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# Geographical indications as a brand strategy: A literal review

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**Abstract**
Geographical indications (GIs) are intellectual property rights that identify a product's geographical origin and ensure product quality and brand development for indigenous products. They help indigenous producers build brand value, boost livelihoods, and attract consumers who value regional product characteristics. GIs can drive price premiums and create price-premium transmission dynamics between markets by representing manufacturers' common reputation. Indigenous producers can identify with geographical indications for a unique identity, protection against unfair competition, sustainable practices, cultural heritage preservation, and rural economic growth. Geographical indications as a brand strategy improve product identification, production standards, reputation, quality, production, and regional reputation. They benefit from agrotourism, cultural heritage preservation, international trade negotiations, fair trade, and indigenous producers' interests. This study aimed to explore the role of geographical indications as a brand strategy for indigenous producers and concludes that the future of geographical indications for branding is bright, as countries and regions use them to mark and unleash the potential of the region's reputation by protecting indigenous products.

**Keywords:** Geographical indications, role of branding, brand strategy, indigenous producer

## Introduction

The importance and relevance of brands to economies in the twenty-first century is underscored by the fact that brands are among the most valuable assets to firms. This observation is axiomatic for all economies (Abimbola, 2010) [1]. Branding strategy is a firm's decision to build substantial brand equity. The level of brand equity is the result of the effectiveness of a firm's branding strategy (Seo and Jang, 2013) [48]. These strong consumer brand image results facilitate brand extensions. (Rubera and Droge, 2013) [43]. Geographical indications (GIs) are instruments that promote commercial products. However, it can generate wealth, add value, protect the producing region and develop, expand the export of products, strengthen the domestic market, and promote products and their historical and cultural heritage, among other issues (Mirna de Lima Medeiros, 2016) [33]. GIs can be practical marketing tools for gaining competitive advantage. These are distinctive signs that permit the identification of products in the market (Albayram, 2014) [59]. GIs make it possible to add value to the natural resources of a country and the skills of its population, and provide local products with different identities.

A Geographical Indication is a sign used for products with a specific geographical origin that possesses qualities or a reputation due to that origin. They function as certifications of origin and quality, providing consumers with valuable information about the unique characteristics and reputations of products associated with specific geographical regions. Several studies have underlined the role of the region of origin as a quality cue. GIs can be effectively used to ensure product quality and develop brands for indigenous products. Geographical indications are differentiation tools for marketing strategies. Consumers are paying increasing attention to the geographical origins of products and are concerned about the specific characteristics of their products. Consumers are often prepared to pay more for these products. This has favoured the development of specific markets for products with particular characteristics linked to their place of origin.

A geographical indication is a place or country name that identifies the origin, quality, reputation, or other characteristics of products. A GI signals to consumers that goods have special characteristics due to their geographical place of origin, whose quality and

characteristics are due exclusively or essentially to the geographical environment, including both natural and human. A geographical indication associates a specific product with a territory and therefore it's related code of practice, and encompasses three main elements: a defined geographical area of production, specific quality of the product due to specific characteristics of production and processing, and a name and reputation that differentiate the product from others. (Vandecandelaere, 2010) [53].
Geographical indications are a type of intellectual property right that refers to the specific geographic origin of a product. The concept of geographical indications has a long history dating back to ancient civilisations. In ancient Greece, the origin of products such as olive oil and wine was of utmost importance. Geographical indications have evolved over time to address the challenges of globalisation and ensure fair trade practices. This concept dates back to the 18th century in France and was officially recognised as a separate intellectual property right in the 1883 Paris Convention. Several countries, including Europe, have implemented legislation to protect Geographical Indications (Warner 2007) [54].

Today, the theoretical foundation of geographical indications is rooted in intellectual property rights and international trade regulations. This includes the recognition and protection of geographical indications under various international agreements, such as the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) administered by the World Trade Organization. These agreements provide a legal framework for the registration, protection, and enforcement of geographical indications at both national and international levels. Geographical indications serve as a means of promoting economic development and the equitable distribution of benefits by valuing and protecting local resources, traditional knowledge, and cultural expressions. The theoretical background of geographical indications revolves around the principles of territoriality, cultural heritage, distinctiveness of products, intellectual property rights, international trade regulations, and sustainable development.

These protections come in the form of branding systems, such as Protected Designation of Origin and Protected Geographic Indications. These branding systems successfully promoted and protected regionally specialised agricultural products. For example, Café de Colombia and Champagne are both examples of brands that have utilized geographical indications to represent specific regions and maintain controlled production techniques. (Albrecht *et al.*, 2014) [4].

The use of geographical indications provides several benefits to both producers and consumers. For producers, it offers legal protection for their products, ensuring that they have exclusive rights over the use of geographical names associated with their region. (Parsinezhadan and Naeim 2022.) [37] This protection helps prevent counterfeit products from misleading consumers and maintains the quality and reputation of the products. For consumers, geographical indications ensure quality and authenticity (Taş and Sedat, 2020). Geographical indications can also stimulate economic growth and development in local communities (Saputra and Firdaus, 2021) [44]. Geographical indications contribute to the development of agrotourism by promoting and protecting regionally specialised agricultural products. The unique characteristics of these products, such as their distinctive taste and cultural significance, attract tourists to the region, create new opportunities for local businesses, and stimulate economic growth. This study explores the role of geographical indications as a brand strategy for indigenous producers.

## Review of Literature

Indications of geographic origin have become an important source of brand value since the late nineteenth century (Higgins, 2018) [22]. GIs can be used as a brand strategy to improve livelihoods and attract consumers who value the unique characteristics and qualities associated with products from a specific region. Branding literature seems to be an area which is still developing in terms of matching consumer and origin identities. Though a new stream of research on Geographical Indication (GI) is developing intensely, scholars largely concentrate on the practical effects of this sign and associated managerial processes. The literature on geographical indications and brand strategy particularly focuses on understanding the role of geographical indications as a brand strategy for indigenous producers who do not fall under the umbrella of other intellectual property rights, considering the impact and role of geographical indications to be quite important.

Emotional connections to a brand lead to higher price premiums. According to Imene and Georges (2014) [23], products with regional references can affect consumer preferences to a greater extent than food products protected by official labels. Consumers seem to seek to satisfy their psychological, sensorial, and emotional expectations more than functional or utilitarian expectations. Consumers can develop memorable associations with brands, and it will be useful for firms to associate a region of origin with the label. GIs are another intellectual property tool by which economic actors can distinguish themselves and their goods from those of their competitors. Goods labelled with GIs sell at premium prices, enabling producers to obtain greater profits (Flodgren, 2010) [13]. Another study by İşaret (2021) [24] revealed that the use of geographical indication in marketing can alter how consumers perceive similar products, potentially influencing their willingness to pay a higher price.

GIs are recognised as a unique expression of local agro-ecological and cultural characteristics that have come to be valued as signals of high quality and local traditions. In many markets, organic certification, although valuable, may not offer the most appropriate way of safeguarding the actual provenance of local foods and conveying it to marketplace consumers (Giovannucci, 2007) [18]. Similarly, Vandecandelaere (2010) [53] claimed that there are different motivations for implementing and protecting GIs as intellectual property rights. Indeed, the implementation of GIs can add value to origin-linked quality products and thus improve livelihoods. When correctly implemented and managed, they can be a tool for rural development by contributing to local resource preservation and strengthening the organisation of local stakeholders.

''Quality'' is a term that can conceptually link increasing consumer demand for differentiated product taste (Warner, 2007) [54]. The collective reputation embodied in an indication requires protection from misappropriation and dilution. Further, misappropriation, while harming the reputation of the indication, leads to consumer confusion and increases search costs (Rangnekar, 2004) [38]. Indications of geographical origin (GIs) play an important role in signalling a certain level of quality and safeguarding the actual provenance of local foods and convey this to consumers to ensure their authenticity. GIs allow economic actors to distinguish their goods from those of competitors by associating them with a specific region known for its unique characteristics and qualities.

Giovannucci (2007) [18] pointed out that, in many markets, organic certification, although valuable, may not offer the most appropriate way of safeguarding the actual provenance of local foods and conveying this to marketplace consumers. As the concept of 'local' sourcing and marketing becomes more important, these Geographical Indications (GIs) or appellations are a potentially unique form of competitive advantage available even for small farmers and enterprises. GIs certification improves the ability of reputation to operate as a mechanism for assuring quality, and welfare gains are more likely to be larger when the introduction of a certification scheme occurs at an earlier stage to limit potential losses in the value of already established reputations. This is because certification, by raising the price that entrants can command, reduces the cost of building a reputation and, hence, the value of an established reputation. (Menapace and Moschini, 2012) [32]. Geographical indications can provide a basis for differentiating commodity products based on their geographical origins. Agarwal and Barone (2005) [2] observed that branding strategies centred on the geographical origins of a product can provide a basis for differentiating commodity products. Using unique quality characteristics associated with a particular location or quality images that are based on the history, tradition, and folklore in a region.

**Role of geographical Indications as a branding strategy for indigenous producers**

Brands have a significant effect on product marketing. They help raise consumer awareness and recognition, impact purchasing decisions, and foster brand loyalty. A strong brand strategy is crucial for shaping a brand's image and reputation, which influences consumer perception and behaviour. Thus, an effective brand strategy could increase profitability and market dominance. It encompasses various elements, including logo design, brand name, and product quality, which contribute to the development of brand identity and image.

“Brand remains with us when our factory is burned”. These are the words of David Ogilvy, who is considered “the father of advertising”. Brands are essential for brand owners on two levels. First, they serve as a focus for consumer loyalty and asset development to ensure future demand and cash flow. Thus, they introduce stability into businesses, help guard against competitive encroachment, and allow investment and planning with increased confidence. Brands are trade assets that are legally protected and shielded from duplication. They are valuable, rare, and non-substitutable, and provide sustainable competitive advantages. A brand is built over time based on the impressions one has of producers, its products, or services, and is confirmed (or destroyed) by experience.

Brands play a significant role in reducing the costs that consumers encounter during the search process. Brands can decrease transaction costs and information asymmetries between consumers and producers (Borg and Gratzer, 2014) [6]. Reduced search costs act as moderating factors that alter the impact of classical consumer purchase factors (Wimble *et al*. 2016) [56].

A brand helps with product differentiation by distinguishing one product from another and creating a competitive advantage (Valjaskova and Kral, 2019) [52]. This allows companies to stand out in a crowded market and ensure that their products are perceived as unique and high quality (Dirisu *et al*., 2013) [12]. Brand differentiation is important for marketing managers to create strategies to prevent crowding from negatively impacting their brands (Lau, 2018) [29]. Brands serve as a means of product differentiation, enabling consumers to connect products to quality, emotion, function, and design (Giannias, 1999) [17]. The market positioning of branded products is crucial for firms because it affects their profits and consumer utility (Braciníková and Matušínská, 2018) [7]. Differentiation occurs when a brand outperforms rival brands in terms of providing certain features, thereby reducing its sensitivity to other features. Overall, brands play a significant role in product differentiation by helping companies distinguish themselves, create a competitive advantage, and connect with consumers.

A brand helps reduce risk by providing a measure of guarantee for the quality, performance, and source of a product or service (Raychaudhuri and Garg, 2016) [40]. This assurance reduces the risk and complexity of buying decisions for both consumers and businesses. Branded products are preferred because they provide mental satisfaction when buying a quality product and its associated services from a reliable and well-known source (Goedertier *et al*. 2015) [19]. Additionally, brands considered prototypical and familiar in a product category have a risk-reducing advantage that outweighs their category-anchored rigidity, leading to increased consumer acceptance of novel extensions (de Oliveira *et al*., 2018) [10]. Furthermore, high brand equity is associated with lower investment risk in emerging markets, suggesting that stocks of companies with valuable brands ensure lower risk investments for shareholders (Rego *et al*., 2009) [41]. Brand capital is also negatively related to stock price crash risk, as it exposes firms to investor and customer scrutiny, reducing opportunistic managerial behaviour and the accumulation of negative information (Rego *et al*., 2009) [40]. Finally, consumer-based brand equity plays a role in reducing firm risk, particularly by protecting equity holders from downside systematic risk.

A brand helps attract a price premium and willingness to pay by building trust, credibility, and value (Franky and Syah, 2023; Saygili, 2023) [14, 46]. When consumers develop positive attitudes and emotional connections towards a brand, such as love and trust, they are more willing to pay higher prices for the products or services offered by the brand (Oppong *et al*., n.d.) [36]. Additionally, customer experience, satisfaction, and loyalty also play a role in influence brand power and willingness to pay a price premium (Chen and Liu, 2023) [9]. Maintaining and improving product quality along with continuous innovation can strengthen customer loyalty and brand power, leading to an increased willingness to pay a price premium (Rohimah, 2022) [42]. Brand equity, which encompasses trust, credibility, value, and perceived quality, acts as a mediator between these factors and willingness to pay more. Therefore, brand managers should focus on building and maintaining trust, credibility, value, and equity to enhance customers' WTP for price premiums in their products or services.

Brands distinguish between these signs, whereas geographical indications are the primary definite signs. Given the traditional and local characteristics of products, geographical indications are commonly used to differentiate products from their market equivalents. Launching products in markets with attractive packages or distinguishing brands is insufficient for producers of goods. Definitions are required to prove the quality of a product. The best practice for these definitions is geographical indication.

Geographical indications can be used as a product differentiation tool by highlighting the unique qualities and origins of a product (Hernandez and Granados, 2021a) [20]. This can stimulate collective governance actions for quality control, trade, marketing, and innovation based on local resources and regional biodiversity (Užar, 2022) [51]. Consumer awareness and knowledge of geographical indications play a crucial role in their effectiveness as differentiation tools (Kapur 2022a) [25]. However, there is a need for consumer education and information to increase awareness and understanding of geographical indications (Maina *et al*. 2018) [30]. The Geographical Indications Act provides protection to producers and consumers by ensuring the authenticity and origin of products (Ayup Suran Ningsih and Salsabilla, 2019) [5]. The differentiation effect of geographical indicators in terms of the magnitude of elasticities and substitution effects, which correspond to higher quality, generates lower price sensitivity and product substitution (Stasi *et al*., 2011) [50]. Geographical indications (GIs) attract price premiums in several ways. First, GIs represent the common reputation of producers, which helps dissolve the information asymmetry between producers and consumers, leading to higher prices (Gal and Jambor, 2020) [15]. Second, the quality standards associated with GIs can drive price premiums, because collective decisions on higher-quality standards require group homogeneity (Morales *et al*., 2017) [34]. Additionally, barriers to entry and the quality of the demarcated area are related to the prices attainable using GIs (Wilson *et al*., 2012) [55]. Furthermore, GIs can create price-premium transmission dynamics between markets, allowing producers to forecast fluctuations and adjust their supply accordingly (Nilsson and Vahtra, 2017) [35]. Moreover, the origin attributes of GIs, such as altitude, farm size, and country or sub-region of origin, can significantly affect price premiums (Bremmers, 2015) [8]. Overall, GIs provide a mechanism for differentiating agricultural products and signalling their quality, which can attract price premiums in the market.

Geographical indications (GIs) can be used to signal a product's quality by providing a regional quality signal and reputation (Xu *et al*., 2022) [57]. GIs serve as special intellectual property rights that certify the origin and characteristics of a product, ensuring that it is produced in a specific geographical area, and meets certain quality standards. The certification of GIs can promote the technical complexity of exporting agricultural products and improve their quality and reputation (Spagnolo and Davison, 2022) [49]. GIs can also act as a form of collective action for governance, quality control, trade, marketing, and innovation based on local resources and regional biodiversity (Kohsaka and Miyake 2021) [28]. The legitimacy of a GI claim is determined by whether objective evidence exists to meet the criteria set out in relevant agreements (Hernandez and Granados, 2021b) [21]. The process of registering GIs involves negotiations and agreements on quality that can strengthen existing conventions and create a sense of solidarity among producers (Kapur 2022b) [26]. Overall, GIs play a crucial role in connecting consumers to authentic products and protecting them from deceptive claims of origin.

## Conclusion

The future of geographical indications for branding appears to be promising. As more countries and regions adopt and implement them as tools for branding and protecting indigenous products, the recognition and value of geographical indications are likely to increase. This may lead to greater appreciation of traditional knowledge, cultural heritage, and natural resources, as well as potentially drive economic development in rural communities by providing a platform for local producers to develop brands and trade under their own market identities. By enhancing the livelihoods of farmers and contributing to the overall growth of the agricultural sector, geographical indications have proven valuable branding strategies for indigenous producers. They offer a unique identity and recognition of indigenous products, protect them from unfair competition and genericides, promote sustainable practices, preserve cultural heritage and traditional knowledge, and contribute to the economic development of rural communities. Adopting geographical indications can empower farmers and promote the unique qualities of agricultural products in developing countries. Leveraging geographical indications enables indigenous producers to establish strong market identities, leading to increased economic growth, improved livelihoods, and preservation of cultural heritage. Adopting geographical indications as a brand strategy offers various advantages, such as enhanced product identification, established production standards, protected reputation, guaranteed quality, increased production, and boosted regional reputation. In addition, geographical indications contribute to agrotourism and benefit rural communities, cultural heritage preservation, and international trade negotiations. They promote fair trade practices and protect indigenous producers' interests.

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