

CONSUMER ANIMOSITY: DOES IT EXIST IN AFRICA?

Peter N. Kiriri

*Chandaria School of Business,
United States International University – Africa,
Email: pnkiriri@usiu.ac.ke*

ABSTRACT

Globalization has been hailed by some as the panacea of world's economic, social and political problems. However, the same has had its own challenges and has come to be a topic of major study. One area that has generated interest is the effects of globalization on marketing and specifically consumer behavior. In different parts of the world, consumers have responded differently to products from different countries based on their perceptions about the country of origin. One of the highly debated aspect of consumer behaviour is consumer animosity. Consumer animosity is defined as an individuals' negative feelings and attitudes toward a specific foreign country that are often developed by various triggers, such as traumatic historical events, economic disputes or even as a result of basic differences in cultural norms and values. This paper addresses consumer animosity and focuses of whether African consumers have animosity tendencies towards products from other countries. It forms a basis for preparation of an empirical study to validate the consumer animosity construct among African consumers and contribute to the ongoing debate of animosity highly studied in USA, Asia and Europe but little in Africa.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

As globalization gains momentum, consumers all over the world are confronted with increased choices of foreign products and services. Such choices have also to be evaluated in line with domestic/local products. As a result, the process of making a decision on what, when and where to buy becomes a complex process sometimes necessitating consideration of implicit and explicit issues. Critical to such decision making are the perceptions consumers have about the product and/or its country of origin. Such perceptions lead to either positive or negative attitudes towards foreign products. Negative attitudes towards foreign products can arise from several factors such as previous or ongoing political, military, economic, or diplomatic events. Thus, it has become important for marketers to understand the attitudes consumers possess against their products. Due to globalization, markets have become intensively competitive, consumers are faced with information overload, increased choice and their making consumers to rely on the country-of-origin information and to guide them in consumption choices (Bertoli & Resciniti, 2013).

Consumers exhibit different attitudes towards their home country (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989), foreign countries in general (Shimp & Sharma, 1987; Suh & Kwon, 2002) and specific foreign nations (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2006). Consumer attitudes towards products from their home country has been described as consumer xenocentrism. That towards foreign countries has been described by Shimp & Sharma (1997) as consumer ethnocentrism. Attitudes towards products from specific countries based on a negative association has been described as consumer animosity (Klein, Ettenson & Morris (1998).

Due to various global developments including the glowing influence of China in world trade, the “Make America Great Again” initiatives by President Donald Trump of USA, the Brexit effects in Europe and various countless international conflicts and tensions, consumer decision making has become more conscious of the origin of the products they consume. As a result of the countless conflicts taking place across the world and economic and political tensions, there has been an increasing hostility towards stronger economies. There has also been a renewed sense of nationalism thereby influencing the feelings of ethnocentrism and animosity of consumers. As a result of the impact of the global developments on consumes, marketers have to develop responsive strategies that will cushion them from the consumer tendencies, which include decisions on the location of production sites, marketing communication and advertisement strategies (Huang, Phau, & Lin, 2008). The recognition of the potential effects of consumer animosity though having being recognized earlier by Klein et al. (1999) was amplified during the 2003 U.S. led invasion of Iraq. France opposed the invasion and as a result about 73% of American were reported to have boycotted French wines, cheeses, and other delicacies, and 53% favored renaming French fries and French toast as “freedom fries” and “liberty toast,” respectively. Some American retailers pulled French items off shelves, liquor stores returned French wines to wholesalers, and French eateries lost business in various cities (Ebenkamp, 2003). Such has been identified also as consumer patriotism. Consumer animosity may be as a result of cross-country tensions as a result of historical, economic, military, religious, or political conflicts. Consequently, consumer animosity may affect consumer purchase decisions.

2.0 DEFINING CONSUMER ANIMOSITY

The construct of consumer animosity was first introduced in the marketing literature in the late 1990s by Klein, Ettenson a Morris (1998) and Klein & Ettenson (1999) to offer insights into consumer attitudes to buying foreign products. Klein et al. (1998) defines consumer animosity as an individuals’ negative feelings and attitudes toward a specific foreign country that are often developed by various triggers, such as traumatic historical events, economic disputes. Animosity can also be as a result of basic differences in cultural norms and values (Riefler & Diamantopoulos, 2007). If consumers think that actions of a foreign nation negatively affect their own country, they will likely show animosity towards that specific country. In explaining consumer animosity further, Klein et al. (1998) notes that consumer animosity maybe as a result of the ‘remnants of

antipathy related to previous or ongoing military, political, or economic events'. As such they note that there exists two broad dimensions of animosity: war animosity and economic animosity.

According to Klein et al. (1998), animosity towards a specific country would affect consumers' willingness to purchase foreign products rather than their evaluation of these products. Klein (2002) contends that consumer animosity does not drive product judgements or quality perceptions as angry consumers do not tarnish or denigrate the image of target country's products, but they simply refrain from buying them. Consumer animosity thus leads to consumer boycott of products from a target country. Therefore, antipathy toward a country and its people will translate into a refusal to buy products and services originating from this country, irrespective of judgments on product quality.

According to Papadopoulos et al. (1998), the consumer perceptions of a product's origin is based on three components of attitude (cognition, affection and conation). Cognition refers to the knowledge about the products or services; affection refers to the favorable or unfavorable attitude towards the COO; and conation refers to the actual buying behavior (Ahmed, Anang, Othman, & Sambasivan, 2012). The affection or the emotional component can play a dominant role in the purchase of foreign products or services (Kinra, 2006).

According to Maheswaran (2006), consumers with a high level of animosity towards a particular country are prone to impulsive and quick response to products/services because of the past or future actions of the country that may be in the form of military aggression, economic sanctions and political blackmail. Previous research has established a strong link between animosity and purchase behavior of consumers towards the products produced by countries that have conflicts (Ang et al., 2004; Bahae and Pisani, 2009; Klein et al., 1998; Nijssen and Douglas, 2004; Rose et al., 2008).

Much research has examined the consequences of consumer animosity and its effects on consumers' attitudes towards foreign products. Research has found that there are two main effects including purchase intention and product judgment (Klein, 2002; Klein et al., 1998; Nijssen & Douglas, 2004). Negative feelings and attitudes toward a certain country may lead to refusal to buy products and services from the hostility- evoking countries, regardless of their product quality or judgment (Klein et al., 1998). Klein et al. (1998) found that there existed a direct negative impact of animosity on the willingness to buy products from the offending country. Klein et al. (1998) also found that animosity towards a specific nation affected foreign product purchasing behavior regardless of its relation to consumer's beliefs about the quality of the product. High levels of animosity have the potential of devaluing the quality of foreign products, inducing consumer apathy and nurturing the tendency of boycotting products from the hostile country (Hoffmann et al., 2010). Nijssen and Douglas (2004) validated the animosity model in the Netherlands, a country

with a high level of foreign trade, and found that animosity had an impact on consumers' purchase of foreign products even when domestic alternatives were not available

3.0 TYPES OF CONSUMER ANIMOSITY

Following the seminal study by Klein et al. (1998), other researchers have expounded on the construct of consumer animosity. Related studies have been carried out in most parts of the world but minimal if any in Africa. Animosity has been studied in North America (Klein, 2002; Little, Little & Cox, 2009), Europe (Amine, 2008; Jiménez & San Martin, 2010; Riefler & Diamantopoulos, 2007), the Middle East (Bahae & Pisani, 2009; Mostafa, 2010) and Asia (Ang et al., 2004; Huang, Phau & Lin, 2010). These studies have identified more dimensions of consumer animosity than the war/economic dimensions by Klein et al. (1998).

As stated, the original authors of consumer animosity (Klein et al., 1998) distinguished only between general, war and economic-related animosity. They studied war-related animosity by focusing on a past historical military event, i.e., the Nanjing massacre in 1937 during the Second Sino-Japanese War. Subsequently, Shin (2001), Klein (2002), and Nijssen and Douglas (2004) investigated World War II actions and their repercussions. Podoshen and Hunt (2009) found that due to the Holocaust many Jewish consumers living in the U.S. still have animosity toward Germany and therefore refuse to purchase German-made cars.

Klein et al. (1998) suggest that economic related animosity is based on the perception that a foreign animosity country is an unfair and unreliable trading partner, and it exerts excessive influence in the home country. Ang et al. (2004) investigated animosity in five Asian countries in the context of the 1997 Asian crisis. Funk et al. (2010) studied American animosity toward India, partially explained by the perception that India is taking jobs away from Americans. Economic animosity can stem from anger against perceived unfair practices that have direct economic impact on consumers or from fear of being dominated by economic powers (Rice & Wongtada, 2007).

However, the reasons for animosity do not merely stem from war and economic events. Newer research has found that animosity may be rooted in issues related to politics, religion, or culture. Political reasons for animosity can encompass events such as the Australian-French diplomatic incident during French nuclear testing in the South Pacific (Ettenson & Klein, 2005), France's opposition to American foreign policies (Russell & Russell, 2006), territorial disputes between Taiwan and Japan (Huang, Phau & Lin, 2010) and strained relations between Iran and the U.S. (Bahae & Pisani, 2009; Funk et al., 2010), among many others.

Animosity based on religion has been also witnessed in the recent past. Researchers have argued that religiosity is very personal and its influence on consumer behavior is dependent upon an individual's level of religious commitment. Such is more prevalent among Muslim based

communities. Maher and Mady (2010) examined the religious animosity of Kuwaitis toward Denmark ignited by the depiction of the prophet Mohammad in a Danish newspaper. The Danish dairy group Arla Foods (FA) suffered religious animosity (Riefler & Diamantopoulos, 2007) as a result of the publication in September 2005. According to Abosag (2009), the boycott of AF started early in 2006 and within the first five days of the boycott, the company lost over sixty percent of its market share in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia where it had production facilities. Other than sales of FA, within a few days, an enormous boycott of other Danish products started including products from Lurpak butter to Lego toys, were quickly pulled off the shelves in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Algeria, Bahrain, Yemen, Tunisia, Jordan, and other countries around the Middle East as Muslims awaited an apology for the depiction of prophet Mohammad in cartoons (Maamoun & Aggarwal, 2008).

According to Khalil (2012), there is a strong relationship and a clear link between religiosity in Arabic/Islamic collectivist cultures and consumer behaviour (mainly boycotting). Khalil also found that consumers in such societies are collectively influenced by religious factors when formulating their purchase decisions, particularly for international brands. Beyond religion, culture has also been found to drive consumer animosity albeit at an implicit level. Russell et al. (2011) in their research in France found cultural animosity on France's ideological resistance to the U.S. which was reflected in the anti-consumption of American movies.

Animosity has also been categorized as national animosity and personal animosity (Jung, Ang, Leong, Tan, Pornpitakpan, & Kau, 2002). National animosity is anger in response to perceived wrongdoing against one's country whereas personal animosity is resentment against a country or group based on negative personal experiences (Jung et al., 2002). Personal animosity is hostility arising from negative and bad experiences of a person when she or he was in contact with a foreign country or the people of that country. National animosity refers to the perception of how much one's country was affected and suffered due to the actions of another country (Jung et al., 2002; Nijssen & Douglas, 2004; Shimp et al., 2004). Personal animosity refers to one's resentment toward another country stemming from negative experiences with that country or its people (Jung et al., 2002) or from personal feelings of dislike toward the target country (Hoffmann, Mai & Smirnova, 2011).

Animosity can arise from a specific situation or event (Situational Animosity), such as policy changes, or as a culminating ingrained emotional response from a series of events, also referred to as Stable Animosity. Situational animosity is driven by a specific event, whereas stable animosity accumulates over a longer period of time due to historical events between countries, for example, military or economic hostilities. Over time, situational animosity may evolve into stable animosity characterized by a long-lasting and deeply-rooted general antagonistic emotion

toward a particular country. Stable animosity can be passed from one generation to another via formal (e.g. history texts) or informal (e.g. word-of-mouth) channels (Jung et al., 2002).

4.0 CONSUMER ANIMOSITY IN AFRICA

In Africa, few have been undertaken to assess the level of customer animosity. Such studies have been in South Africa where studies have been done to assess the attitude that South Africans have over Chinese apparel products. A study by Muposhi, Dhurup, & Shamhuyenzva (2018) found that economic animosity result in negative attitudes and purchase intention towards foreign sport apparel in South Africa, the study results suggested that there was some resentment of South African consumers towards Chinese apparel. More than 60% of respondents agreed that China had too much influence on the South African economy indicating high levels of consumer animosity towards Chinese apparel. Muposhi et al. noted that not all consumers resented Chinese products which could be attributed to lower prices of Chinese products that make them more affordable to people with low disposable incomes. Studies have found that the level of animosity towards foreign products is potentially diluted by the unavailability of domestic alternatives and high quality of foreign products (Nes et al., 2012).

Related studies that have been done in Africa have majorly focused on consumer ethnocentrism and xenocentrism as opposed to consumer animosity. Generally, most studies in Africa have found the desire for foreign made products. On the other hand, others have found the existence of xenocentrism. For example, studies in Nigeria (Okechuku & Onyemah, 1999; Agbonifoh & Elimimian 1999; Festervand & Sokoya, 1994; Lysonski & Durvasula, 2013) found that Nigerian consumers had a negative image of the “Made in Nigeria” label preferred imported brands. In Ghana, Opoku and Akorli (2009) found that Ghanaian consumers had a low perception of products made in Ghana relative to foreign products. In Mozambique, John & Brady (2011) found a preference for foreign products over local products as did Kisawike (2015) in Tanzania consumers. Interestingly, In Kenya, Maina, Kibera and Munyoki (2015) found that most Kenyans had a high preference for local commercial bank services as opposed to those from foreign owned commercial banks. However, consumers in Zimbabwe had a moderately high level of ethnocentrism (Makanyeza & du Toit, 2016) as had consumers in South Africa (Pentz, 2011). Different from the previous studies that were not product specific, these two studies in Zimbabwe and South Africa were more focused to specific products of interest (poultry products and Chinese clothing respectively).

5.0 REASONS FOR LOW LEVELS OF CONSUMER ANIMOSITY IN AFRICA

This paper submits that there are likely to be lower levels of consumer animosity in Africa as compared to countries in Asia, North America and Europe. Various lessons are advanced in support of this:

5.1 *Level of Economic Development and production capacity in Africa*

Due to the level of economic development, most African countries lack the capacity to manufacture most of the goods that they may require. As such, they have to depend on imports from foreign countries. The limited domestic choice in terms of products leaves them with minimal alternatives but to depend on foreign products, sometimes from a country with an unfavorable past relationship. The existence of a larger subsistence economy in most African countries have resulted in exporting raw materials for conversion in other countries. Interestingly, the same is exported back as finished product at even a higher price but due to lack of choice the products end being purchased.

5.2 *Pricing Issue*

Related to the level of economic development, is the ability or inability to afford products. Pricing influences consumer choice. As a result, most African consumers would make a choice depending on whether a product price is high or not. The influence of pricing makes other factors including the country of origin become secondary. Research has also found that when the product is affordable, consumers would still buy despite the misgivings they may have about the country of origin. It has also been argued that when a consumer has an issue with a country they may rationalize their decision by avoiding to relate the country with the product of purchase.

Research has also found that consumers make trade-offs between animosity and price. Some consumers are willing to pay a higher price to avoid products from a high animosity country, while others are more price sensitive and discounted the country of origin information. Consumers' trade-off between animosity and price allows firms from a less favorable country to enter a consumer's final decision set.

5.3 *Non Existence of War other than Colonization*

Unlike most of the countries in that have expressed a high level of consumer animosity as a result of a past war, few African countries have been to war with each other. Even where there has been war, the warring parties have only prevented entry of products from the warring country by creating trade barrier like taxation, embargo and even border closures. Whereas the leadership of the warring countries may have antagonistic tendencies towards the opposing side, the citizens may have different tendencies and might therefore not develop animosity towards products from the other country. Even though most African countries were colonized by some Western Nations, a level of dependence and historical ties exist with the colonial masters as opposed to hatred towards them. The colonial masters having developed economies aid their former colonies. Citizens of colonized countries have some positive attitudes towards products from their colonizers and would in most cases prefer them as compared to domestic products.

5.4 Product Quality

In countries where domestic products are perceived to have low levels of quality, foreign made products maybe preferred. In Africa, the ability to afford and use products from certain countries is considered a mark of success and an elevated social status. In this regard, even in situations where there could be a reason for animosity toward a specific country, the same maybe diluted by the preference of products perceived to be of a higher quality from such a country. Previous studies on foreign products have found that judgments of product quality have an impact on consumer animosity. In cases of low levels of consumer animosity, locals would have a preference for foreign products as opposed to the domestic products. This may indicate that consumers' product choice is influenced by other product attributes such as perceived quality.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper was focused on discussing the issue of consumer animosity and whether Africans exhibit animosity tendencies towards foreign products. An assumption has been made that there exist low levels of consumer animosity among Africans. This maybe just an assertion as there exists very few studies that have been conducted on the topic in Africa. It is therefore a call to researchers to extend this discussion by conducting cross countries studies on the existence or not of consumer animosity. Such studies should also focus on both economic and historical based animosity such as colonialism – do Africans harbor animosity towards the countries that colonized them? Do they have antagonistic feelings toward products from their past colonial masters? The studies should endeavor to identify specific products of interest to allow evaluation of the four assertions above indicating why there may be low levels of consumer animosity in Africa. Such should include the mediating factors of product price, product availability and product quality. A discourse on the African nature of consumer animosity will also address the paucity of studies in Africa regarding consumer behavior towards foreign made products and specifically consumer animosity.

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