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Title	Matching product and country images – the image of Finnish high design furniture in the eyes of Italian consumers		
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Abstract

During the past decades Finland has been losing its position in the international markets for design, and the will to alter Finland's image to be more favorable in this field has been often expressed. This study recognizes the important link between a country's general image and the image of a certain product category from that country, and takes as its purpose the studying of the contemporary image of Finnish high design furniture in the context of the Italian market. In order to achieve an understanding of the favorability of the combination of Finland and the country's high design furniture in the eyes of Italian consumers a survey among Italian university students along with two expert interviews were conducted.

The theoretical framework for the study started with describing the processes of product evaluation from the point of view of a consumer. The approach was colored by the chosen product category, which was noted e.g. for its strong connection with the consumer's status needs. As to the country image issues dealt with later in the study, it was suggested that in order for a country's high design furniture to be favorably perceived the country should excel in such country and product image dimensions that convey notions of "design", "prestige" or "luxury".

This study concluded that the image of Finnish high design furniture in Italy is neutral – there is nothing directly negative in how the country's high design furniture is viewed. The lacking of a positive link between Finland's country image and the product category of the study's interest, however, means that the Finnish origin does not offer the kind of value-added to these products that could make them more competitive in the international markets – the country image dimensions most important to the evaluation of high design furniture were found in this study to be too neutral to help boost the image of these products. Instead, Finland's country image in Italy seems to be one characterized by an image of "rationality" as the country was most favorably perceived with regard to its wealth, level of technological advancement and education, the reliability of the country's products and the trustworthiness of its people. Furthermore, it was concluded that Finland may not have a highly distinctive image in Italy, and that it may rather reflect the broader Scandinavian image.

The limitations for this study have mostly to do with the small samples size and the explorative nature of it. The former in that it poses problems to the question of generalizability of the survey results, and the latter in that more knowledge would have been needed on whether the country image dimensions chosen to be important for the product category of high design furniture were in fact the best suited.

Key words	Italy, Finland, design, Country image, Country of origin, Consumer product evaluation
Further information	

