Consumption expression of ideological resistance

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**Abstract**

**Purpose** – This paper aims to focus on resistance driven by animosity toward a country due to cultural, political, military, and economic reasons. Previous research has linked animosity toward a given country to explicit judgments and purchases of products from that country, thus ignoring the possibility that latent ideological beliefs may reveal themselves behaviorally more subtly. This research focuses on implicit consumption expressions of country-based consumption resistance.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Cross-sectional survey data were collected from French moviegoers in seemingly unrelated studies. In study one, respondents reported the movies they had watched at a movie theater over the past month and these movies were subsequently coded by country of origin. Animosity, ethnocentrism, and global openness were measured in study two. Finally, participants selected lottery tickets for either a French or foreign movie. This choice measure captures whether ethnocentric consumption tendencies emerge after animosity is made salient.

**Findings** – Ideological resistance to the USA expresses itself in the anti-consumption of US movies. Further, when animosity toward the USA is made salient, high animosity French respondents express an increased preference for domestic consumption choices, even though they are not generally ethnocentric.

**Originality/value** – The focus on actual consumption data provides an externally valid test of both latent and explicit expressions of ideological resistance to a country in the form of consumption choices.

**Keywords** Country of origin, Anti-consumption, Consumer behaviour, Culture

**Paper type** Research paper

1. Introduction

Consumer resistance is often based on ideological or cultural motivations (Varman and Belk, 2009). This paper focuses on resistance driven by negative sentiment, or animosity, toward a country due to cultural, political, military, and economic reasons (Klein *et al.*, 1998; Onea, 2008). Previous research in this domain has linked animosity toward a given country to explicit judgments and purchases of products from that country, asking consumers directly whether they own or what they think of products from country A. This focus on consumption attitudes and behaviors explicitly linked to a country ignores the possibility that latent ideological beliefs, such as those that drive animosity, may reveal themselves behaviorally in a more subtle fashion. This research
focuses on these more implicit consumption expressions of country-based consumption resistance.

The context for this research is animosity toward the United States (US), which is exhibited by millions of people throughout the world (Grigoriadis, 2010; PEW, 2005; Sardar and Davies, 2003) and persists even though many believed that it would subside following the election of President Obama (Brown, 2009). Political science literature documents that animosity towards the US is rooted in major ideological, cultural, and religious differences (Berman, 2005; Sardar and Davies, 2003). It is heavily engrained in the psyche of the people, having developed over a prolonged period of time, and therefore unlikely to change (Onea, 2008). Despite continuous evidence of animosity toward the US (Grigoriadis, 2010; PEW, 2006), there is limited evidence regarding the degree to which it reveals itself in the consumption (or anti-consumption) of US products (Ceaser, 2003; Lee et al., 2009). Furthermore, the latent nature of ideological beliefs suggests that they may reveal themselves through consumption in more subtle and unconscious ways than previously studied (Amodio and Devine, 2006).

2. Conceptual framework

2.1 The expression of country-based animosity in consumption

Country-of-origin (CoO) is an important determinant of consumer attitudes, purchase intentions, and behavior (Gühran-Canli and Maheswaran, 2000). Traditional CoO research has focused on the positive effects of CoO on product judgments (e.g. Bilkey and Nes, 1995; Maheswaran, 1994). In parallel, studies within the animosity paradigm have documented that negative country views affect consumers’ willingness to buy a country’s products, though not their opinions of them (Klein, 2002; Klein et al., 1998; Nijssen and Douglas, 2004; Riefler and Diamantopoulos, 2007; Russell and Russell, 2006).

Animosity studies have shown that animosity is related to consumer preferences and choices (Klein, 2002), and even boycotting behavior (Etenson and Klein, 2005). One major limitation of these studies is that the CoO of products is usually made salient to respondents: survey questions specifically state the country (e.g. “I would never buy Italian products”) and experimental manipulations openly indicate the origin of a hypothetical brand. Emphasizing a product’s CoO impairs external validity and the emphasis on CoC potentially creates demand issues. This is especially problematic given the potentially latent nature of country-based resistance.

There is a great deal of anecdotal evidence that animosity toward the US has negatively impacted US international business interests across many sectors (O’Brien, 2005; Sengupta, 2005). For instance, one study, consisting of 20,000 respondents across 20 countries, found that nearly 20 percent of consumers actively avoid purchasing US brands, a form of anti-consumption (GMI, 2005). But the degree to which ideological resistance to a country, a type of politically motivated rejection (Sand and Ekici, 2009) catalyzed by a country (Russell and Russell, 2006) is expressed in the avoidance of products from that country deserves further empirical testing (Lee et al., 2009). Further, the latent nature of the ideology construct requires not only an unbiased assessment of its relationship to materialized forms of expressions (Althusser, 1971), such as the consumption of US products (Varman and Belk, 2009), but also an evaluation of the impact on consumption preferences of making one’s ideological beliefs salient.
2.2 Direct and indirect expressions of ideology
There is indeed a large body of evidence in social psychology which demonstrates that strongly held ideological beliefs reveal themselves directly in people’s behaviors, and that this process occurs automatically without conscious awareness (Dovidio et al., 2002). For instance, research on racial attitudes and behaviors has consistently found that people who hold strong negative views about certain ethnic groups exhibit greater avoidance behavior (e.g. sitting further away from them, reducing eye contact with them) towards members of those groups without being consciously aware of their behaviors (Amodio and Devine, 2006).

Research on intergroup interactions further shows that heightening the salience of various ideological views affects these behaviors (Vorauer et al., 2009). Prompting people about their own beliefs can alter their behavior. For instance, simply measuring a given construct, such as a dimension of one’s social identity, at the onset of a study is sufficient to prime it and alter subsequent responses (Transue, 2007). Whenever people feel threatened, they tend to adopt a prevention-oriented focus, avoiding choices that increase the threat and preferring instead those options that make them feel safer (Higgins, 1997). In the CoO domain, prompting animosity can make people feel threatened (Russell and Russell, 2006) and this could activate a prevention-focus that increases ethnocentric tendencies, which manifest themselves as a preference for domestic over foreign options (Shimp and Sharma, 1987).

3. Research context and hypotheses
The link between country-based resistance and consumption is here addressed in a study that relates animosity toward the US and actual consumer choices of movies in France, which has a market where US products coexist with products of other origins, hence providing consumers with choice options. It is thus an ideal context for testing the two key research questions:

*RQ1.* Is latent animosity toward the US expressed in reduced consumption of US products?

*RQ2.* Does prompting animosity toward the US activate ethnocentric tendencies, as reflected by a preference for domestic products?

In order to distinguish between latent and explicit consumption expressions, two behavioral measures are collected. The first measure focuses on actual consumer choices by collecting information on existing market offerings without making the CoO obvious, thus providing an externally valid and unbiased measure of consumption choices (Peterson and Jolibert, 1995). The second choice measure is collected after measuring animosity to capture consumption behavior once the otherwise latent country-based resistance is activated (Transue, 2007).

3.1 Context: movie consumption
US movies have remained prevalent on the global cinema scene for the past century and the trade of audiovisual products between countries is undeniably inequitable. In 2008-2009, for example, US studios exported approximately $14 billion, a 30 percent increase from 2004, in audiovisual products while importing less than $150 million (USBEA, 2010). Additionally, the US movie audiovisual industry is one of the few US industries that maintains a positive trade balance representing 7 percent of total
services trade (MPAA, 2010). This trade imbalance and general domination of US movies has been ascribed to the demise of some and stagnation of other national audiovisual industries.

There has been ongoing concern over the potential of US movies to tug at the social fabric of local cultures, especially where American productions dominate the marketplace (Puttnam, 1997; Kadmi-Cohen, 1930). Motion pictures were the first cultural artifact to command a large presence in foreign markets and to be consumed en masse (Ulff-Møller, 2001). Consumption of movies can affect one's values: movies transfer information, ideologies, and behavioral norms, which in turn can serve as a catalyst for change within a society (Lull, 1995). The continued globalization of markets and the potential impact of movie consumption on local cultures make it important to document whether and how animosity toward the US reveals itself in anti-consumption of US movies and whether activating this otherwise latent ideological resistance awakens ethnocentric tendencies, as reflected in an explicit preference for domestic movies.

3.2 The French context
The turbulent history of friendliness and animosity between France and the US is especially palpable in the movie industry (Roger, 2005). France has presented the staunchest opposition to the mass presence of American movies due to a fear that their omnipresence would result in the demise of French culture (Ulff-Møller, 2001). The French government instituted numerous policies, ranging from quotas to taxation, in an effort to reduce the inflow of American movies. As a result, unlike most national markets, France maintains a healthy number of domestic productions (Puttnam, 1997). The French movie market is one of the most steadfast competitive markets, with domestic production accounting for approximately 35 percent of the local market and US productions accounting for only about 53 percent of the market, whereas they often command a vast majority in foreign movie markets (CNC, 2010).

3.3 Hypotheses
Based on the extant research, it is predicted that animosity toward the US will be associated with lessened consumption of US movies ($H_1$) but that it will not be related to the consumption of domestic films ($H_2$) or other foreign non-US films ($H_3$). However, when activated, animosity toward the US should be related to an increased preference for domestic movies ($H_4$).

4. Method
The hypotheses were tested with cross-sectional survey data of movie consumption collected in France. Two private French undergraduate institutions circulated email invitations on behalf of the researchers for students to partake in an internet-based study. A total of 1,500 students were contacted. Respondent participation was encouraged with the use of free movie tickets to a theater of their choice. A total of 417 participated, thereby yielding a response rate of 27.8 percent, somewhat higher than in typical internet-based surveys (Deutskens et al., 2004).

The survey was presented as a set of unrelated studies. The first study, presented as a study of people’s entertainment choices, included the main dependent variable, a movie consumption measure. Respondents were asked to list the last five movies they
had watched at a movie theater over the past month. This actual consumption measure ensured the validity of the answers. All reported movies were subsequently coded by CoO to allow for accurate ratios of domestic, US and other foreign movie consumption to be computed. Respondents were also asked a series of questions how much each of ten factors contribute to their movie choices (e.g. director, main actor(s), awards received). These randomly presented factors were rated on a scale from 1 (not at all important) to 5 (very important) and included CoO. This measure was designed to unobtrusively assess the salience and relative role of the CoO criterion in participants’ decisions (Bloemer et al., 2009).

The second part of the survey was presented as a study of people’s views of national and international politics. This section included measures of the independent variables. Using a set of five-point Likert scale anchored by 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree), respondents indicated their level of agreement with a series of 24 randomly presented statements in which a five-item measure of animosity toward the US was included, adapted from the animosity scale (α = 0.72; Klein et al., 1998; Russell and Russell, 2006). Two control variables were also included:

1. ethnocentrism; and
2. global openness.

Ethnocentrism represents the general view that one’s group is central and has been shown to negatively relate to attitudes toward and purchase of foreign products (Klein and Ettenson, 1999; Shimp and Sharma, 1987; Sharma et al., 1995; Vida et al., 2008). It was measured with five items (α = 0.72; Shimp and Sharma, 1987). Global openness (Suh and Kwon, 2002) reflects interest in and openness to experience other cultures and should be positively related to consumption of foreign products. It was measured with four items (α = 0.75; Suh and Kwon, 2002). All measures had been validated in previous research. The measures were adapted from previously translated research instruments (Netemeyer et al., 1991) or generated through appropriate translation – back translation methods by bilingual English-French speakers.

In the final section, demographic information was collected. Last, all participants were told that to thank them for completing the study they would be entered in a lottery for four movie tickets. They were given the options to choose between tickets for either a French or foreign movie. This actual choice measure captures whether ethnocentric consumption tendencies emerge after animosity is salient.

5. Results
5.1 Descriptive statistics
Consumption ratios were computed based on the self-reported movies consumed. Respondents who had not seen any movies at a theater in the last month were removed from the analyses. Participants had watched an average of 2.52 (SD = 1.91) at the theater in the past month, comparable to the national average of 2.92 in the same month (CNC, 2010). On average, 55 percent of these movies were American and 34 percent were French, proportions that nearly mirror the overall market share distribution of 52.5 percent and 35.7 percent respectively (CNC, 2010). There was variance in animosity toward the US in the sample (M = 2.36; SD = 0.72), despite generally low levels of ethnocentrism (M = 1.57; SD = 0.60) and high global openness (M = 4.47; SD = 0.52).
5.2 Relationship between animosity and movie consumption

To test the hypotheses, each of the two consumption measures (past movie consumption choices and end-of-study movie ticket choice) was regressed against animosity. To control for the general proclivity to embrace other cultures or instead to revert to one’s own, ethnocentrism and global openness were included as controls as well as age and gender. Multiple regression was used for the movie consumption ratios, also controlling for the total number of movies watched, and logistic regression for the choice of movie tickets. As can be seen in Table I, animosity is the only variable significantly and negatively related to past consumption of US movies, in support of H1. Animosity is not related to the ratio of previously watched French movies, in line with H2, nor the ratio of previously watched foreign, non-US films, in line with H3. It is noteworthy that ethnocentrism is not related to past domestic movie consumption, perhaps because of the generally low levels of ethnocentrism in the studied sample. Global openness is significantly and positively associated to the ratio of foreign movies but, interestingly, it is not related to consumption of foreign movies in general but only of foreign non-US movies. This suggests that, in the context of movie consumption, cultural openness is reflected by a preference for the non-dominant cultural offerings, which leaves out the omnipresent American movies.

The logistic regression results, also shown in Table I, further show that, once it has been measured and thus made salient, animosity toward the US is related to a subsequent increase in preference for domestic movies at the outset of the study, in support of H4.

To illustrate the relationship between animosity and movie consumption, the sample was divided into quartiles to compare consumption choices across animosity quartiles. The ANOVA ($F(3, 246) = 3.46, p < 0.05$) shows that the high animosity group (top quartile) had watched fewer US movies than the low animosity group (lowest quartile). The difference in the ratio of past consumption of US films between the two groups was of 14 percent (48 percent vs. 62 percent; $t(108) = 2.39, p < 0.05$), thus providing evidence that latent animosity toward the US manifests itself in some, but not complete, anti-consumption of US movies. However, the two groups do not differ in the ratio of French ($t(108) = 1.62, p > 0.05$) or other ($t(108) = 1.16, p > 0.05$) movies, a pattern consistent with H2 and H3. At the outset of the study, after

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>Ratio of US movies</th>
<th>Multiple regression</th>
<th>Ratio of French movies</th>
<th>Ratio of other foreign movies</th>
<th>Logistic regression</th>
<th>Choice of French movies$^a$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Animosity toward US</td>
<td>$-0.157^*$</td>
<td>0.096 ns</td>
<td>0.112 ns</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.594$^*$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnocentrism</td>
<td>$-0.023$ ns</td>
<td>$-0.048$ ns</td>
<td>$-0.012$ ns</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.965 ns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global openness</td>
<td>$-0.040$ ns</td>
<td>$-0.044$ ns</td>
<td>0.132$^*$</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.720 ns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total movies watched</td>
<td>0.257$^*$</td>
<td>$-0.274^*$</td>
<td>$-0.006$ ns</td>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>$-0.218^*$</td>
<td>0.312$^*$</td>
<td>$-0.116$ ns</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.688 ns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.010 ns</td>
<td>$-0.058$ ns</td>
<td>0.072 ns</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.150$^*$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.123</td>
<td>0.162</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I. Regression results (Standardized coefficients and significance)

Notes: $^*$Significant at $p < 0.05$; $^a$Exp (Beta) are reported in this column
measuring animosity, 36.5 percent in the top animosity quartile requested tickets for a French movie, compared to 25.9 percent in the lowest quartile, thus providing evidence of increased ethnocentric tendencies when animosity is salient, in line with H4.

To evaluate whether high animosity consumers watched fewer US movies because they pay closer attention to CoO information and this awareness enhances the scrutiny they place on consumption decisions (Bloemer et al., 2009; Klein, 2002), the rating of importance of CoO for selecting movies was regressed against animosity, while controlling for ethnocentrism, global openness and all other movie selection criteria. The regression results ($R^2 = 0.22$) reveal that indeed animosity is the only predictor significantly related to the importance of CoO information (standardized $\beta = 0.109, p < 0.05$).

6. Discussion, limitations, and future research
The study provides empirical evidence for the proposition that ideological resistance to the US in France expresses itself naturally in a degree of anti-consumption of US movies: although all the respondents had access to the same finite number of theaters within the metropolitan area of their regional French city, French respondents at the high end of the animosity spectrum had watched fewer American movies in the past month. In addition, when animosity toward the US is made salient, high animosity French respondents express an increased preference for domestic consumption choices, even though they are not generally ethnocentric. The study reveals that consumers who harbor high animosity toward the US pay closer attention to CoO information.

By focusing on actual consumption without making reference to CoO and by assessing the constructs in separate studies, this research provides a more externally valid test of the relationship between (anti-) consumption and animosity-driven forms of resistance. The empirical evidence based on unprompted movie choices points to consumption as an implicit expression of people’s latent ideological beliefs about the country from which they originate. In addition, the pattern of choices at the outset of the study reveals that bringing these latent ideological beliefs to people’s awareness also triggers a prevention focus and heightens ethnocentric tendencies, a process not previously documented.

Of course, the results are bounded by the sole focus on movies and the cross-sectional nature of the data. Future research should continue to disentangle the relationship between ideological resistance and anti-consumption across a range of countries and product categories. Despite its ability to identify a relationship between ideological resistance and consumption choices, the quantitative survey methodology required certain choices of measurement, both in the independent and dependent variables to tackle constructs that other paradigms (such as anthropological research) would treat more holistically. Clearly, the ways in which consumption is used as an expression of latent ideological resistance must also be studied through different paradigmatic lenses.

From a theoretical standpoint, this research highlights the need to treat consumption choices as indirect expressions of ideology and to recognize that prompting research participants about country of origin biases subsequent behaviors. The latent nature of animosity and the consequences of making it salient to consumers deserve further attention, such as through experimental manipulations that increase or decrease the salience of animosity feelings (Russell and Russell, 2006), and with the combination of both implicit and explicit measures of consumption choices, as in this study.
From a practical standpoint, this research demonstrates the need for multinational companies to carefully consider how they promote their products as to reduce the salience of the CoO, if the country is viewed negatively. Whenever products originate from a country towards which people harbor negative feelings, they should be promoted in a way that does not obviously associate them with that country (Ettenson and Klein, 2000). More specifically, it substantiates concerns about anti-Americanism and its consequences for US businesses (Katzenstein and Keohane, 2006). Many US businesses sought to address these animosity concerns by becoming involved in supporting humanitarian and other international social projects in order to create a more positive image for their brand and maintain their global market positions (Kuehn, 2005). However, such initiatives have been found to have little impact, especially in the long-term (GMI, 2005). This is not surprising given the deep historical and cultural roots of anti-Americanism (Lacorne, 2005) and the often-latent nature of resistance based on CoO, as demonstrated in this research.

Note
1. Foreign languages spoken were also included in the regression but did not affect the results and not considered any further.

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Expression of ideological resistance


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