

Corporate identity in a globalised world: A study of elements marking national identity on company websites

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Abstract: This paper presents a study of nationality used by companies as a positioning parameter in their market communication. The study takes its point of departure in the field of tension between globalisation and national identity in corporate communication. On the one hand, companies may see themselves as global players with no disposition to accentuate national affiliation. On the other hand, for many years, national origin has been used for the purpose of achieving a competitive advantage. In research, it has been questioned if this awareness of national origin will continue in the globalised world. The study focuses on the wind industry, analysing German, Danish, British and US American company websites, 256 in total. The analysis encompasses the use of national flags or colours, internet domain, language and reference to a specific country. In brief, the study shows that national identity is still, to some extent, being utilised as a positioning parameter. Danish websites in particular display elements marking national identity.

Keywords: Globalisation, Country of Origin, Corporate Identity, national identity, websites, Danish, German, British, US American.

1. Introduction

This paper deals with the application of nationality as a market positioning tool in an increasingly globalised world. The aim of the paper is to provide insight into the specific use of verbal and visual elements marking nationality in contemporary internationally oriented market communication.

In this first section, we provide background information for the study. We focus our attention on two aspects that we consider significant in market communication and market positioning. One aspect relates to the changing role of ‘the national’ in the course of globalisation. The other aspect addresses the way in which people respond to globalisation. Section two deals with our research question and text corpus. In sections three and four, we account for the theoretical background of the study covering central aspects of corporate identity and country of origin. Finally, we present the findings of the study in section 5 and round off the article in section 6.

Over the last 25 years, large parts of the world have experienced intensified technological, economic, social, political and cultural changes related to globalisation. Some of the dimensions of globalisation incorporate increased worldwide access and interconnectedness through digitalisation, world economy integration, and transnational corporation growth; but political transformations and cultural effects also form part of the globalisation processes. From a corporate point of view, globalisation places a high competitive pressure on companies; this is due to the emergence of a potentially large number of competitors on export markets as well as on home markets. Spreading knowledge geographically implies increased worldwide awareness of living standards and products and thus creates both global market opportunities and increased competition (Jessop 2002: 113). In other words, companies must position themselves in a way that differentiates them from competitors, for example by means of verbal or visual elements marking nationality. Other potential means of differentiation are for instance price and distribution network.

Nationality is losing ground, however. Globalisation has implied the weakening of the autonomy and power of nations (Beck 1999: 13). By the same token, globalisation can be defined as “the processes through which sovereign national states are criss-crossed and undermined by transnational actors with varying prospects of power, orientations, identities and networks” (Beck 2000: 11). In other words, “the national scale has lost its taken-for-granted primacy” (Jessop 2010:

55).

With regard to the way in which globalisation influences human behaviour, the process seems to contain varied and sometimes opposing tendencies. According to Robertson (1992), it is central to the understanding of globalisation processes and their ramifications that we consider the relationship between the universal and the particular. Robertson (1992: 97-100) presents the universalism-particularism issue as a relationship involving “direct attention *both* to particularity and difference *and* to universality and homogeneity” (Robertson 1992: 100 [italics in the original]). On the one hand, the increased worldwide interaction and interdependence have given rise to a demand for assimilating into the universal. Accordingly, it is plausible to assume that people tend to understand themselves more as citizens of the world and less as members of a nation, causing cultures to become more homogeneous across national boundaries. On the other hand, focus is, at the same time, on particularity and difference, implying a demand for adhering to the particular and focusing on differences between people, nations, traditions, views etc. In other words, globalisation contains both globalising and localising processes (Robertson 1992: 97-100; Jensen 2013: 129-130). Robertson states that these simultaneous processes should be considered as aligned rather than contrasted sets of interests (Robertson 1992: 97).

Concerning the applicability of nationality in market communication it is also an issue that in a world of great global density and complexity, multiculturalism and polyethnicity, identifying the individual and collective selves and the individual and collective others (Robertson 1992: 98) is becoming increasingly difficult. It may seem problematic to make use of nationality as a parameter in market communication as this is based on rather clear and unambiguously positive country images. We therefore wish to explore the extent to which nationality is used in market communication in spite of its undefinable character.

2. Research question and text corpus

Based on the considerations above, we investigate *to what extent wind industry companies and companies related to the wind power industry emphasise nationality on their websites*. The study aims at identifying the extent to which companies choose to emphasise nationality in their corporate identity and to position themselves by means of parameters indicating the origin of the company or its products.

Our text corpus comprises corporate websites of companies within the wind industry and of subcontractors related to the wind industry such as suppliers of work clothes, technical equipment and services. The reasons for choosing the wind power industry as our object of study relate to three characteristics of this industry. First, the wind power industry plays an important part in connection with the energy transition plans in many countries; this is a consequence of global warming and dependence on fossil fuels. In Germany, the ‘Energiewende’ aims at completely transforming the energy supply system into an environment-friendly and energy-saving system at competitive prices (Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung 2015). In the United Kingdom, the government has announced a national strategy for climate and energy called ‘The UK Low Carbon Transition Plan’ (HM Government 2009). In the United States, the U. S. Department of Energy has launched an Energy Transition Initiative in order to implement energy efficiency and renewable energy solutions (U. S. Department of Energy 2015), and in Denmark, ‘The Danish Climate Policy Plan’ aims towards a low carbon society (Danish Energy Agency 2015). Consequently, the wind industry is generally regarded as an industry of the future which holds large market potentials.

Second, the wind power industry is a relatively young industry, which may therefore be less bound by traditions of using nationality in market communication. In certain industries such as the Danish food industry and the German car industry, Country of Origin indicators have been used intensively for many years, but their use may be less distinct in younger industries established in today’s widely globalised world.

Third, many companies in this industry are global players operating abroad. This presents them with the need to develop an external market communication strategy and to consider which sales arguments work best. In this process, the question of emphasising or downplaying their national Country of Origin is often dealt with.

Our text corpus is composed by corporate websites, as these are the company's own carefully considered public presentation of its identity. More precisely, our corpus consists of 256 websites by exhibitors presenting at the WindEnergy exhibition in Hamburg in 2014¹, distributed on 100 German, 99 Danish, 42 British, and 15 US American websites. As for the Danish, British and US American websites, all of the listed exhibitors were included in the study. The German exhibitors counted 806 in total; we analysed the first 100 websites on the alphabetical list of German exhibitors.

3. Corporate Identity

The study's theoretical approach takes its starting point in the notion of Corporate Identity (CI); this is central to the understanding of organisational communication and market positioning. CI is a strategic manifestation of a company's "vision and mission, underpinned by the strategies which a corporation employs in its operations" (Melewar & Wooldridge 2001: 328). In other words, CI serves the purpose of identifying and profiling the company. This enables potential customers and others to differentiate this company from other companies that provide the same types of products and services (Herbst 2012: 34-35). Furthermore, CI is a precondition for creating sympathy, building confidence and trust (Herbst 2012: 118); such factors are necessary for creating loyal customers and business partners.

Even though there is general agreement that the notion of CI is useful, various understandings of CI exist. Researchers and practitioners have structured and used the concept in many different ways. Pérez and Rodríguez del Bosque (2014) provide a comprehensive review and classification of important parts of the existing literature, proposing an integrative multidisciplinary approach to CI. In the early years, CI research focussed only on the visual representation of corporations, excluding other aspects of the company's identity. For many years now, research has commonly taken a more holistic view on identity, comprising more aspects of the company's personality (Pérez & Rodríguez del Bosque 2014).

Nonetheless, some critical remarks have been phrased by researchers such as Bolten (2015: 87-88), who questions if it is at all possible or even relevant to focus on the long-lasting homogenous appearance of a company at a time when co-operations and strategic alliances are formed and terminated very rapidly. We find this criticism relevant, but we still consider CI a useful concept of orientation for the company stakeholders, when used as a dynamic rather than a fixed concept. CI provides stakeholders with a presentation of the company's profile, values and norms (Sander 2011: 553-554; Cornelissen 2014: 6, 7)².

The concept of CI is closely related to a number of different fields. Among other things, CI relates to corporate branding, as in some cases this takes an identity-based view (e.g. Balmer 2008). In Balmer (2012), for example, seven identities constitute the corporate brand constellation. These are actual identity as well as communicated, conceived, covenanted, cultural, ideal, and desired corporate brand identities. In other studies, CI has been replaced by the concept of branding, freeing it from the connection to the formerly used narrow focus on the visual elements of corporate

1 WindEnergy Hamburg – The global on- & offshore expo (<http://we14.media-hmc.de/catalog/index.cfm>). The nationality of the websites is evident from each entry in the list of exhibitors.

2 Cornelissen distinguishes between internal and external identity, using the notion 'organisational identity' for the internal identity and 'corporate identity' for the external identity (cf. Cornelissen 2014: 67). This distinction seems irrelevant as integration between the two is necessary in order to ensure that the identity is communicated consistently to all stakeholder groups.

personality (e.g. Olins 2004, 2008, 2014).

Furthermore, CI is closely connected to Corporate Image. Image is the picture of a company that stakeholders make in their minds; this picture is not rigidly fixed, but develops over time and can suddenly be changed if, for instance, mass media discover an important negative feature of the company (Herbst 2012: 117-126). Along the lines of Herbst (2012: 88), we regard image as an integral part of CI. It is not simply a projection of CI, as stated in Birkigt et al. (2002), as the company itself cannot dictate its image. Stakeholders are influenced by other factors, too; for example by the information they receive from the media and from other stakeholders they know (Herbst 2012: 124). However, the company itself can influence the image to a certain degree by building a strong and unique CI.

Another field that plays an important part in connection with CI is organisational culture. Hatch & Schultz (1997) define organisational culture as “a context within which interpretations of organizational identity are formed and intentions to influence organizational image are formulated” (Hatch & Schultz 1997: 357). In this definition, we see that organisational culture is conceived of as not being part of the actual organisational identity, but as a context for it. Herbst (2012), on the other hand, sees corporate culture as the basis of the company personality and as a part of the CI. A company always has a company culture, he states, and mentions that the company culture can emerge from a national or regional culture (Herbst 2012: 88-91). Melewar & Jenkins (2002) agree that corporate culture is part of CI. According to them, CI consists of the combination of communication and visual identity (as one element), behaviour, corporate culture and the external factor market conditions (Melewar & Jenkins 2002: 81). Under the corporate culture, the subconstruct nationality is explicitly mentioned and situated along with organisational imagery and history, as well as goals, philosophies and principles (Melewar & Jenkins 2002: 81). Another classification is seen in Melewar & Karaosmanoglu (2006), where communication and design are separated, and corporate strategy and corporate structure are added as new elements (Melewar & Karaosmanoglu 2006: 849). The element nationality, in their article referred to as “country-of-origin”, is again situated under corporate culture along with other elements (Melewar & Karaosmanoglu 2006: 849).

We regard CI as the company’s understanding of its own personality (cf. Herbst 2012: 117), established on the basis of a unique company culture, including its values and focal points, company image, company “Leitbild” (ideal and promise to fulfil) as well as the instruments Corporate Design, Corporate Communication and Corporate Behaviour (Herbst 2012: 88, 107-115). Using these three instruments, a company can present a strong and unique CI. Corporate Design is, for example, the design of products, buildings and communication tools for print media, exhibitions, clothing etc. (Herbst 2012: 107-108). Corporate Communication encompasses for example advertising, PR and promotion (Herbst 2012: 112-114). Finally, Corporate Behaviour can be illustrated by the company’s behaviour towards its employees, suppliers, customers, shareholders and other stakeholders such as the state, the general public and neighbours (Herbst 2012: 114-115).

On this basis, we will now proceed with a more detailed discussion of the concept of Country of Origin.

4. Country of Origin

Country of Origin (COO) is an instrument traditionally used by companies to mark their national identity, promote their products or services, gain a competitive advantage and create trust. In the past 20-30 years, researchers have discussed if COO has lost its meaning (cf. Jaffe & Nebenzahl 2006; Melewar & Karaosmanoglu 2006). Mai (2011) presents a comprehensive critical overview of the existing literature and the current state-of-the-art research in the field of COO effect, i.e. the effect of COO on buyers. He calls this research “ermüdend” (tiresome), because it is in many cases not fit for practice. Instead he suggests that researchers should turn to the examination of

companies' use of direct and indirect COO references in marketing and communication, which is yet scarce (Mai 2011: 112). This is what this study sets out to do.

As explained in section 1, the globalisation of markets and production has made it very difficult to hold on to the clear-cut notion of nationality, and similarly, to the classical notion of COO. In some industries, COO still has significance, because it helps people orientate themselves in relation to "place", identifying for them their own position in relation to their surroundings (Nielsen 2005: 155) and ensuring the quality, solidity and security of a company or product (Scheffe 2015). Many examples can be found in market communication concerning for instance agricultural products and cars: The Danish jam producer Orkla Foods Denmark uses the Danish origin of the brand "Den gamle fabrik" (The Old Factory) intensively in their promotion, including the Danish flag and allusions to Danish summer (Den gamle fabrik 2015). Similarly, for several years, the German car manufacturer Volkswagen has made use of the generic slogan "Das Auto", not only in Germany but also internationally (Volkswagen 2015). The question we raise in this paper is if COO is also used in the wind industry.

An example that shows the potentially large influence of COO can be seen in the Volkswagen emissions scandal that developed in the autumn of 2015. Volkswagen, the greatest car producer in Europe, had installed illicit software concealing the real emissions of their cars in more than 11 million produced cars, thus cheating on emissions tests – and thereby cheating customers and authorities as regards environmental protection. This inspired a discussion in the media that the scandal would damage not only Volkswagen and the car industry, but also the classical notion of "Made in Germany" and not least the trust by consumers and authorities in the quality that this notion represents. It might in fact even threaten the German economy (Lind 2015).

An interesting trend, observed by Schuhmacher (2003), is that some companies do not highlight their country anymore, but instead the producer or the brand itself. This means that some companies do not use the term "Made in", but instead "Made by" or "Made for" (Bolten 2015: 52). This might be one solution to the problem of hybrid products with a globalised production process. A product may, for instance, be designed in Denmark, some of its parts are made in Germany and China, and they are all assembled in Poland and sold in Britain (cf. Jaffe & Nebenzahl 2006: 115-116). An example of the use of the "Made by" concept is the following text on the website of the German car producer BMW Group: "The same consistent standards of quality, safety, and processes at all locations guarantee worldwide premium products "made by BMW Group"" (BMW 2015). Another example can be found on the website of the Danish skin care producer and retailer Matas. This firm uses the slogan "Made by Matas – We made the choices for you, in order for you to be safe" to promote the products produced by themselves (Matas 2015). Another illustrative case is the Danish fashion brand NN07, whose logo consists of the brand name NN07 and "NO NATIONALITY". On the website of the company, the text says explicitly "We are NO NATIONALITY", which marks a clear statement. These examples suggest that the companies conceive of themselves as a guarantee and a source of security for the customers.

As a solution to the problem of the differentiated Country-of-Origin elements, Jaffe & Nebenzahl (2006)³ suggest a more sophisticated taxonomy for hybrid products than pure affiliation to one country; they distinguish six categories. Based on our previous empirical research (cf. Larsen & Pedersen 2016), we suggest that a new category be added to their taxonomy, namely "Quality ensured in Country".

3 In Mai (2011) we find other category terms related to differentiating the elements of hybrid products with roughly the same contents as in the description by Jaffe & Nebenzahl (2006).

Table 1: Extended COO-taxonomy (based on Jaffe & Nebenzahl 2006: 28-32; Nielsen 2005)

HC - Home Country	The country in which the consumer permanently resides.
DC - Designed-in Country	The country in which either a part of or the entire finished product is designed.
MC - Made-in Country	The country whose name appears on the “made-in” label [...] usually where final production takes place.
PC - Parts-made-in Country	The country that is the source of identified key parts or components.
AC - Assembled-in Country	The country where final assembly takes place.
OC - Country of Origin	The country which a consumer associates with a certain product or brand.
QC - Quality ensured in Country	The country in which the quality of a product has been approved.

This addition is based on our study of Danish and German websites (Larsen & Pedersen 2016); we found the following example of a German company (ALTHOM) making a reference to the quality and its uncompromising stance in this field: “Keine Kompromisse – Quality ensured in Germany”. This statement is used to illustrate that the quality of a product has been checked in a country with apparently high quality standards. The reason for doing so is to make it clear to customers and others that the product does in fact meet these high standards, although it might have been produced in another country which is not known for having the same high standards. It may be argued, however, that this statement is in itself a compromise: As the company cannot vouch for the “Made in Germany” quality, because parts are produced or assembled in other countries, it only states that the quality control has taken place in Germany.

This is not comparable to the strategy by which companies simply ascribe to their products the identity of other nations with a stronger and more positive image than their own through associations that are created for example through brand or product names (“Borrowed Origin”) (Mai 2011: 107). The British coffee and sandwich shop chain Pret A Manger (Mai 2011: 107), also known as Pret, might serve as an example of a company indicating foreign origin in its brand name; in this case the name connects to the famous French cuisine. We will now turn to the indicators that signal COO.

A study by Djursaa et al. (1991) indicates that a company’s use of COO might change over time. The study shows that some Danish companies use COO in the first phases of their export marketing in Britain, in order to quickly establish an identity, drawing on the positive features of Denmark’s image; they call this “waving the flag”. Later on, when the companies are well established on the market, they emphasise their individual brand identity instead, and reduce their use of COO. This is the case with the windmill producer who was interviewed in the study.

From the research literature, it is not clear if the globalisation of markets and companies renders national identity more or less important for the companies. In Melewar & Jenkins (2002) it is presumed that the importance of COO is rising: “As companies expand their global operations, the role of the nationality of the company and its perceived attributes have become more important” (Melewar & Jenkins 2002: 84). As opposed to this, Melewar & Karaosmanoglu (2006: 856) show that most company representatives responding say that COO has an impact on company culture, but also that the importance is less distinct in internationally operating companies, and that the importance is generally declining because of globalisation.

Not all nationalities have always been strongly associated with product attributes by all customers. A study mentioned in Jaffe & Nebenzahl (2006) showed that the perceived attributes connected to German products were very strong; Germany was associated with quality, solidity,

reliability and after sales service by German, French and Italian respondents of the study. In contrast to this, the respondents generally ranked Great Britain and the United States very low as regards product association; the United States is only weakly associated with technology, and Great Britain only very weakly with style (Jaffe & Nebenzahl 2006: 83). In the latest Anholt Nation Brands Index from November 2015, however, the United States, Germany and Great Britain are all in the Top 3 of nation brands, whereas Denmark is not in the Top 10. The position of the countries in this index is not only restricted to product association, but also includes governance, culture, people, tourism and immigration/investment; therefore, the index is only partly relevant in this connection (GfK 2015). Niss (1996) mentions that “Made in Denmark” connotes high quality and innovation in product development and design, but also that not all foreign customers share these positive associations. Many customers have no knowledge of what Denmark is (Niss 1996: 14) and would not be able to associate any attributes with the COO. Therefore, Jaffe & Nebenzahl (2006) propose that Denmark’s positive country image should be used more to improve brand awareness in some product categories which reflect a “match” between country image and product category, for example windmills (Jaffe & Nebenzahl 2006: 128-129).

4.1. Country of Origin indicators

In order to select the focal points of the present study, we will turn to the indicators that signal COO. Papadopoulos (1993) states that not only the “Made in” concept has a significance, but also brand names and company names, slogans, etc. can show the affiliation of a company. In research, many different factors have been analysed. Nielsen (2005), for example, conducted a study of the use of COO by Danish companies. His findings suggest a scale of elements going from weak to strong indication of COO affiliation. He sees a weak affiliation, at one end of the scale, in the form of company names including the Danish letters *æ*, *ø*, *å* and company names with *Dan-* or *Scan-*. At the other end of the scale, a strong affiliation is seen in the form of slogans emphasising nationality, nationality being thematised extensively in the company and product presentation and a distinctly national brand identity⁴. Mai (2011: 108) registers a list of direct and indirect references through “Made in” labelling, brand names, pictures, language, music, geographic entities (i.e. cities, regions, nations and supranational entities), referring to Stich (1997: 19). Singh & Pereira (2005) have examined 36 elements of very different types that reflect the cultural dimensions of Hofstede (1980) and Hall (1976), for instance personalisation, information on company hierarchy, terms of sale, symbols of national identity, mentioning of awards and superlatives. In the present study, however, we wish to examine elements that can indicate national affiliation, not cultural dimensions.

Based on the literature review above, we have conducted a quantitative and qualitative analysis of selected COO indicators. These indicators have been chosen because of their clear signalling of national affiliation. First, we have selected the *use of national flag and colours of the flag*. This is a very direct form of marking national affiliation, associated explicitly with national boundaries. This use of the flag is seen in other industries, for example in the promotion of Danish and German food products.

Second, we have chosen *language options on the website*. The chosen language(s) might signal how the company sees its own identity, as globalised or rather localised. If for example the website of a German or Danish company is only accessible in the national language, this might point to a more nationally oriented identity of the company. In contrast, if the company only maintains a website in English, this might be indicative of a more internationally oriented identity.

Third, the indicator *top level domain* has been selected. The top level domain is seen in the address of the company website. It indicates affiliation to a state (e.g. ‘dk’ for Denmark, “uk” for Britain, and “de” for Germany) or a function (e.g. ‘com’ for commercial). As opposed to the

4 See also Adriansen (2003) for an overview over Danish national symbols.

national domains of Denmark, Britain and Germany, there is no equivalent top level domain for the US American companies.

Last but not least, *references to the country in which the company is situated* are examined in this study. In this category, explicit references to the company's US American, British, German or Danish origin or position are examined. Regional or local affiliations are not included in this paper, because these express other types of affiliation.

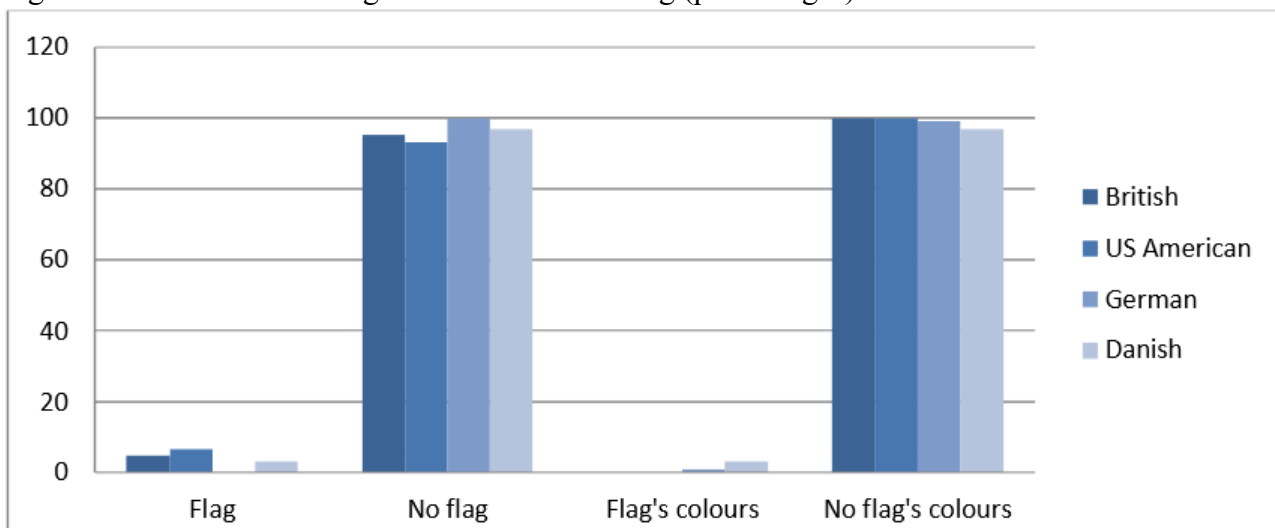
5. Findings

As mentioned in section 2, we have examined corporate websites of companies related to the wind industry. For reasons of limitation, we have focused primarily on the website parts containing company profile and slogan; this is due to their comprised depiction of corporate identity. Of the indicators chosen for this study, the first three turned out to be of rather limited information value. Therefore, we will start by commenting briefly on the use of national flags or colours, internet domain and language choice on the website; subsequently, we will concentrate more thoroughly on the fourth category; references. The figures in the following section show the percentage of occurrence of the indicators, distributed on the declared nationalities of the companies in our corpus. Additionally, we will give examples of the concrete use of references.

5.1. National flag and colours

The first indicator is *use of national flag and colours of the flag*. There is very little use of "waving the flag", as Djursaa et al. (1991) call it. National flags and the flag colours are almost absent on the analysed websites. Three of the Danish companies make use of the national flag; two of the British companies and one of the US American companies do so. None of the German companies use the German flag on their website. The picture is quite similar when it comes to the use of the colours of the flags. Only one of the German companies and three of the Danish companies make use of the colours of the flag, while neither the British nor the US American companies do so. In the very few instances where flags or flag colours are used on the websites, this is almost exclusively seen in connection with a "Made in" sign.

Figure 1: Use of national flag and colours of the flag (percentages)



An exceptional example of a more discrete use of the colours of the German flag (black-red-gold) can be seen in (1). Here, the German manufacturer of diving suits, aquata Produktions- und Entwicklungsgesellschaft mbH, has placed small waves in the national colours at the top left corner

next to the name of the company. Although this indicates the national affiliation of the company, this use of the colours of the flag seems more like a visual design-related item. Additionally, COO is not emphasised elsewhere on this company's website.

On some websites, we see a different use of national flags; i.e. flags indicating the language(s) offered on the website. This use seems to have no relation to the company's national affiliation, but a reception or production analyses would be needed to provide solid information on this topic. An example of this can be seen in (2), where flags are shown along with the languages offered on the website. Interestingly, we note that the Brazilian flag is shown to signal the Portuguese language, and that the American flag is shown as a signal of the English language. The latter is not seen on the British company websites.



(1)

The fact that the traditional, very simple marking of national affiliation through the use of the national flag was almost completely absent is a so-called non-significant result (Mai 2011: 114). Apart from providing insights into the practice of companies, it gives us a methodological foundation for dealing with this indicator in our further research, where it can be given less attention.

5.2. Language options

The second indicator in this study is *language options on the website*. Here, we see two different tendencies. One applies to most of the Danish and German companies, which offer the information in their national language as well as in at least one other language, mostly English. The other tendency applies to many British and American companies, which only offer their information in English. It also applies to some German (8 %) and a large part of the Danish companies (34 %), which do not have a German or a Danish website version, respectively, but only an English version. This reflects the special position of English as a *lingua franca* for communication among people from different countries, but for companies not based in an English speaking country it may also be interpreted as a signal of a more global, universalistic orientation.

From a linguistic point of view, it was also interesting to see that many companies offer their information in various languages. However, automatic translation systems like "Google Translate" or others were frequently used for generating the texts.

5.3. Top level domain

The third indicator is *top level domain*. The top level domains used by the Danish and German companies are usually ".com" or the domain of their country. The distribution of national and international top level domains differs slightly among the two countries. More than half (53 %) of the Danish websites use ".com", and 42 % use the Danish top level domain ".dk". Of the German websites more than half (55 %) are registered under the German top level domain ".de" and 38 % under ".com". The British companies employ mostly ".com" (69 %) and to a lesser extent ".uk" (24 %). As mentioned above, no national top level domain is seen for the US American companies. Consequently, a large majority (87 %) of these companies use ".com". Only very few of the

analysed companies in all four countries use other top level domains such as “.eu”, “.org”, “.aero”, “.io”, and “.net”.

Figure 2: Language options on the website (percentages)

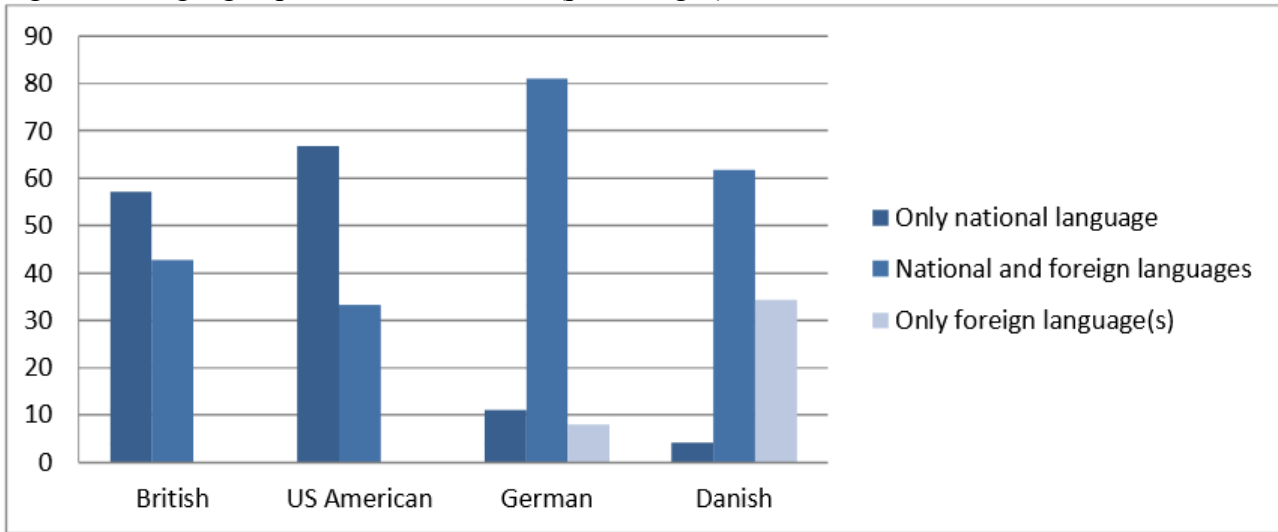
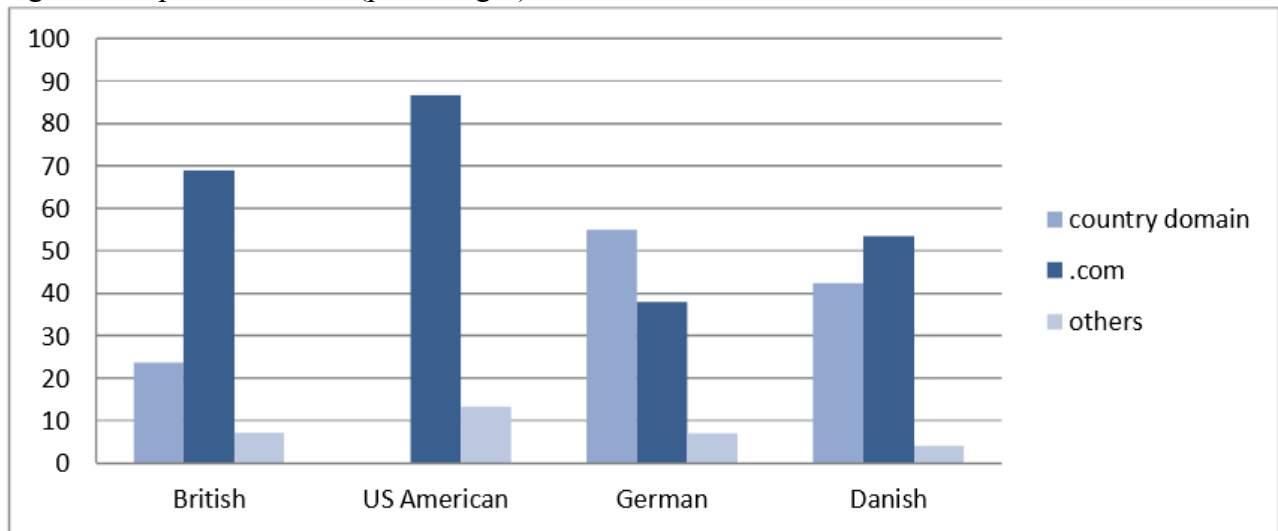


Figure 3: Top level domain (percentages)



An example showing the features *language options* and *top level domain* is seen in the front page of the website by the German company August Friedberg GmbH shown below. In this example (2), we see the top level domain “.com”, and we find four languages represented: German, English, Portuguese and Korean, as well as a short welcome text in each language (on the left side of the page).



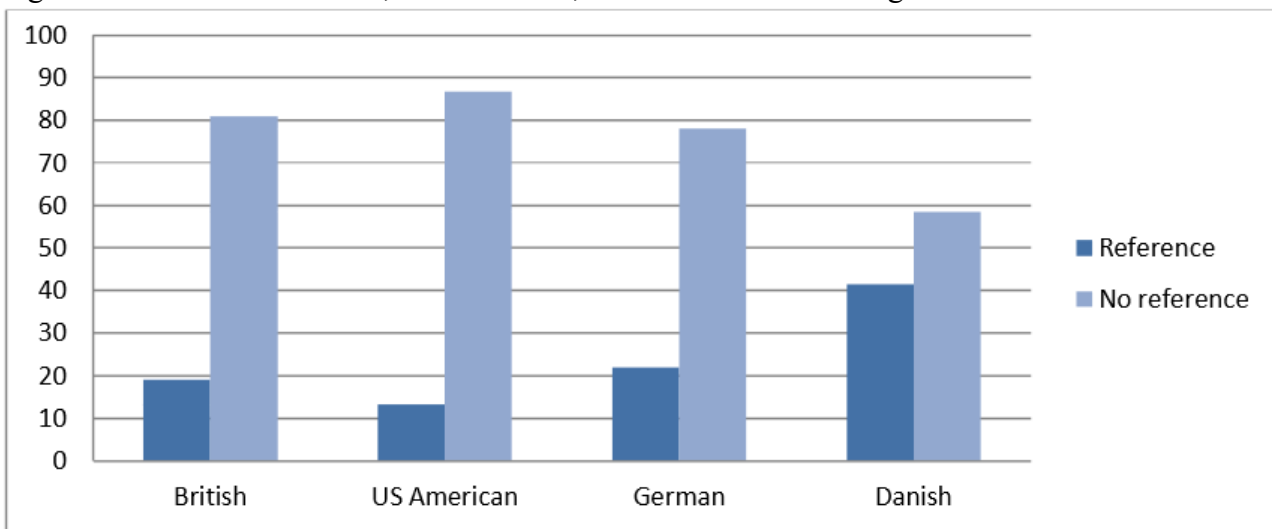
(2)

Similarly to the analysis of flags, the analysis of the top level domain produces data of limited value and represents methodological limitations. As the US American companies do not have the possibility of choosing a national top level domain, this indicator is not relevant for signalling COO in this group. Still, the ‘missing’ “.us.” is a particular case, which does not reduce the value of the indicator as such. When comparing the findings regarding the British, German and Danish companies, it becomes clear that 55 % of the German and 42% of the Danish companies have chosen a domain name that signals national affiliation, whereas this applies to only 24 % of the British. The study also shows that the majority of the British and Danish companies favour “.com”, whereas the German companies choose “.de” over “.com”.

5.4. Reference to country

The fourth indicator includes *reference to the country in which the company is situated*, meaning Britain, USA, Germany and Denmark. In the bar chart, we see that only a minority of the US American (13 %), British (19 %) and German (22 %) companies make references to their COO, whereas a large part of the Danish (41 %) companies do so.

Figure 4: Reference to British, US American, German and Danish origin



In most cases, references are made in a very brief way. Examples of this are found on the websites which merely mention that the company is Danish (DSV) or that its headquarters are located in Denmark (HOVE). By the same token, a quote like the following refers to the company’s start in

Denmark: “Established in Denmark in 1933, today DEIF is a global supplier of green, safe and reliable control solutions for decentralised power production, marine & offshore and wind turbines.” (DEIF [underlining in the original]). In addition to the part marking COO, we see here the accentuation of the company’s global orientation. We have seen this combination of national origin and global orientation on several of the Danish websites. A different wording of the same twofold statement is presented on the website of APRO Wind A/S (3): “Danish offshore wind expertise travels the world” on the front page. This explicit thematisation of the company’s Danish origin is combined with a predominant position of one map showing the places of business and another map showing the world, signalling the company’s global activities.



(3)

In the following quote, we see an elaboration of characteristics connected to the “Made in” label which is rather unusual. Here, the German company alki TECHNIK GmbH first informs the reader about the values and characteristics of its brand and products. Subsequently, a very clear reference is made to the “Made in Germany” concept. It is stated that the company’s products embody the classic characteristics of the “Made in Germany” quality, and that they represent high quality and accurate equipment, thus meeting the highest standard demands.

Furthermore, the company is proud of its many years of experience and its customer oriented partnership.

“Unsere alkitronic Produkte kommen in allen industriellen Branchen zum Einsatz, welche Wert auf ein hohes Maß an Präzision und Qualität legen. Dazu zählen u.a. Kraftwerke, Chemieanlagen, Bergbau, Stahlbau, Schwermaschinenbau und neue Umwelttechnologien wie Windparks. Durch ein weltweites Service- und Vertriebsnetz unterstützen wir unsere Kunden vor Ort. alkitronic steht für höchste Ansprüche, langjährige Erfahrung sowie kundenorientierte Partnerschaft und verkörpert die klassischen Eigenschaften der “Made in Germany” Qualität.”

Another interesting example of elaboration and distinction is evident from the website of the British company Silver Fox (4). Here we see a clear distinction between the labels “UK Brand” and “UK Made”, which relates to the discussion of whether nationality can be applied for promoting products that are not actually made in the country in question. In this case, the company supports differentiation between mere branding through nationality and actual national production and the qualities associated with the latter: “Silver Fox is not just a UK Brand, it is also UK Made”. Moreover, in the successive sentence, the meaning of “UK Made” is explained; the customer can be

certain about quality and consistency, and the company can be reactive for its deliveries and cooperate with the customer on special requirements.

The Silver Fox Brand

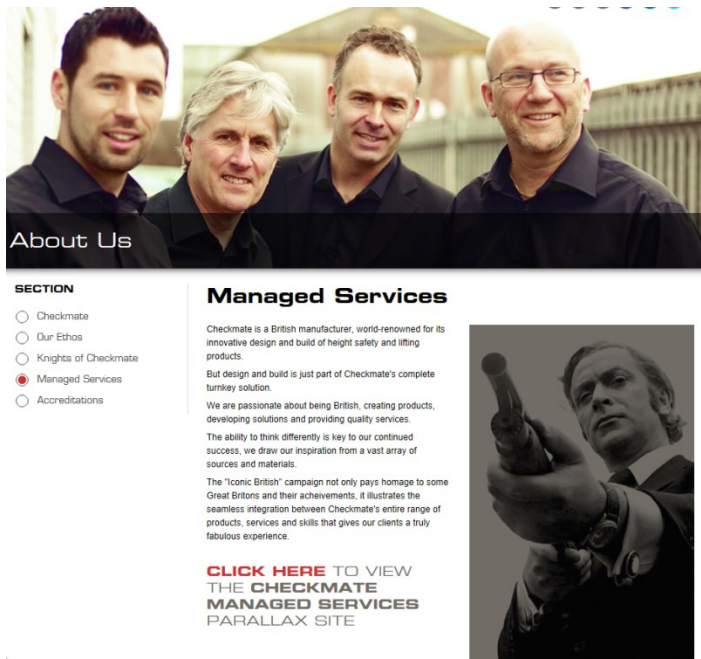
Silver Fox is not just a UK Brand it is also UK Made.

This means you can be sure about our quality and consistency. It also means we can be far more reactive for your delivery and work with you on any special requirements you might have for your particular project.

We understand – Silver Fox solutions have been designed and developed to ensure your finished job not only looks good and lasts the course but has saved you significant time in the process.

(4)

The explication of the British COO characteristics can also be observed on the website of the British company Checkmate (5), where a very specific reference to Britain and being British is made.



(5)

The company claims to be world-renowned for its innovative design and build and states that these two elements are only part of the company’s complete turnkey solution. Its British identity is also an important element for the company: “We are passionate about being British, creating products, developing solutions and providing quality services. The ability to think differently is key to our continued success, we draw our inspiration from a vast array of sources and materials.” In other words, design and innovation, quality and the ability to think differently are important for the company, as well as the pride it takes in being British. A clear correlation between being British and being able to think differently when creating products and developing solutions and providing quality services is stipulated. Furthermore, an iconic picture from the British film “Get Carter”

(1971) of Sir Michael Caine holding a shotgun is presented on the website as part of a campaign launched by the company as the “Iconic British” campaign. A link leads to another website (the “parallax site”) by the company, presenting the campaign. On this website, the introductory text is repeated and further explanatory texts are displayed, along with photos of a Spitfire, an Aston Martin, St Pauls Cathedral, Twiggy and Sir Michael Caine in “Get Carter”. The campaign pays homage to “some Great Britons and their achievements” and – according to the text on the websites – illustrates the “seamless integration” between the company’s “entire range of products, services and skills that gives our clients a truly fabulous experience”.

With regard to the new category, “Quality ensured in Country”, we wish to add to the taxonomy by Jaffe & Nebenzahl (2006) a single example which was also found in this study. The US American company (Dr. Shrink) (6) makes a direct reference to the “Made in” concept and relates it, on the same electronic ‘label’ on the company website, to quality assurance. The parameter emphasises its quality focus as a characteristic of the company.



Even though we have now displayed a number of examples of the use of COO, it is important to state that only a minority of the companies studied make extensive use of COO. This places them to the far right on the COO scale of Nielsen (2005), causing them to stand out from the others. Paradoxically, it seems that the supposedly outdated application of COO occurs in such small numbers that it functions as a differentiation parameter, supporting a high-profile CI for these companies.

Comparing the country references in all four groups, we find that there is a marked difference between the Danish companies and the companies from the other three countries. Danish companies tend to use COO far more often than do the other companies, although in most cases, the use of COO is predominantly non-extensive, stating merely for instance that the company has its headquarters in Denmark. Only a minority of all analysed company websites use COO; however, a large minority of the Danish companies. It is also worth mentioning that as many as 25 out of 99 Danish websites reflect no elements marking nationality. These websites use “.com” and communicate almost exclusively in English.

6. Concluding remarks

In summary, the present study shows that COO plays a role, especially among Danish companies, in spite of globalisation and in spite of the fact that the complex present-day production processes often involve different countries. It is worth noticing that only a minority of the companies signal COO in terms of the traditional “Made in” country construction, and that some companies question the validity of this label and relativise it by emphasising “not just UK Brand but UK Made”. The main result of our study is, however, that the companies in the wind industry do not use COO as a positioning parameter, even though the examples discussed above may leave the opposite impression.

Bearing the universalism-particularism issue in mind (cf. section 1), we see that the behaviour of Danish companies differs from that of companies in the other countries studied in that they show both tendencies, separately and in combination. One fourth of the Danish companies demonstrate no affiliation with Denmark and thus seem to align with the universalism tendency. However, the

Danish companies which do mark their nationality are in line with the tendency towards particularism. A third group combine the two in mentioning both their Danish origin and their global orientation. The other three website groups reflect little use of nationality and seem to a larger extent to be 'globalised'.

It seems logical to ask why this trend is seen in Danish companies; what do they wish to signal by using COO in this way, and what exactly are they hoping or expecting to achieve by doing so. We would assume that in carefully prepared profile texts on a company website, the companies would not use COO if they thought this use would be disadvantageous to them; however, our analysis does not suggest any specific conclusion to this question. Therefore, this would be a very interesting focal point in further research. An investigation into this topic would involve interviews with or questionnaires to companies which make use of COO as well as with other companies which do not. Mai (2011: 100) presents a paradox: on the one hand, if the customers know more about the product and consider other product characteristics – and we can assume that they do so in connection with products like these – COO is less important. On the other hand, in case of technically complex products that are expensive to purchase, it is more likely that customers consider COO as an aspect of interest. This paradox makes further research even more recommended.

In addition to our concrete findings concerning elements marking nationality, the study suggests a theoretical extension of the field of CI expressed through COO. Thus, supported by the findings in our present and previous studies, we propose the addition of a new category to the taxonomy created by Jaffe & Nebenzahl (2006) describing a new aspect of contemporary companies' use of COO. By adding the category "Quality ensured in country" to this taxonomy, we draw attention to the fact that in their marketing communication, companies sometimes find it expedient to focus on the connection of their products with a specific country known for the quality of its production. They do so by mentioning that the quality has been controlled in the country in question. Thereby they relate the product to the product quality level of this country. They do not suggest, however, that the product was in fact produced in that particular country, but a connection to a specific country is established which draws on the positive connotations attached to it. As only rather old studies in this field exist, e.g. Djursaa et al. (1991) and Jaffe & Nebenzahl (2006), further research would be desirable.

One might say that companies which use COO differentiate themselves from other companies through this feature. The other companies, however, emphasise a number of rather uniform parameters to describe themselves; for example quality, experience, innovation, expertise and leadership. This means that their profiles do not differ significantly from each other. We also see from this study that some companies combine COO with the above parameters, thereby claiming that a relationship exists between these and the particular characteristics of the country in question.

The parameters applied by many companies in the present survey to signal their CI are concentrated on the following aspects⁵: Quality (Cooper and Turner Limited), including certificates to prove the quality, flexibility (Lind Jensens Maskinfabrik A/S), international experience (BerlinWind GmbH) and worldwide activities (anemos-jacob GmbH), partnership with the customers (Adolf Würth GmbH & Co. KG), knowhow (ABE Betriebsführung GmbH) and expertise (ROVOP Ltd.), many years of experience in the industry (MPI Offshore Ltd.), innovation (BGB Engineering Ltd.), setting standards (Pompanette LLC) and first-class service (Eve Trakway Limited).

The companies in the survey present one or several of the above parameters as their special characteristics. The presentations of the different companies are in fact very similar, which means

5 Only one company is mentioned at each parameter, but the element is found at many other company websites in the survey.

that to a large extent, the companies seek to promote themselves using the same parameters. These similarities are not optimal if the customers are to distinguish between different product providers.

Another aspect which is often stressed by companies is that they are leading in their particular niche or industry, e.g. “award-winning leadership in the industry since 1970” (AIMCO), “leading global supplier” (Flash Technology), “a leading provider of...” (JDR Cable Systems), “führende Position” (ATM Anlagen Termin Montage Hartmann GmbH). In some cases, this information is relativised or supplemented by the addition of the area in which the company is leading, e.g. “führender internationaler Anbieter” (ARCADIS Deutschland GmbH), “Europe’s leading” (Certex A/S), “one of the world’s leading” (Fred. Olsen Windcarrier), “arguably the UK’s No. 1 repair facility for...” (Alicat Workboats). Leadership is, of course, connected to the parameters mentioned above; a company would hardly see itself as being in a leading position if it did not possess some of the qualities mentioned, but in quite a few cases, the basis of the alleged leadership is not explained explicitly on the websites.

In what ways the use of COO and of other parameters influence the decision-making processes of stakeholders, e.g. customers, is still an open question. Although numerous studies have been conducted in this field, it appears very difficult to investigate this question and to obtain a credible answer (see Mai 2011). It might be that more complex high-cost products require so much knowledge on the part of the customer that COO is less important. However, if products are easily comparable, COO may be a deciding factor.

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