The Consumer Amity Influence on Foreign Product Purchase in the U.S.

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This paper investigates the concept of consumer amity towards foreign countries and its effects on consumer behavior, namely on product judgments and willingness to buy. A differential test of the model is conducted with British, Canadian, and Japanese products in the U.S. city of Boston, MA. In parallel with product-country image, consumer amity is found to significantly and positively influence consumers’ willingness to buy products from countries they feel high levels of amity towards, but not their judgments towards said product. Implications for managers and researchers are discussed.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Cross-cultural research has introduced such concepts as ethnocentrism, product-country image, and animosity in order to better understand consumer behaviors towards foreign products. While most focus on their negative effects on product judgments and intention to buy—for example, consumer animosity may prevent consumers from buying products otherwise perfectly suited to their needs and tastes—a question is raised as to whether or not similar positive influences may occur. Indeed, recent studies have shown that people do have friendship-like feelings towards foreign countries: for instance, according to a Canadian survey, American citizens view the United Kingdom as their best nation friend. Therefore, in addition to animosity-like feelings that may hold one from buying otherwise perfectly suited-goods, could a feeling such as amity felt towards a country drive one to select and buy a product otherwise not necessarily well suited, or perhaps not as well suited as other products? In an international context, how would such a thing fit in a model of foreign product evaluation encompassing product-country image (PCI)? To answer these questions, we first briefly review the PCI literature and theoretically differentiate this construct from that of consumer amity and come up with two basic hypotheses about the expected impacts of consumer amity on product judgments and willingness to buy. Following a scale development and validation process (not reported in this article), we describe a first test of the model conducted in the Boston metropolitan area in the U.S. in which 238 American consumers had to provide evaluations of, and willingness to buy 4 products from either the United Kingdom, Canada, or Japan. Stimuli development and sample recruitment are described, along with measurements of product-country image for each product category as well as amity towards each of the 3 countries, which were also gathered. To test the model, two regression analyses are conducted to explain product judgment and willingness to buy based on our data. Pooling data as well as category-specific data analyses all show that product evaluation is positively influenced by PCI but not by consumer amity. Willingness to buy, however, is demonstrated to be mainly influenced by product judgments but also by consumer amity and only slightly by PCI. Both our hypotheses are thus supported, précising and confirming the role of amity in consumer behavior. Implications for international marketers are multiple, given the growing competition on the global marketplace. First, exporting firms associated with a country whose past and current international actions are possibly positive should consider administering research surveys that measure levels of amity in select target markets. These studies could be included as part of the international market research carried out by these firms or that carried out by their national governments. It should also be noted that one country’s actions may be viewed differently from one country to another and thus have different commercial repercussions. For instance, it is likely that the decision by the U.K. to go to war in Iraq raised this country’s level of consumer amity in the U.S. but may have decreased it—perhaps even replaced it with consumer animosity—in other countries. Second, firms that aim at exporting to a country where no particular amity (or where animosity) is felt may find it useful to partner with another company from a nation characterised by high amity in the target country. For instance, Japanese and Canadian companies may find it useful to have their products and services sold in the U.S. through a British partner while British and Japanese companies might consider partnering with U.S. firms to penetrate the Canadian market. Third, governments may consider the usefulness of promoting their positive actions and decisions through public relations in order to boost consumer amity in select countries. Future studies should aim at researching the antecedents and potential dimensions of consumer amity in order for companies and governments to be better able to manage it. Moreover, while significant effects were found in the U.S., future research should investigate whether consumer amity has the same effects in other countries and settings. Most importantly, however, this study raises the question of extending the animosity and amity constructs and merging them into a dual valence (positive-negative). Indeed, as they stand, both scales only allow for either positive (amity) or negative (animosity) measurements. Future research should investigate whether these are distinct concepts.

REFERENCES


