the period from 1975 to 1995, there was an increase in the overall average rating of importance of the Japanese ″made-in″ label that was attributed to all five dimensions shown in Table 5. However, a decrease occurred in consumer perceptions of the importance of Japanese products in 2000 indicating perhaps a change in Finnish attitudes toward these products. The fact that Finnish consumers have changed regarding the degree to which they look for Japanese products on shopping trips, use these products for comparison purposes in shopping, prefer to buy these products, are generally pleased with the products, and take personal pride in ownership of these products are all factors that contributed to the overall change in average rating during the six data collection years for Japanese products. The increase in the extent to which consumers look for products from the U.S.A. during shopping trips, use the products for comparison purposes, prefer to buy these products, are satisfied with products purchased, and take personal pride in their ownership contributed to the overall relative increase in the importance of the ″made-in U.S.A.″ label.

From 1975 to 2000 there was a decline with regard to consumer attitudes concerning the degree to which consumers look for Swedish products, use them for comparison purposes, prefer to buy them, and take pride in their ownership which contributed to their relative decline in importance. Similar declines in attitudes toward the importance of products from England and France were due to the various factors noted in Table 5. It is interesting to note that of the five members of the European Union, the products of three of them – Sweden, England and France – lost relative position in the minds of Finnish consumers during the period from 1975 to 2000. The products from Russia remained the least attractive in relative importance to consumers throughout this period of time.

As a final dimension of Finnish consumer attitudes toward the products and associated marketing practices of these countries, the study explored the general product preferences in a more global way. The respondents in 1975, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995 and 2000 were asked to rank the eight countries in terms of the following question: If a product that is equal in price, quality, and styling is available from each of the eight countries, rank order (from 1 to 8 with No. 1 being most important) your preferences in terms of country of origin. The average rating and relative ordinal ranking for each of the countries are noted in Table 7.

It is noteworthy that the importance of the country of origin label rankings in 2000 are perfectly correlated with the rankings of the perceptions of product characteristics and also of the suitability of marketing practices with two exceptions. The relative positions of Japan and Sweden were reversed as they related to consumer perceptions of the suitability of marketing practices. A one-way Analysis of Variance test indicated a statistical significance in the differ-

TABLE 7. Average Ranking of Countries as Preferred Country of Origin.

	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000
1. Finland	1.57(1)	1.30(1)	1.46(1)	2.04(1)	1.77(1)	1.85(1)
2. Germany	3.36(3)	3.19(3)	3.44(3)	3.01(2)	3.15(2)	3.40(2)
3. Sweden	3.20(2)	3.16(2)	3.33(2)	3.67(3)	3.88(3)	3.70(3)
4. U.S.A.	5.58(6)	5.26(5)	5.27(7)	4.65(6)	4.69(5)	4.68(4)
5. Japan	5.66(7)	5.41(6)	4.74(4)	4.48(5)	4.50(4)	4.78(5)
6. England	4.26(4)	4.70(4)	4.94(5)	4.71(7)	5.11(6)	4.87(6)
7. France	5.30(5)	5.48(7)	5.22(6)	4.41(4)	5.39(7)	5.24(7)
8. Russia	7.05(8)	7.46(8)	7.61(8)	6.85(8)	7.38(8)	7.27(8)

ence in ratings for the eight countries at the .001 level.

The data in Table 7 indicate that over the period from 1975 to 2000, the U.S.A., Japan and France improved their average ratings; whereas Finland, Germany, Sweden, England and Russia generally declined in their average ratings. In addition, during the period of full EU membership for five of the countries, 1995 to 2000, Finland, Germany, Sweden and England declined as preferred countries of product origin; whereas France increased.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

A longitudinal study of this nature has a number of potential limitations that should perhaps be considered. The data were collected in six of the major urban areas of Finland noted above. The data may therefore be considered to be representative of the urban Finnish consumer, but not necessarily representative of the more rural population. In addition, this possible limitation may be hypothesized to bias the data in favor of the products and marketing practices of foreign producers because of the wide availability of these products.

The use of urban respondents for the study obviously biased the data in favor of the more educated segments of the population who live in cities. Consequently, the results may be considered not to be representative of the entire Finnish population. The more highly educated segments of the general population can also be hypothesized to have a greater recognition and acceptance of products from foreign countries, and perhaps less of a bias only for domestic products (16).

Perhaps a limitation is also resident in the fact that English is the language being used to analyze and present the research findings. In translating concepts and questions from English into Finnish and then back into English it is always possible that meanings are changed. This possible limitation was of concern throughout the study, however, and a great deal of care was exerted to correctly and properly translate the research questions and responses.

In a study of this nature in which consumer attitudes are analyzed with regard to products and marketing practices, it is obvious that all of the various product dimensions and aspects of marketing activity cannot be considered. Therefore, certain product dimensions and aspects of marketing activity had to be selected for the study. The particular items selected for consideration may be thought of as a possible limitation.

The general objective of the study was to establish the fact that there is an appreciable difference in the attitudes that Finnish consumers have toward the products and associated marketing practices of various selected countries. If the underlying objective of the study had been to establish precise estimations of the general parameters of the data, and generalize these to the total Finnish population, the size of the sample of respondents would be a genuine limitation. However, given the general objective this sample size is therefore not a limitation. The F-ratios presented in the data tables of this analysis can be considered adequate to support this general conclusion.

The study also focuses on general attitudes or stereotypes that Finnish consumers hold regarding products and marketing practices of various selected countries – not for specific products and marketing activities (17). And finally, countries of reference in the 1995 and 2000 data collection years included Germany (not West Germany, as in previous years) and Russia (not the U.S.S.R. as in previous years). The political conditions existing in 1995 and beyond were believed to justify these two changes in countries of reference, and pretests with a sample of respondents verified the comparability of the data collected in 1995 and 2000 with previous years (18).

GENERAL SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Perhaps the most significant conclusion from this research study is that there are continuing, consistent and significant differences in the attitudes of Finnish consumers with regard to the products and associated marketing practices of various countries (19). These are closely related to the preferences expressed for products from the eight countries studied. These findings serve to demonstrate both the importance of the country of origin in the decision-making of consumers (20), and the difficulty faced by marketers and policy makers who hope to overcome negative country of origin stereotypes in the market positioning of products in the international arena (21).

In the 2000 study of Finnish consumers, as well as in the prior five surveys, the most positive responses were to the products and marketing activities of Finland, Sweden and Germany. Japan was held in the next highest regard in terms of product characteristics and marketing activities. Ratings for specific product characteristics and marketing activities were generally high, but varied when specific product or marketing issues were the focus (22).

The study also highlights several general product attributes and marketing practices that can be improved by business firms marketing the products of various countries (including Finland). These improvements would no doubt help to secure a more competitively attractive position and level of profitability in the Finnish consumer market, and perhaps other similar national markets (23).

This research study can be of value to the business community, national governments, chambers of commerce, and other organizations involved in the international trade of each of the eight countries in a number of ways, including the following:

1. The study highlights the relative competitive position of the products from each of the eight countries in the Finnish market and how these have changed over time. While the relative perceptual positions of the countries have remained very consistent, it is true that Finnish consumers have become more critical of all countries' products.
2. The study provides some insights as to the positive ways in which Finnish consumers have reacted toward the products and associated marketing practices of each of the countries in comparison to those from the other countries over time. For example, it can be said that the U.S.A.'s recent emphasis on quality improvement must have had some impact on its products' image, while both the U.S.A. and Japan have done much to catch up with France in product design.
3. The study points out many general ways by which the products of each of the eight countries can still be further improved in order to better suit the needs and wants of Finnish consumers. Using the U.S.A. again as an example, it can be seen that the U.S.A. needs to improve some very specific things such as the technological reputation of its products.
4. The study focuses on several ways that the marketing practices associated with products from each of the eight countries can be refined further in order to improve the competitive impact of these products in the Finnish marketplace. For example, an improvement in product warranties would be a great help to the U.S.A. in improving its position.
5. The labels of products from European Union member countries cannot identify the country of product origin. Despite this, however, the study obviously shows that Finnish consumers still have a sense of the "country of origin" and rather strong

opinions regarding products and marketing practices associated with these products. There is obviously room for improvement in the products and marketing practices of EU countries even within the union.

6. Where appropriate, the study will no doubt provide many ideas whereby the products and marketing practices of each of the countries can also be improved further for other national geographical markets in addition to the Finnish market (24).

The author hopes that this repeated cross-sectional study and analysis will provide a means whereby a greater understanding can be achieved regarding the relative position of the products from various countries in the Finnish market, and the attitudes of Finnish consumers toward the marketing practices associated with these products. Comments and suggestions from other international scholars and businesspeople are welcome regarding the study and its implications. ■

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