



RESEARCH NOTE

Interplay of consumer animosity and product country image in consumers' purchase decisions

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Abstract

The literature has long acknowledged the impact of stereotypical associations with a product's country of origin (COO) on consumers' cognitive assessments of the product. However, consumers' emotional reactions to a product's COO can also influence their decisions. For example, the literature reports a monotonically negative relationship between consumer animosity (CA) and the purchase of products from an animosity-evoking country. The literature provides an incomplete picture though because it does not consider other factors that may transform this negative relationship. Drawing on theories of the interplay between affect and cognition in decision-making, this research investigates the nuanced interaction between CA and product country image (PCI). Using samples from the United States, China, Japan, and South Korea, we find that the monotonically negative impact of CA holds only when the target country's PCI is unfavorable. When PCI is favorable, we find an inverted U-shaped relationship between CA and purchase intentions – that is, CA has a positive effect on purchase intention as it increases from low to moderate levels and a negative effect as its magnitude escalates beyond a threshold. These findings offer new insights to address the complexity of market entry modes, segmentation, targeting, positioning, and communication decisions in international markets.

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INTRODUCTION

International marketers are confronted by unique challenges when positioning their products in a global marketplace because their products' country of origin (COO) may influence consumers' decision-making in various ways. On the one hand, product country image (PCI), defined as "the overall perception consumers form of products from a particular country, based on their prior perceptions of the country's production and marketing strengths and weaknesses" (Roth & Romeo, 1992: 480), may inform consumers' decision-making by influencing their cognitive assessments¹ of the product's innovativeness, workmanship, reliability, and value (Samiee, 1994). On the other hand, consumer animosity



(CA), defined as “the remnants of antipathy related to previous or ongoing military, political, or economic events” (Klein, Ettenson, & Morris, 1998: 90), may serve as affective input² that discourages consumers from purchasing a country’s products. Previous studies have confirmed the influence of both PCI and CA on consumer decision-making, suggesting that international marketers incorporate both COO elements in their global strategies (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). However, much of the research on PCI and CA has examined their influence in isolation, rather than exploring how they interact with each other, despite literature in psychology and other fields long acknowledging that affect and cognition interact to influence decision-making (e.g., Lerner, Li, Valdesolo, & Kassam, 2015). In particular, psychologists have found that affect shapes decisions by influencing both the content and depth of cognitive thoughts (Keltner & Lerner, 2010; Schwarz & Bless, 1991). In the international marketing context, this interaction between affect and cognition suggests that CA influences the extent to which consumers consider PCI in their decision-making.³ Therefore, a contingent framework of the interplay of CA and PCI on foreign consumers’ decision-making is warranted.

Drawing on research propositions and findings on the interplay of affect and cognition (e.g., Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999; Lerner et al., 2015; Loewenstein, 1996; Loewenstein & Lerner, 2003), we propose and find that the *monotonically* negative impact of CA holds *only* when the target country’s PCI is unfavorable. When PCI is favorable, we find an inverted U-shaped relationship between CA and purchase intention – that is, CA has a positive effect on purchase intention as it increases from low to moderate levels and a negative effect as its magnitude escalates beyond a threshold.

From a theoretical perspective, our research illustrates that CA’s influence on purchase attention is not necessarily monotonically negative, highlighting the importance of studying the interplay between affect and cognition in international marketplaces. Our contingent framework offers a new perspective on the counterintuitive observations in international marketplaces. For example, from 2019 to 2020, Chinese cellphone brands such as Xiaomi enjoyed a 36.9% increase in sales, while anti-China sentiment in India surged following a violent border clash between India and China (Aditya, 2020). Arguably, Chinese products enjoy a favorable PCI (e.g., functionality, value) among

Indian consumers (Srivastava, 2014), which might have transformed the effect of CA on purchase intentions. From a practical perspective, understanding the nuanced interplay of PCI and CA can help international marketers incorporate PCI and CA *simultaneously* into their international marketing strategies.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

CA’s Impacts

Klein et al. (1998) find that CA results in reduced purchase intentions because consumers focus on their animosity and ignore the merits of products from a country toward which they feel animosity. Research has also explored various moderators that may mitigate the negative impact of CA on purchase intention, including product importance and necessity (Bahae & Pisani, 2009), product COO familiarity (Jiménez & San Martín, 2010), cultural similarity (Ma, Wang, & Hao, 2012), and target country competitiveness (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2004). However, most studies tend to assume a *monotonically negative* main effect of CA on purchase intention and explore factors that alter only the *magnitude* of the effect. By contrast, our study explores the possibility that some contextual factors can transform the *direction* of CA’s effect on consumers’ purchase decisions.

PCI’s Impacts

Although consumers are knowledgeable about the “correct” COO to varying extents (e.g., Samiee, Shimp, & Sharma, 2005), a large body of research indicates that consumers often use PCI information to evaluate products’ quality, risk, and value when making purchase decisions (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). We conceptualize PCI as a cognitive COO cue that captures consumer beliefs and judgments about products identified with a specific country. PCI differs in favorability along various dimensions, including workmanship, technology, design, and reliability, which in turn influence purchase intentions (Pappu, Quester, & Cooksey, 2007).

Interplay of Cognition and Emotion in Decision-making

Three streams of research on the interplay of affect and cognition are particularly relevant to the current research. First, dual-process theory maintains that “a person’s emotional state can influence



various aspects of information processing including encoding and retrieval of information, different strategies used to process information, evaluations and judgments, and creative thinking” (Bagozzi et al., 1999: 195). In particular, individuals experiencing positive (or benign) affect tend to engage less in systematic processing, while those in a negative emotional state are motivated to process information systematically (Schwarz & Clore, 1983).

Second, the influence of affect on decision-making also depends critically on the intensity of the affect (Loewenstein, 1996). An intensified affect can “overwhelm cognitive processing and deliberative decision-making altogether” (Loewenstein & Lerner, 2003: 627). Specially, “emotional reaction is greatly enhanced, interfering with cognition and making a passionate response salient” (Luo & Yu, 2015: 2).

Third, when confronted with inconsistent cognitions and emotions, individuals are motivated to resolve the “dissonance” to restore consistency. Mandler (1982) and Meyers-Levy and Tybout (1989) both report that moderate incongruity can be arousing, thus motivating consumers to be more engaged in reconstructing the existing schema or forming a new schema.

Non-conflicting Scenario: PCI is Unfavorable

When PCI is unfavorable and CA is present, consumers will not experience dissonance, because both cognitive and affective elements of their purchase decision are consistently negative. Therefore, consumers’ arousal level will be low, leading to a more affective mode of decision-making and little effort in cognitive processing. In addition, both cognitive and emotional cues produce the same result – reduced purchase intention. Thus, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 1: When PCI is unfavorable, the relationship between CA toward a foreign country and the intention to purchase products from that country is monotonically negative.

Conflicting Scenario: PCI is Favorable

Consumers’ decision-making is more complex when PCI is favorable and CA is present. Therefore, we examine the interplay between CA and PCI and its influence on purchase intention when CA is at a low, moderate, and high level, respectively.

Low CA. From a dual-process perspective, when CA is low, emotional processes are preferable to

cognitive ones. According to Zajonc (e.g., Zajonc, 1980; Zajonc & Markus, 1985), emotion can grow in the absence of an effortful interpretative process. In a purchase decision setting, this means that consumers tend to rely more on affective cues such as CA than on the more deliberative and, thus, more taxing cognitive cues such as PCI. Similarly, from an arousal perspective, consumers with low levels of CA are likely to experience a low degree of cognitive dissonance and arousal and thus are less motivated to elaborate on favorable PCI in depth. Therefore, at low levels of CA, favorable PCI, though containing positive information, is not fully factored into consumers’ decision-making to yield a positive effect on purchase intention. Note that we are not claiming that PCI imposes no influence on purchase intention; instead, we maintain that when CA is low, PCI’s positive influence is weaker than when CA is at a moderate level.

Moderate CA. When CA increases to a moderate level, both the increased negative emotional state (from the dual-process perspective) and the enhanced arousal associated with the conflict between CA and the favorable PCI (from the arousal perspective) lead to greater cognitive processing of PCI. Favorable PCI, therefore, becomes more salient in the decision process (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), leading to a stronger purchase intention (see “Elaboration effect” in Figure 1). We further argue that as CA escalates from a low to moderate level, the decrease in purchase intention due to a higher CA (see “Elimination effect” in Figure 1) is more than compensated for the elaboration effect. This is because a low to moderate level of CA still allows other factors, such as PCI, to rise as influencers on purchase intention, while a high level of CA would overshadow the impact of other

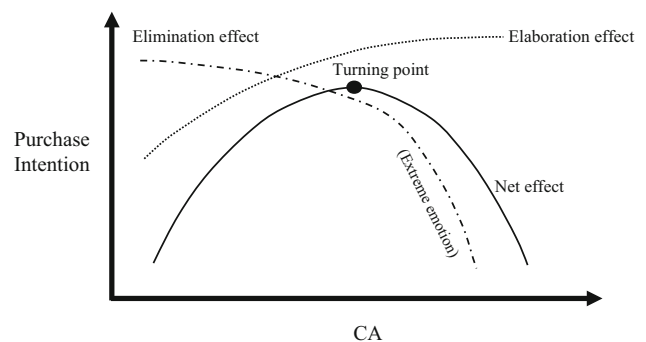


Figure 1 Theoretical framework: inverted U-shaped relationship between CA and purchase intention when PCI is favorable.



factors. Indeed, Cui, Wajda, and Hu (2012) report a stronger role of CA in determining consumers' willingness to buy products from high-level-animosity countries than from low-level-animosity countries. Thus, with favorable PCI, *net* purchase intention should be higher when CA is at a moderate than a low level (see "Net effect" in Figure 1).

High CA. When CA escalates to a high level, consumers resort to "extreme" emotional responses, with a reduction in cognitive processing that results in a disregard of the favorable PCI information (Klein et al., 1998) and emotional exaggeration involving a "revenge" tendency, causing a sharp drop in purchase intention (see the *Extreme Emotion* in Figure 1). Taking these arguments together, we posit the following:

Hypothesis 2: When PCI is favorable, the relationship between CA toward a foreign country and the intention to purchase products from that country has an inverted U-shape.

We further predict that as the favorability of PCI increases, it positively moderates the turning point (see *Turning Point* in Figure 1) of the inverted U-shaped relationship between CA and purchase intention. Because the two opposing forces – the systematic process of favorable PCI in decision-making (i.e., the elaboration effect) and the elimination effect of CA – give rise to the inverted U-shaped relationship, more favorable PCI will strengthen the elaboration effect and thus shift the inverted U-shaped curve rightward along the axis of CA. Thus:

Hypothesis 3: When PCI is favorable, the turning point of the inverted U-shaped relationship between CA and purchase intention will occur at a higher level of CA as PCI becomes more favorable.

RESEARCH CONTEXT AND DATA COLLECTION

To enhance our study's external validity, we examine products from multiple countries with varying country images in the global market, as well as consumers with varying levels of CA toward those countries. We chose national samples from the United States, China, Japan, and South Korea because cultural, economic, political, and historical interactions among these countries are characterized by both cooperative activities and significant disputes and conflicts, thus ensuring substantial

and meaningful variance in CA and PCI. Furthermore, prior research has well documented the varied PCI of these countries (e.g., Dinner, Kushwaha, & Steenkamp, 2019).

Constructs and Measures

We surveyed 2044 randomly selected consumers who reported their attitudes, beliefs, and behavioral intentions toward products from the other three countries (see Web Appendix A for survey design details). We adapted all constructs used in this study from the literature. Web Appendix B1 lists the scales measuring the constructs central to the study, including PCI, CA, purchase intention, and key covariates. Web Appendix B2 summarizes the assessments of measurement reliability, validity, and invariance and common method variance, providing supportive evidence for measurement quality.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSES AND RESULTS

To ensure the internal validity and robustness of our findings, we tested our hypotheses in three empirical analyses: (1) *market-specific analyses*, to understand how CA and PCI influence foreign product purchase intention of consumers from one specific *market* (i.e., American, Chinese, Japanese, or South Korean *market*); (2) *COO-specific analyses*, to investigate the same question but with a focus on the purchase intention of products from a specific *COO* (i.e., American, Chinese, Japanese, or South Korean *products*); and (3) *bilateral-tie-specific analyses*, to examine the question in each bilateral tie between the four markets and COOs (e.g., American consumers evaluating Japanese products). In each setting, we also ran models on both split and full samples to cross-validate our findings (Haans, Pieters, & He, 2016). The split-sample analysis enables a direct comparison of the different types of relationships between CA and purchase intention contingent on the favorability of PCI, serving as a direct test for Hypotheses 1 and 2. Full-sample analysis generates an analytical solution of the moderation effect of PCI on the relationship, functioning as a solid test for Hypothesis 3.

Market-specific Analyses

Using the U.S. sample as an example, we first split the data collected from American consumers by the median value⁴ of PCI and test the relationship between CA and purchase intention using a



quadratic-effect model (Equation 1). By comparing the results in high- and low-PCI groups, we can identify how the relationship varies with the level of PCI. Columns 1 and 2 in Table 1 summarize the results.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Purchase intention} = & \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 \text{CA} + \alpha_2 \text{CA}^2 \\ & + \alpha_3 \text{CET} + \alpha_4 \text{National pride} \\ & + \alpha_5 \text{Prejudice socialization} \\ & + \alpha_6 \text{Age} + \alpha_7 \text{Gender} + \alpha_8 \text{COO} \\ & + \epsilon_1; \epsilon_1 \in N(0, \sigma_1^2). \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

For the low-PCI group, the coefficients of CA ($\beta = 0.435$, $p = 0.086$) and CA^2 ($\beta = -0.125$, $p = 0.001$) indicate a seemingly inverted U curve; however, the turning point of the curve is not different from the minimum value of CA ($p = 0.330$); thus, the relationship between CA and purchase intention

remains monotonically negative, in support of Hypothesis 1. By contrast, we find an inverted U-shaped relationship between CA and purchase intention for the high-PCI group: CA ($\beta = 1.894$, $p = 0.000$) is significantly positive, while CA^2 ($\beta = -0.330$, $p = 0.000$) is significantly negative, confirming Hypothesis 2 and showing that the effect of CA on purchase intention is positive until the value of CA reaches a turning point ($\text{CA}^* = \frac{-1.894}{-2 \times (-0.33)} = 2.870$, $p = 0.000$). Panel a of Figure 2 presents the two types of relationships.

The split-sample analyses directly reveal the different types of relationships between CA and purchase intention in favorable versus unfavorable PCI groups, confirming Hypotheses 1 and 2. Yet the full-sample analyses enable us to investigate how PCI transforms the relationship in a *continuous* way and to assess the magnitude and significance of the moderation effect. Following Haans et al. (2016) and Aiken, West, and Reno (1991), our full-sample

Table 1 Market-specific analysis: American market

	Dependent variable: purchase intention		
	Quadratic effect (low-PCI)	Quadratic effect (high-PCI)	Moderated quadratic (full sample)
Animosity	0.435 (0.252) $p = 0.086$	1.894 (0.181) $p = 0.000$	- 2.795 (0.436) $p = 0.000$
PCI			- 1.110 (0.163) $p = 0.000$
Animosity ²	- 0.125 (0.035) $p = 0.001$	- 0.330 (0.023) $p = 0.000$	0.318 (0.061) $p = 0.000$
Animosity \times PCI			0.938 (0.097) $p = 0.000$
Animosity ² \times PCI			- 0.128 (0.013) $p = 0.000$
Consumer ethnocentrism	- 0.645 (0.066) $p = 0.000$	- 0.565 (0.045) $p = 0.000$	- 0.605 (0.036) $p = 0.000$
National pride	- 0.051 (0.042) $p = 0.229$	0.014 (0.037) $p = 0.710$	- 0.011 (0.026) $p = 0.674$
Prejudice socialization	0.208 (0.042) $p = 0.000$	0.276 (0.042) $p = 0.000$	0.244 (0.028) $p = 0.000$
Age	- 0.014 (0.045) $p = 0.748$	- 0.078 (0.036) $p = 0.031$	- 0.030 (0.027) $p = 0.261$
Gender: Female	- 0.100 (0.089) $p = 0.263$	- 0.112 (0.073) $p = 0.128$	- 0.112 (0.054) $p = 0.038$
COO: Japan	0.117 (0.115) $p = 0.311$	0.071 (0.084) $p = 0.397$	0.019 (0.065) $p = 0.771$
COO: South Korea	0.150 (0.100) $p = 0.135$	0.114 (0.097) $p = 0.241$	0.127 (0.065) $p = 0.054$
Constant	5.754 (0.549) $p = 0.000$	3.301 (0.456) $p = 0.000$	9.018 (0.749) $p = 0.000$
Observations	474	474	947
Adjusted R ²	0.433	0.749	0.681
F-statistic	41.135 ($df = 9; 464$)	158.093 ($df = 9; 464$)	169.308 ($df = 12; 934$)

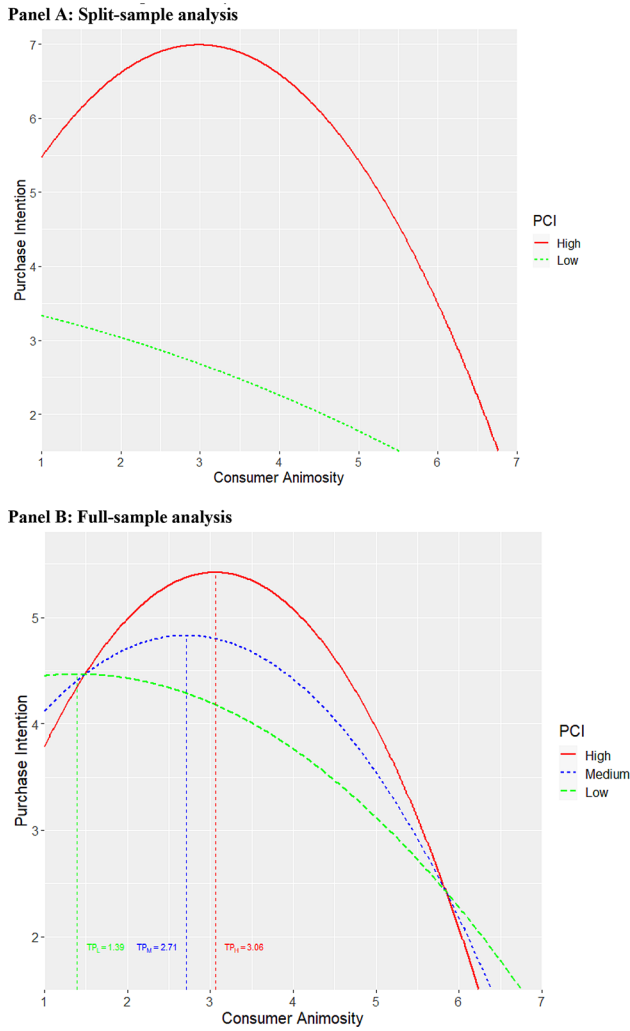


Figure 2 Market-specific analysis: American market. **a** Split-sample analysis. **b** Full-sample analysis.

analyses employ a moderated-quadratic model (Equation 2), in which PCI moderates both the linear and quadratic effects of CA. Furthermore, we can derive the turning point of the inverted U-shaped relationship (i.e., CA^* in Equation 3) and assess how this point shifts with the change in PCI (i.e., Equation 4) to test of Hypothesis 3.

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Purchaseintention} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 CA + \beta_2 CA^2 + \beta_3 PCI \\
 & + \beta_4 CA * PCI + \beta_5 CA^2 * PCI \\
 & + \beta_6 CET + \beta_7 Nationalpride \\
 & + \beta_8 Prejudicesocialization \\
 & + \beta_9 Age + \beta_{10} Gender + \beta_{11} COO \\
 & + \epsilon_2; \epsilon_2 \in N(0, \sigma_2^2).
 \end{aligned}
 \tag{2}$$

Column 3 in Table 1 reports the results of the full-sample analyses. The moderated-quadratic model further confirms an inverted-U shaped relationship between CA and purchase intention when PCI is favorable and, more importantly, indicates that this relationship is positively moderated by PCI; that is, the turning point of the curve corresponds to a higher value of CA as PCI increases. Specifically, we use the mean value of PCI and one standard deviation below and above the mean value as the medium, low, and high conditions of PCI.⁵

$$CA^* = \frac{-\beta_1 - \beta_4 * PCI}{2\beta_2 + 2\beta_5 * PCI}. \tag{3}$$

$$\frac{d(CA^*)}{d(PCI)} = \frac{\beta_1\beta_5 - \beta_2 * \beta_4}{2(\beta_2 + \beta_5 * PCI)^2}. \tag{4}$$

When PCI is at a low level, the turning point of CA (CA^*) is 1.386 ($p = 0.544$), which is not significantly different from 1; thus, only the descending half of the curve manifests in the meaningful range of CA (i.e., 1–7), corresponding to a monotonically negative relationship between CA and purchase intention and confirming Hypothesis 1 (see Panel b of Figure 2). As PCI increases to medium and high levels, the turning point shifts to the right to 2.705 ($p = 0.000$) and 3.057 ($p = 0.000$), respectively. The corresponding relationships between CA and purchase intention become inverted U shaped, consistent with Hypothesis 2. The marginal effect tests also confirm the positive shift in effect of PCI on the inverted U-shaped relationship between CA and purchase intention – 0.501 ($p = 0.000$) at a medium PCI level and 0.201 ($p = 0.000$) at a high PCI level – suggesting that a one-unit increase in PCI leads to 0.501 and 0.201 unit of rightward shift, respectively, of the inverted U-shaped curve along CA. Thus, Hypothesis 3 is confirmed. Web Appendices C1–C3 provide details on analyses of other national samples.

Furthermore, COO-specific and bilateral-tie-specific analyses support our hypotheses as well; we report the results in Web Appendices D1, D2, E1, and E2. We also test our hypotheses with product ownership, instead of purchase intention, as the dependent variable and with an experiment in which we manipulated participants' CA; both analyses again find supportive evidence for our hypotheses (see Web Appendix F and G for details). In summary, all the analyses lead us to conclude



that the contingent nature of the relationship between CA and purchase intention is not only evident but also robust across various markets, COOs, and their combinations.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical Contributions

Prior research has mostly found a monotonically negative relationship between CA and purchase intention, though it recognizes that the impact may vary. To our knowledge, no studies have examined the possibility that the very nature, rather than just magnitude, of the relationship between CA and purchase intention varies by context. We posit and confirm that the monotonically negative impact of CA on purchase intention occurs *only* when a target country's PCI is unfavorable; by contrast, an inverted U-shaped relationship exists when the target country's PCI is favorable. We also demonstrate that the turning point at which the impact of CA on foreign purchase intention shifts from positive to negative moves to the *right* as the favorability of PCI increases. Our theoretical framework highlights the importance of examining the interplay of cognitive and affective factors in international marketplaces.

Managerial Implications

Prior research has made various recommendations for international marketers to incorporate PCI or CA into their strategies for entering international markets and brand communications. Web Appendix H summarizes a subset of relevant known recommendations from the literature and offers a set of nuanced suggestions derived from our findings. We elaborate on a few managerial suggestions from the list.

First, given the inverted U-shaped relationship between CA and purchase intention when PCI is favorable, brands associated with a COO denoting more favorability might have a unique opportunity to work with a *subset of consumers* whose CA level is "just right," meaning a moderate CA. For example, according to Japan National Tourism Organization, China has topped all other countries as a source of tourists to Japan in recent years, despite the frequent CA-driven tensions between Japan and China resulting in sales drops in Japanese brands such as Toyota and Honda (Luo & Zhou, 2020). Among other contributing factors, Japan has succeeded in attracting a high number of young

tourists; for example, 54% of Chinese tourists to Japan were in their 20s and 30s, in comparison with the same age group's 35% share in all outbound tourists in 2018 (Wang, 2020). Note that, according to our data from China, these younger Chinese tourists hold a moderate level of animosity toward Japan compared with the high level held by elderly tourists ($M_{CA} = 4.273$ for age 18–30; $M_{CA} = 4.745$ for age above 30; $t(338.010) = -3.883$, $p = 0.000$), while both age groups share similar favorable PCI ($M_{PCI} = 5.140$ for age 18–30; $M_{PCI} = 5.113$ for age above 30; $t(370.66) = 0.254$, $p = 0.801$).

Second, international marketers should invest in or downplay PCI in their global marketing practices in accordance with changes in CA in different markets. Indeed, our study shows that under high levels of CA, even a favorable PCI is unlikely to completely counteract the negative effect of CA. International marketers need to localize products and re-brand through mergers and acquisitions or other low-profile entry modes if they deem entering such high-CA target markets desirable. Cosmax, a Korean cosmetics company, presents a good example; while not possessing its own brands, Cosmax develops and manufactures cosmetics products in multiple countries, including China. Cosmax's business in China was relatively unaffected when increased animosity led Chinese consumers to boycott South Korean products in the aftermath of the THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) deployment in South Korea in 2017 (Chosun Biz, 2017) partly because of its low-profile entry strategy.

Our empirical findings also highlight the importance of simultaneously monitoring both PCI and CA and their interaction in target markets. Web Appendix I lists several tools to help international marketers more precisely assess the levels and dynamics of PCI and CA through secondary statistics, surveys, and text-mining-based monitoring.

Limitations and Future Research

As our study is the first to examine the non-monotonic relationship between CA and purchase intention that occurs under differing levels of PCI, its findings should be taken as suggestive rather than conclusive. We also acknowledge several other limitations that future research might address. First, we rely heavily on survey methods. We recommend that future research employ more experimental studies to verify the underlying mechanism producing the interaction we observed (e.g., checking varying levels of cognitive



elaboration at different levels of CA while PCI is favorable). Second, we did not differentiate consumers by their knowledge of the COO and other product characteristics. Researchers have noted that the influence of COO “pertains only to the segment that seeks or uses these cues” (Samiee, 1994: 586) and called for investigation into whether, when, and under what conditions COO influences consumer behavior (Samiee, 2010). In addition, consumers’ individual characteristics, such as the need for cognition, need for affect, and materialism, might further moderate the interplay of CA and PCI. Finally, we did not examine the effect of product categories. Differential effects of COO based on product category have been widely discussed (e.g., Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2004; Roth & Romeo, 1992). Future research could examine such category effects.

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NOTES

¹PCI may also reflect a country’s brand image and thereby have symbolic value and affective elements (e.g., feeling a fit with one’s lifestyle). However, for the purposes of this research, we view PCI as entirely cognitive.

²Although the appraisal theory of emotions suggests that cognitive associations such as beliefs about a country can influence the interpretation of an experienced emotion, in our research we conceptualize CA as an entirely affective factor.

³We also split the data using the mean value and other quantiles of PCI; the results are qualitatively the same.

⁴We are not claiming that CA influences consumers’ PCI perception; instead, we focus on how CA and PCI interact with each other in influencing purchase intentions.

⁵We also set different PCI levels using the median value of PCI; the results are qualitatively the same.



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