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Examining the animosity model in a country with a high level of foreign trade

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Abstract

Much research relating to consumer attitudes toward foreign products has been conducted in large industrialized countries, with big internal markets and a wide range of domestic brands. Little attention has been paid to the case of countries with high levels of foreign trade where, in some product markets, no domestic brands or alternatives are available and hence consumers have no choice but to purchase foreign brands in that product category. The lack of domestic brands is, however, likely to affect feelings of ethnocentrism, nationality and animosity as well as attitudes towards the purchase of foreign products. This study examines consumer attitudes towards the purchase of foreign cars and TVs in the Netherlands. The Netherlands is viewed as a prototypical example of a country with high levels of foreign trade, well integrated into the global economy. In one category—cars, there are no domestic brands, while for TVs, Philips, a Dutch multinational, holds major market share. The results show that consumer ethnocentrism and feelings of animosity have an important impact on the evaluation of foreign products, even when no domestic brands are available.

Keywords: Animosity; Consumer ethnocentrism; Foreign product evaluation

1. Introduction

With the growth of international trade, an increasingly diverse array of products of different national origins is now available in many countries throughout the world. This has resulted in greater interest in examining consumer attitudes towards products of different national origins, as well as the underlying determinants and antecedents of those attitudes. Most research has been conducted in large industrialized countries such as the US, France, Germany, and Japan that have large internal markets and a wide range of domestic alternatives or brands in most product categories. Attention has primarily focused on examining negative attitudes towards foreign or imported products, assuming that consumers prefer domestic-made products.

Negative attitudes towards foreign products can arise from a number of sources. Consumers may believe products from certain countries, e.g., emerging markets, are of inferior quality (Han, 1988). They may hold feelings of hostility or animosity towards a specific country and hence “boycott” their products (Klein, Ettenson, & Morris, 1998). Equally, consum-

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ers may have strong feelings of patriotism and pride in domestic products and consider it wrong, almost immoral to buy foreign products (Shimp & Sharma, 1987).

Attitudes towards foreign products will depend not only on individual characteristics and the product category, but also on the specific country or context. A contextual aspect that has been relatively little studied to date is the availability of domestic and foreign products. In countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium or Austria, there are no domestic brands or alternatives available in a number of product categories, as, for example, cars or computers. Consequently, the relevant choice set, and hence the evoked set in this category consists solely of foreign products or brands. As a result, even if consumers have negative attitudes towards foreign products in general, they may evaluate foreign brands in this category favorably and be willing to buy them.

The importance of foreign trade and of imports is another factor likely to impact attitudes towards foreign products. In countries with a high proportion of imported foreign goods, consumers will be more accustomed to foreign brands. Equally, there may be no domestic manufacturers in many product categories. Typically such countries tend to be smaller

Table 1
A comparison of economic indicators of small and large West European countries

	Trade as % of GDP	Imports % of GDP	Exports % of GDP	Population (millions 1998)	GNP 2000 (billions US$)	GNP per capita (US$)	Annual GDP-change (% 1999–2000)
Small country group							
Austria	70.1	36	42	8	204.2	25,220	30.0
Belgium	138.1	74	73	10	252.5	24,630	40.0
Croatia	64.6	41	42	4	20.1	4510	3.7
Czech Republic	120.5	65	58	10	50.6	4920	2.9
Denmark	57.9	27	–	5	171.0	32,020	2.9
Finland	65.5	28	40	5	129.1	24,610	5.7
Greece	32.5	25	15	11	126.2	11,960	4.3
Hungary	131.3	28	45	10	47.5	4740	5.2
Ireland	139.3	53	76	4	87.1	22,960	11.5
Luxemburg	–	–	–	0.4	18.4	42,060	8.5
Netherlands	112.5	53	56	16	40.3	25,140	3.5
Norway	58.4	22	41	4	151.2	33,650	2.3
Portugal	58.9	36	31	10	110.7	11,160	3.3
Slovak Republic	128.5	66	56	5	20.0	3700	2.2
Slovenia	103.9	56	57	2	20.0	10,070	4.6
Sweden	70.3	82	44	9	237.5	26,780	3.6
Switzerland	68.9	34	40	7	273.7	38,120	30.0
Total[a]/Average[b]	88.8[b]	45.4[b]	44.8[b]	120.4[a] (26%)	2320.1[a] (25%)	20,368[b]	4.4[b]
Large country group							
France	46.6	23	24	59	1429.3	24,470	3.1
Germany	56.3	26	27	82	2051.7	25,050	30.0
Italy	44.2	22	27	58	1154.2	20,010	2.9
Poland	31.1	31	25	39	162.2	4200	40.0
Spain	47.8	27	26	39	590.1	14,960	4.1
UK	43.9	23	29	60	1460.5	24,520	3.1
Total[a]/Average[b]	450.0[b]	25.3[b]	26.3[b]	337 (74%)[a]	6848.0 (75%)[a]	18,868[b]	3.4[b]

Source: The World Bank (World Development Report, 2002).

[a] Within group total (percentage of overall total).

[b] Within group average.