Countervailing Influences of Consumer Animosity and Nostalgia on Purchasing Decisions

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We offer empirical evidence that nostalgia may act as countervailing force to animosity in settings when formerly occupied countries become independent. For ownership of nostalgic products, nostalgia is a better predictor than animosity; the opposite holds for non-nostalgic products. Ethnocentrism plays no role when nostalgia and animosity are also predictors.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/1014655/volumes/v41/NA-41

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Introduction
In recent years, consumer animosity has received a lot of attention in international marketing literature (for a review, see Riefler and Diamantopoulos 2007). The construct is conceptually defined as “remnants of antipathy related to previous or ongoing military, political or economic events” (Klein, Ettenson, and Morris 1998, 90) and has been repeatedly found to have a negative effect on consumers’ willingness to buy foreign products (e.g., Klein et al. 1998; Klein 2002; Shimp, Dunn, and Klein 2004). Animosity may also adversely impact product evaluations (Ettenson and Klein 2005; Rose, Rose, and Shoham 2009; Shoham et al. 2006). Its influence has been found to be separate from that of consumer ethnocentrism, namely, the “beliefs held by consumers about the appropriateness and indeed morality of purchasing foreign-made products” (Shimp and Sharma 1987, 280), which has similar effects on foreign product buying behavior (for a review, see Shankar and Shoham 2006).

In some purchase settings, there may be a countervailing force to animosity, namely nostalgia, reflecting “a preference (general liking, positive attitude, or favorable affect) toward objects (people, places, or things) that were more common (popular, fashionable, or widely circulated) when one was younger (in early adulthood, in adolescence, in childhood, or even before birth)” (Holbrook and Schindler 1991, 330). Such settings typically occur when countries that experienced painful long-lasting occupation, become independent. For example, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, dozens of new countries were established where consumers are exposed to products that are closely connected with consumers’ youth and past, but at the same time, they originate in a (now) foreign and disliked country. Under these circumstances, negative attitudes due to animosity may co-exist with positive attitudes due to consumer nostalgia and the question arises as to which construct has the strongest impact on consumer behavior.

Against this background, the purpose of the current study is to empirically examine consumer animosity and nostalgia as countervailing forces on consumer behavior in Lithuania, while controlling for the effects of consumer ethnocentrism. Lithuania provides a suitable setting for nostalgia and country animosity research as the country was occupied by the Soviet Union for five decades (1940–1990) and only regained its independence relatively recently. The Russian Federation is thus a target country for negative sentiments as it is a legal successor to the Soviet Union and an ex-controlling state of this union. Russian-made products may give rise to nostalgic feelings (as those products are connected with the past), but at the same time evoke animosity feelings due to historical events. The latter include mass deportation campaigns to Siberia, partisan resistance fights, and more recent independence fights (Laurinavičius, Motieka, and Statkus 2005). Attitudes towards products made in Russian Federation are thus probably simultaneously loaded both with (positive) nostalgic memories and (negative) animosity feelings.

Unlike most previous studies of animosity and nostalgia, the focus of the present study is not on intended, but on actual behavior (product ownership) as the key outcome variable. More specifically, two types of products are considered: nostalgic and non-nostalgic products. Both types of products are manufactured and imported from the Russian Federation, but originate from different time periods. Nostalgic products were already available during Soviet times, whereas non-nostalgic products have been launched to the market after Lithuania regained independence.

Conceptual Background and Hypotheses

Impact of Consumer Animosity
Animosity is theoretically expected to be negatively related to buying products from the offending country, since Lithuanian consumers’ animosity feelings are likely to bear on purchasing decisions, leading to the avoidance of Russian products. In a prior research, product ownership was assessed by Klein et al. (1998), who validated their willingness to buy measure with a measure of actual ownership of six consumer products (e.g., radios, cameras); by Shin (2001), who asked respondents to freely list all products of Japanese origin they possess; and by Klein (2002), who asked respondents to indicate whether they own a Japanese car. Shoham et al. (2006) used a change-in-purchase behavior scale that featured six actual product categories produced or marketed by Israeli Arabs, while Guido et al. (2010) observed animosity effects on purchases on two additional product categories. As all these studies empirically confirm that animosity negatively influences actual ownership, we also expect that:

Hypothesis 1: Consumer animosity is negatively related to actual ownership of Russian products.

In their seminal study, Klein et al. (1998) found that animosity toward a foreign nation affects negatively the purchase of products produced by that country independently of judgments of product quality. Thus, consumers may acknowledge the (good) product quality stemming from the offending country, but still avoid such products because the foreign country concerned has engaged in military, political, or economic acts that a consumer finds both grievous and difficult to forgive (Klein et al. 1998). While several studies subsequently confirmed the non-significant link between animosity and product judgment (e.g., Witkowski 2000; Shin 2001; Klein 2002), other authors found a direct negative effect of animosity on product judgment (e.g., Ettenson and Klein 2005; Mostafa 2010; Shoham et al. 2006). Shoham et al. (2006) draw on the principle of cognitive consistency theory (Festinger 1957) and balance theory (Heider 1958). Researchers argue that consumers who feel heightened animosity will seek to restore the balance and be motivated to adapt their cognitions (product-quality judgments) downward. Thus, an increase in animosity levels will bring about a decrease in product-quality judgment to maintain the harmony. Moreover, the impact of animosity on product judgment may be country specific (e.g., Japan may be a target country of animosity, but, at the same time, it enjoys a positive image in terms of quality and workmanship). In the current case, we expect that animosity will lead to a denigration of products made in the Russian Federation as the latter tends to be associated with a poor product quality stereotype. Thus:

Hypothesis 2: Consumer animosity is negatively related to product judgment of Russian products
Impact of Nostalgia

Findings regarding the relationship between nostalgia and purchase behavior are mixed. For example, Sierra and McQuitty (2007) found that nostalgia positively influences consumers’ intentions to purchase nostalgic products, while Ford and Merchant (2010) found that appeals for charity that evoke personal nostalgia have a positive impact on the charitable-donation intentions of consumers. In contrast, Rindfleisch, Freeman, and Burroughs (2000) found that nostalgia is a poor predictor of product preference and choice for such products as automobiles. Similarly, Lambert-Pandraut and Laurent (2010) concentrated on actual ownership of perfume and found that nostalgia does not offer a strong explanation of older consumers’ tendency to use older perfumes.

The above mixed findings can (at least) partly be explained by differences in the level of specificity of the nostalgia scales used. Some aforementioned studies used Holbrook’s (1993) general nostalgia scale (e.g., Rindfleisch et al. 2000) and linked to specific, but not necessarily nostalgic, brands. Other studies focused on nostalgic products and also used more product-specific items in their nostalgia measure (e.g., Sierra and McQuitty 2007). In the present case, since we explicitly consider both nostalgic and non-nostalgic products, we expect that:

Hypothesis 3: Nostalgia is positively related to actual purchases of nostalgic Russian products only.

Prior research has not addressed the relationship between nostalgia and product judgment. However, bearing in mind that nostalgia reflects a “yearning for yesterday” (Davis 1979, 18), one could expect that such a state of mind may lead to a harsher evaluation of the products of today. In addition, the scale used to measure nostalgia (product nostalgia factor) incorporate product judgment items (e.g., “They don’t make them like they used to”). The consumers who hold attitude that products were better in the old days will be more positive towards Soviet products (that originate from the old days). We thus hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 4: Nostalgia is positively related to product judgment of nostalgic Russian products only.

Impact of Consumer Ethnocentrism

As already noted, in the current study, consumer ethnocentrism serves as a control variable for the effects of animosity and nostalgia on product judgment and ownership. Ethnocentric consumers would consider purchasing imported products as being wrong because it hurts the domestic economy, causes loss of jobs, and is unpatriotic (Shimp and Sharma 1987). Whereas ethnocentrism is strongly linked towards preferences for domestic products and negatively related towards all foreign products, animosity is country-specific (Klein 2002; Klein and Ettenson 1999). A substantial body of research shows that consumer ethnocentrism has a significant negative impact on product judgment and willingness to buy foreign products (e.g., Klein 2002; Netemeyer, Durvasula, and Lichtenstein 1991; Sharma, Shimp, and Shin 1995). We, thus, expect that:

Hypothesis 5: Consumer ethnocentrism is negatively related to actual ownership of Russian products.

Hypothesis 6: Consumer ethnocentrism is negatively related to product judgment of Russian products.

Extant literature has not explicitly addressed the relationship among consumer ethnocentrism, animosity and nostalgia. According to Social identity theory (SIT) (Tajfel and Turner 1979, for a review see Hogg 2006), ethnocentrism is associated with a negative out-group bias toward foreign products in general and animosity— with negative out-group bias towards specific country. To the contrary, nostalgia is associated in in-group favoritism (Sierra and McQuitty 2007) and may assist in connecting with a desirable past and with other people who shared the same experience (Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995). As in our case we research specific country-made products and not foreign products in general, the effects of animosity and nostalgia may dominate the consumer choices in contrast to the consumer ethnocentrism (e.g., consumers might avoid buying foreign products in general, but this ethnocentric tendency is weaker than country specific animosity and country specific nostalgia). Thus, in the case when specific country products are analyzed the specific attitudes should dominate general ethnocentric attitudes, therefore we propose that:

Hypothesis 7: Consumer ethnocentrism effects will be weak when animosity and nostalgia are also present

Since product judgment is well-known to be positively related to product ownership (e.g., Guido et al. 2010; Klein et al. 1998; Shoham et al. 2006), we further posit that:

Hypothesis 8: Product judgment of Russian products is positively related to actual ownership of Russian products.

Method

Data were collected through mall intercepts (Bruwer and Haydam 1996) in the biggest shopping mall of Lithuania in Vilnius by randomly approaching consumers entering the mall. A total of 419 questionnaires were included in the analysis. The sample includes almost equal numbers of male and female respondents. Just over 12% of the respondents were younger than 19 years of age, 45% fell into 20–29 years age group, 23.2% were between 30–39 years old, 9.8% between 40–49 and 9.2% were 50+ years old. In terms of household income, most respondents fell into three almost equal groups (each accounting around 29%), and only the lowest-income group was significantly smaller (12% of the sample). Compared to Lithuania’s general population, the sample consists of slightly younger, urban respondents with a higher income (Lithuanian Department of Statistics 2011).

To operationalize the study constructs, we adapted scales that had been validated in previous research. Consumer animosity towards Russia was measured with a three-item scale based on Klein et al. (1998) and adapted to the Lithuanian context (example item: I cannot forgive Russia for the mass deportation campaigns of people to Siberia). The scale focused on war animosity which captures the most relevant and sensitive aspect of animosity towards Russia in the survey country. Nostalgia was measured by four items drawn from Holbrook (1993). Consistent with prior research revealing two-dimensional nature of the scale (Borges and Boulyb 2003; Evans et al. 2010; Reisenwitz, Iyer, and Cutler 2004; Rindfleisch et al. 2000; Rousseau and Venter 1999, 2000), two of the items captured product nostalgia (example item: They don’t make them like they used to) and the other two progress nostalgia (example item: Technological change will ensure a brighter future). Consumer ethnocentrism was measured by the four-items scale used by Klein (2002) which is based on Shimp and Sharma’s (1987) original CETSCALE (example
item: It is not right to purchase foreign products, because it puts Lithuanians out of jobs. Product judgment was measured on a three-item scale based on items developed by Klein et al. (1998), Darling and Arnold (1988), Wood and Darling (1993) (example item: Products made in Russia are of good quality).

Product ownership was measured by asking respondents whether they had bought different Russian convenience goods during the last six months. As currently there is not many nostalgic products available that had been manufactured during the Soviet times, we included three brands that used to be the pride of Soviet manufacturing sector (black tea and mineral water). They are still manufactured by Russian companies, keeping the old brand names. Non-nostalgic products were represented by three brands currently manufactured in the Russian Federation but not available during Soviet times (dressing and cosmetics). Product ownership was measured as sums of all brands purchased in the nostalgic and non-nostalgic categories respectively.

Results

Measurement model

We investigated the dimensionality, reliability and validity of our construct measures via a confirmatory factor analysis (Anderson and Gerbing 1988). Overall fit was satisfactory ($\chi^2 = 252$, df = 85, RMSEA = 0.065, CFI = 0.952, SRMR = 0.041). Composite reliabilities of measurement models ranged from .67 to .93, while average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from .51 to .81. All AVEs exceeded the squared correlation between each construct with all other constructs (Fornell and Larker 1981).

Structural model

To test our hypotheses, we estimated a structural equation model with LISREL 8.8 (Jöreskog and Sörbom 2007), which produced a satisfactory fit ($\chi^2 = 236$, df = 85, RMSEA = 0.065, CFI = 0.952, SRMR = 0.041). The relevant standardized parameter estimates and associated t-values are shown in figure 1. Supporting hypothesis 1, country animosity is negatively related to ownership of both nostalgic ($\beta = -0.09$, p $< .10$) and non-nostalgic ($\beta = -0.11$, p $< .05$) Russian products. Moreover, and consistent with hypothesis 2, animosity negatively impacts product judgment ($\beta = -0.40$, p $< .01$). In support of hypothesis 3, product nostalgia is positively linked to ownership of nostalgic Russian products ($\beta = 0.17$, p $< .05$); however, no such effect is observed for progress nostalgia. Moreover, neither product nor progress nostalgia are related to product judgment, thus offering no support for hypothesis 4. Surprisingly, and in contrast to hypothesis 5 and hypothesis 6, consumer ethnocentrism reveals no significant impact on either product ownership or product judgment. As expected, consumer ethnocentrism effects are weak when animosity and nostalgia are also present and hypothesis 7 is confirmed. Finally, as predicted by hypothesis 8, product judgment is positively related to product ownership; this effect holds for both nostalgic ($\beta = 0.41$, p $< .01$) and non-nostalgic products ($\beta = 0.42$, p $< .01$).

Discussion and Conclusions

Our findings offer some evidence that consumer nostalgia may indeed act as a countervailing force to consumer animosity in certain settings. However, it is only product nostalgia that impacts consumer behavior and its influence is limited to nostalgic products. Indeed, with regard to ownership of the latter, nostalgia is a better predictor than consumer animosity; the opposite holds in the case of non-nostalgic products ownership of which is affected by animosity but not nostalgia. Regarding product judgment, only animosity was found to be a significant predictor, as also observed by Ettensohn and Klein (2005) and Mostafa (2010), among others. Given that product judgment also strongly impacts product ownership, it can be concluded that consumer animosity has a greater explanatory power than either nostalgia or consumer ethnocentrism. Indeed, the latter was unexpectedly found to have no significant effects on either product judgment or product ownership. In this context, some animosity studies found that consumer ethnocentrism is the dominant factor in choosing between a domestic good and a foreign good (e.g., Klein 2002). The current findings suggest that the relative strength of consumer ethnocentrism may be weak, when animosity and nostalgia also influence product purchases.

From a managerial perspective, the study findings have implications for advertisers, who normally benefit from positive consumer responses to nostalgia (Reisenwitz et al. 2004). Advertisers communicating products that strengthen consumers’ nostalgic responses should expect that nostalgia can produce a competitive advantage only when exploited in appropriate settings. In countries where nostalgic memories co-exist with animosity feelings, messages from the past should be used cautiously as they may elicit public outrage. A recent negative publicity example in Lithuania involves a supermarket chain which promoted food products carrying “Soviet” as a brand name during the commemoration of victims of the fight for independence day. The campaign not only provoked negative consumer responses, but also encouraged discussion at the political level that brand names with Soviet connotations have to be banned.

Regarding future research, three issues merit attention. First, the current study should be replicated in other settings in which both animosity and nostalgia may co-exist (e.g., other ex-Soviet countries, former Yugoslavia) in order to assess the generalizability of our findings. Second, instead of using Holbrook’s (1993) scale which captures nostalgia in general, future studies may develop scales that focus on some specific former period; this would make the measurement of nostalgia more comparable to measures of animosity which, by definition, focus on specific events (Riefler and Diamantopoulos 2007). Finally, a longitudinal study seeking to explicate the development of the relationship between animosity and nostalgia over time would offer important insights on the dynamics of the constructs.
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