Jeongsoo Park, Haithem Zourrig* and Kamel El Hedhli

The Effects of Country-Image and Animosity on Asian Consumers' Responses to Foreign Brands

Abstract: This study investigates the effects of country image and animosity on brand quality evaluation and purchasing intention among Asian consumers. Data was collected from Chinese (n = 540) and South Korean (n = 360) consumers. Two brands Sony and Dell, originating from countries-target of animosity, respectively Japan and the US, were designated as foreign brands. The model was empirically tested with structural equation modeling. The results highlight the key role of the country image-brand quality association to leverage the purchase intention, in a context of animosity. Although the country image of both US and Japan is negatively affected by Chinese and South Korean animosities, it would still impact positively the evaluation of the quality of their respective brands, which would, in turn, increase the purchase intention. In particular, the results show that Japan's country image would have an indirect (i.e. through the brand quality path) and direct effects on the purchase intention, however, "the US country image has only an indirect effect on the purchase intention". Herein, Chinese and South Korean consumers would not buy US brands per se unless the country's image relates to the argument of brand quality.

Keywords: brand quality, consumer animosity, country image, purchase intention

1 Introduction

Markets' globalization creates both opportunities and challenges for global brands entering the emerging markets. While many consumers in emerging markets admire the prestigious image of global brands (Xie, Batra, and Peng 2015), still other consumers resist brands originating from developed markets (Sharma et al. 2018).

*Corresponding author: Haithem Zourrig, Kent State University at Stark, Canton 44720-7548, OH, USA, E-mail: hzourrig@kent.edu
Jeongsoo Park, Komazawa University, Setagaya-ku, Tokyo, Japan, E-mail: park@komazawa-u.ac.jp
Kamel El Hedhli, Qatar University, Doha, Ad Dawhah, Qatar, E-mail: khedhli@qu.edu.qa

This is especially true in emerging markets like South Korea and China, where over the history, political crises and economic conflicts with Japan and the US have triggered consumers' feelings of resentment and antipathy towards these countries ("Ang et al. 2004; Klein, Ettenson, and Morris 1998"). Recent reports still point to the pervasiveness of hostility towards Japan among Chinese and South Koreans. For instance, the 2019 Japan-China public opinion poll reveals that nearly 40% of South Koreans view Japan as a military threat, just after North Korea. Likewise, 52.7% of surveyed Chinese hold an unfavorable attitude towards Japan (Genron NPO 2019a). Furthermore, nearly half of the Chinese feel "no affinity towards either Japan or the US, while the percentage of Japanese and Chinese respondents who feel an affinity toward each other's country remained below 13% on both sides (Genron NPO 2019b).

In fact, both South Korea and China were occupied by Japan. The former felt greatly ashamed by the Korean sex slaves' abuse (so-called comfort women), "during the Second World War, while the latter has suffered under a brutal 14 years of partial occupation (i.e. Nanjing Massacre)".

Likewise, the relationships between the two countries and the US have been bitter. "China remains in disagreement with the US over territorial issues in the South China Sea", and in the eyes of many South Koreans, the US was responsible for blocking their country's "efforts to secure an emergency loan from Japan" (Ang et al. 2004).

Ultimately, resentment against these countries has triggered antipathy sentiments towards US and Japanese brands, among Chinese and South Korean consumers. For instance, Nike and McDonald's have been accused of insulting Chinese people in TV commercials (Ishii 2009; Li 2006; Sandoval 2004). In the same vein, for many years, Japanese cars like Toyota were banned in South Korea, and theatres, television, and radio stations cannot present Japanese movies or play Japanese songs (Ang et al. 2004).

Notwithstanding such animosities, the US and Japan remain strong bilateral trading partners to South Korea and China. The US is the number one trading partner of China, and Japan ranked third. Also, Japan is among the largest foreign investors in China and ranked second in 2018 (Canon Institute for Global Studies 2019). Likewise, in 2019, among the top five import origins of South Korea are US ($73.6 billion) and Japan ($28.4 billion) (Workman 2020).

Such a paradox would suggest that despite antipathy feelings, other factors could weigh against the negative effect of animosity on consumers' willingness to buy products originating from countries-target of animosity. In this vein, one could question whether the adversarial relationships and old enmities, still hold and if other factors such as country image, could weigh against consumers' adverse reactions toward products and brands from adversarial countries.

In fact, country image and consumer animosity are interrelated. Before revealing their animosity feelings, consumers first have to be conscious of the

county image and its representative products. If the country's image is positively perceived and has a strong reputation for producing that category of goods, it is very likely for the consumer not to activate feelings of anger, even if they exist (Hong and Kang 2006). Therefore, investigating the effects of country image and animosity on brand evaluation and purchasing intention is salient to understand whether managing a country image could resorb the effects of consumer animosity in emerging markets. Thus, it becomes relevant to examine the relationships between country image and animosity and their effects on perceived quality and purchasing intention of brands originating from target countries of hostility.

In fact, previous studies on animosity have some limitations. For instance, most of these studies have considered only one country as a potential enmity target, leaving other potentially important inter-country enmities unexplored. Besides, these studies have focused on animosity with limited or no attention to the country's overall image (see Klein, Ettenson, and Morris 1998). Hence, this study aims to address these gaps by focusing on two countries, US and Japan, selected here as animosity targets and other emerging countries, including China and South Korea, and most importantly, assessing the country image and animosity in a comparative context by including not only the "target" country but also a benchmark one. More specifically, this study examines consumers' perception from emerging markets (South Korea and China) of global brands originating from Japan and the US, in dyads such as South Korea-Japan, China-Japan, South Korea-US, and China-US.

The remainder of "this manuscript is organized as follows"; firstly, we present a framework with a set of hypotheses supported by a literature review and some theoretical underpinnings. Second, we test these hypotheses, and we report key findings. "Next, we discuss some theoretical and managerial implications". Finally, we conclude with highlighting some limitations while suggesting some research avenues.

2 Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

Drawing on animosity and country image concepts, we propose a model (see Figure 1) suggesting that, before deciding what foreign brands to purchase, consumers rely on the beliefs about the country, weighted against animosity feeling, as a surrogate to infer the brand quality. Such beliefs are, therefore, considered to influence consumer brand quality evaluation, leading to purchase intention.
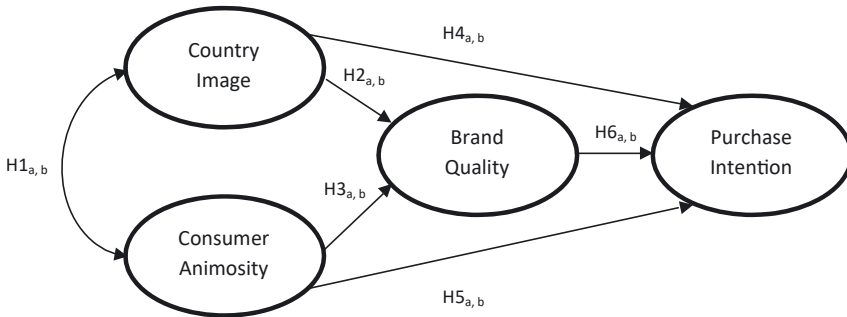
Figure 1: Animosity and country image model.

2.1 The Relationship Between Country Image and Consumer Animosity

The country image refers to "the total of all descriptive inferential and informational beliefs one has about a particular country" ("Martin and Eroglu 1993, p.193"). From this perspective, the country's image is a macro-level and multidimensional concept (Lopez and Balabanis 2019). The country's image differs from the country of origin (or made-in) that is a micro-level (product level) concept defined as "the picture, the reputation, and the stereotype that businessmen and consumers attach to products of a specific country" (Nagashima 1970, p.68).

Whereas, "animosity refers to intense feelings of dislike and enmity based on beliefs arising from previous or ongoing military, political, or economic actions between nations and people that are perceived as hostile, unwarranted, or violating social norms" (Leong et al. 2008, p.997). Besides, "consumer animosity is manifested through consumers' reluctance to purchase products originating from target countries of animosity" (Papadopoulos, Hamzaoui-Essoussi, and Rojas-Mendez 2011, p.3). Different types of animosity have been discussed in the literature. For example, Leong et al. (2008) distinguish between stable versus situational animosity. The former stems from "historical events and proofs of hostility, whereas the latter refers to the situational feelings of anger towards a country or a specific event" (Leong et al. 2008, p.998), and often consists of economic animosities resulting from unfair trade. Animosity has also been discussed in the literature as a different concept from ethnocentrism. In contrast with ethnocentrism, animosity feeling is triggered when consumers have to choose between foreign goods originating from hostile countries, rather than local versus foreign goods "(Fernández-Ferrín et al. 2015)."

Moreover, animosity is related to the country's image. Indeed, before revealing their animosity feelings, consumers first have to be conscious about the country's image and its representative products (i.e. consumers place classifications on Japan to be known for electronics, France for wine, etc.). Thus, if the country's image is positively perceived and has a strong reputation in producing that category of goods, it is very likely that the feeling of animosity will be reduced, even if it exists. From this H1a,b flow:

H1a: Chinese consumer's animosity is negatively interrelated to the country image of (a) Japan and (b) US (i.e. target countries of animosity)

H1b: South Korean consumer's animosity is negatively interrelated to the country image of (a) Japan and (b) US (i.e. target countries of animosity)

2.2 The Effects of Country Image and Consumer Animosity on Brand Quality Assessment

Consumers may use the country image cue to draw inferences about brand quality (Kim, Chun, and Ko 2017). "When consumers face a country name associated with a positive image, they will infer a positive attitude towards a product or a brand originating from that country. However, when the country image is bad, consumer evaluation of the product or the brand will be unfavorable" (Chowdhury and Ahmed 2009). "Previous research has shown that more favorable evaluations of products would tend to occur when the consumer perceives that the country's "strengths" correspond to the skills or conditions necessary to produce such products (Roth and Romeo 1992)". "For example, Yang, Ramsaran, and Wibowo (2018) found that Chinese consumers perceive Japan and the US among countries producing high-quality products". In the same vein, Lee et al. (2018) found that South Korean consumers are likely to evaluate US products with a high-quality lens. Further, Hong and Wyer (1990) found that a country's reputation influences the product's perception significantly more strongly than objective information about products specific attributes; "whenever country-of-origin is favorable, so is the product evaluation". Hence, we posit:

H2a: "The country image of (a) Japan, and (b) the US have a positive effect on the brand quality judgment, among Chinese consumers"

H2b: "The country image of (a) Japan, and (b) the US have a positive effect on the brand quality judgment, among South Korean consumers"

However, the literature on the effects of consumer animosity on perceived quality is inconclusive. For instance, Klein, Ettenson, and Morris (1998) have investigated Chinese consumers' animosity towards Japan and found that animosity didn't influence product quality judgments but did have a negative impact on purchase intention. Whereas, Huang, Phau, and Lin (2010) found a negative relationship between the product quality judgment and animosity. This finding has also been confirmed in subsequent studies (e.g. Shoham, Gavish, and Rose 2016).

These mixed findings could be explained by the differences in the nature of animosity considered in each study. In this vein, "Leong et al. (2008) argue that a situational animosity would have a direct negative influence on affective evaluations and cognitive judgments", while a stable animosity does not. Taken together, a situational animosity is likely to be driven by a specific event. It could impact the perception of product quality negatively. "In contrast, a stable animosity accumulates over a more extended time due to historical events between countries", which may not impact the product's perceived quality but rather reduce willingness to purchase.

In the Chinese context, consumers may harbor an economic animosity towards Japan as well as the US. For instance, Fong and Burton (2008) pointed to such animosity as many Japanese companies were accused of buying and burying Chinese brands to champion their own products. Likewise, the high competition between the US and China in many sectors has triggered Chinese consumers' animosity towards US brands (Ishii 2009). Therefore, one can expect Chinese consumers' animosity to have a negative effect on the evaluation of Japanese and US brands. From this H3a flows:

H3a: "Chinese consumers' animosity has a negative effect on quality judgments towards (a) Japanese brands (b) and US brands"

With regard to the South Korean context, Ang et al. (2004) found South Korean consumers to hold strong animosity towards the US; "such animosity would have a negative effect on the evaluation of the quality of US brands". Likewise, South Korean consumers were found to hold feelings of animosity towards Japan, which could result in a lack of appreciation of the quality of Japanese brands. From these H3b flows:

H3b: "South Korean's animosity has a negative effect on quality judgments towards (a) Japanese brands (b) and US brands".

2.3 The Effects of Consumer Animosity and Country Image on Purchase Intention

"Purchase intention refers to a consumer tendency to purchase the brand routinely in the future and resist switching to other brands" (Kumar, Lee, and Kim 2009). "Previous research suggests a positive association between the country's image and buying willingness" (Wang et al. 2012). Indeed, "consumers are willing to spend more for products originating from countries with a favorable image, associating the image with better quality and higher product reliability" (Licsandru, Szamosi, and Papadopoulos 2013, p. 261). From this H4a,b flow:

H4a: "The country image of the US has a positive effect on purchase intention among (a) South Koran consumers and (b) Chinese consumers".

H4b: "The country image of Japan has a positive effect on purchase intention among (a) South Koran consumers and (b) Chinese consumers".

Likewise, animosity was found to be correlated with the purchasing intention, impacting the buying decisions and product evaluations. "Consumers who hold animosity feelings refuse to buy products originating only from the country towards which they direct these feelings" (Licsandru, Szamosi, and Papadopoulos 2013, p.262). From this H5a,b flow:

H5a: "Chinese consumer's animosity towards (a) Japan and (b) the US has a negative effect on purchase intention of (respectively) Japanese and US brands".

H5b: "South Korean consumer's animosity towards (a) Japan and (b) the US has a negative effect on purchase intention of (respectively) Japanese and US brands".

2.4 The Effect of Brand Quality Assessment on Purchase Intention

Consumers are more likely to purchase a brand that is perceived to offer the right product quality or features. "Consumers associate brands with having symbolic meanings (e.g. wealth and status), which enhances the emotional reward such as a sense of pleasure and happiness upon using these brands" (Batra et al. 2000). "The perception of high quality may lead consumers to recognize the differentiation and superiority of a particular brand and thus encourage them to choose that brand over

competing brands" (Yoo, Donthu, and Lee 2000). "This positive relationship between quality and purchase intention should apply regardless of whether the product is a US brand or a Japanese brand". From this H6a,b flow:

H6a: "Quality judgments of (a) Japanese and (b) US brands have a positive effect on Chinese consumers' purchase intention".

H6b: "Quality judgments of (a) Japanese and (b) US brands have a positive effect on South Korean consumers' purchase intention".

3 Methodology

In this study, we focus on two foreign brands Dell and Sony. These brands have a strong association with their respective country image. Foreign brands are deemed suitable for this study as in contrast with ethnocentrism, the animosity feeling is triggered only in a context where consumers have to choose between foreign brands (originating from target countries of hostility) and not between local versus foreign brands. Moreover, Dell and Sony brands are key players of competition between the United States and Japan; two target countries of animosity in China and South Korea. More specifically, the study's model is tested with Dell and Sony brands, and across Chinese and South Korean groups of consumers.

3.1 Procedure

Data was collected using online surveys conducted by two research companies located in China and South Korea. The survey was written in English and then translated into Mandarin and Korean, by one of the authors and two bilingual graduate students who are native Chinese or Korean speakers (Brislin 1970). The survey was then pretested with small samples of Chinese (n = 20) and South Korean graduate students (n = 20). "Thereafter, items wording was refined, and the final version of the survey was translated and back-translated to English, following the same procedure used by Sun, D'Alessandro, and Johnson (2014)".

3.2 Sample Characteristics

Five hundred forty Chinese consumers and 360 Korean consumers were recruited to participate in this study. Data were collected using an online survey. The sample characteristics appear in Table1.

Table 1: Sample composition.

	China (n = 540)	%	South Korea (n = 360)	%
City	Beijing	33.33	Seoul	50.00
	Shanghai	33.33	Pusan	50.00
	Guangzhou	33.33		
Gender	Male	50.00	Male	50.00
	Female	50.00	Female	50.00
Age	18–25	19.63	18–25	25.00
	26–29	13.33	26–29	8.06
	30–35	24.26	30–35	23.89
	36–39	9.44	36–39	9.72
	40–45	22.96	40–45	23.33
	46–49	10.37	46–49	10.00
Education	High school or less	6.48	High school or less	27.78
	Some college	23.52	Some college	18.06
	College graduate	63.33	College graduate	48.61
	Graduate school	6.67	Graduate school	5.56
Annual household income	Under 65,000 RMB	7.59	Under 10,000,000 kR W	15.28
	65,000–199,999 RMB	39.26	10,000,000–29,999,999 kR W	27.78
	200,000–299,999 RMB	20.00	30,000,000–49,999,999 kR W	28.89
	300,000–449,999 RMB	15.74	50,000,000–69,999,999 kR W	15.00
	450,000–579,999 RMB	10.00	70,000,000–89,999,999 kR W	9.17
	580,000–699,999 RMB	4.07	90,000,000 kR W or over	3.89
	700,000 RMB or over	3.33		

3.3 Measures

"Attitude towards a specific country image was measured with four items adapted from Roth, Diamantopoulos, and Montesinos (2008)". Consumer animosity was measured with four items, the same for brand quality; all were adapted from Klein (2002). Purchase Intention was measured with two items adapted from Coyle and Thorson (2001). "All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree)". Table 2 shows the factor loadings and Cronbach's alphas of all scales (above 0.70, showing acceptable internal consistency levels across samples).

Table 2: Configural Invariance test: factor loadings for each construct across cultures.

Scale items	Factor loadings	
	China	South Korea
Country image four items (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)		
– In general, Japanese (Americans) are well educated	0.679	0.705
	(0.698)	(0.682)
– In general Japanese (Americans) are hardworking people	0.732	0.822
	(0.539)	(0.624)
– In general, Japanese (Americans) have higher standards of living	0.734	0.721
	(0.683)	(0.726)
– In general Japanese (Americans) have outstanding technical skills	0.810	0.709
	(0.608)	(0.666)
Cronbach's alpha	0.827	0.827
	(0.718)	(0.768)
Consumer animosity four items (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)		
– I dislike the Japanese (Americans)	0.893	0.845
	(0.846)	(0.841)
– I feel angry toward Japan (US)	0.861	0.789
	(824)	(0.837)
– I like Japan (US) (reversed)	0.845	0.700
	(0.708)	(0.593)
– I do not like Japan (US)	0.916	0.902
	(0.822)	(0.750)
Cronbach's alpha	0.931	0.880
	(0.876)	(0.843)
Brand quality four items (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)		
– Japanese (American) brands are carefully produced and have fine workmanship	0.835	0.868
	(0.826)	(0.859)
– Japanese (American) brands show a very high degree of techno-logical advancement	0.826	0.874
	(0.820)	(0.844)
– Japanese (American) brands usually show a very clever use of colors and design	0.817	0.741
	(0.762)	(0.649)
– Japanese (American) brands are usually quite reliable and seem to last the desired length of time.	0.807	0.792
	(0.776)	(0.706)
Cronbach's alpha	0.897	0.889
	(0.877)	(0.847)
Purchase intention two items (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)		
– It is very likely that I will buy Japanese (American) brands.	0.701	0.576
	(0.644)	(0.440)
– It is very likely that I will not buy Japanese (American) brands (reversed).	0.689	0.565
	(0.543)	(0.429)

Table 2: (continued)

Scale items	Factor loadings	
	China	*South Korea*
Cronbach's alpha	0.861	0.758
	(0.754)	(0.641)

4 Results

The fit indices indicate that the proposed measurement models for all models fit the data well, as all indices are above acceptable thresholds (χ^2 (*df*) at $P < 0.05$ (Barrett 2007); AGFI > 0.90; GFI > 0.90 and RMSEA ≤ 0.08 (MacCallum, Browne, and Sugawara 1996)). Results of fit indices and all parameter estimates are reported in Table 3.

Table 3: Standardized estimates and Goodness-of-fit indicators for SEM.

	US brand (Dell)		Japanese brand (Sony)	
	China	**South Korea**	**China**	**South Korea**
	n = 540	**n = 360**	**n = 540**	**n = 360**
Hypothesized paths	**β (*t*-value)**	**β (*t*-value)**	**β (*t*-value)**	**β (*t*-value)**
Consumer animosity ←→ country image	−0.172* (−5.38)	−0.086* (−3.31)	−0.214* (−5.35)	−0.057* (−1.78)
Consumer animosity → brand quality	−0.123* (−3.97)	0.012 (0.29)	−0.125 (−4.17)	0.046 (1.12)
Consumer animosity → purchase intention	−0.096* (−2.74)	−0.070 (−1.49)	−0.285* (−9.50)	−0.231* (−6.42)
Country image → brand quality	0.419* (7.76)	0.176* (3.67)	0.659* (11.36)	0.477* (6.91)
Country image → purchase intention	0.034 (0.77)	0.021 (−0.42)	−0.395* (−6.37)	0.102* (1.79)
Brand quality → purchase intention	0.757* (13.28)	0.709* (7.54)	0.935* (13.55)	0.710* (10.14)
Goodness-of-fit indicators				
Chi-square (*df*)	314.80 (72)	229.13 (72)	418.98 (72)	285.12 (72)
GFI	0.925	0.918	0.905	0.893
AGFI	0.890	0.880	0.861	0.844
RMSEA	0.07	0.07	0.08	0.08

*$P < 0.05$ ($t = 1.65$ is used as the critical value).

4.1 Testing Chinese Consumers' Responses to Japanese Brands

"Chinese consumers' animosity toward Japan was found to be negatively interrelated to Japan's country image" (βH1a(Sony) = −0.214, P < 0.05). Hence, H1a is supported. The results also grant support to H2a, suggesting a positive influence of country image on the judgment of brand quality (βH2a(Sony) = 0.659, P < 0.05). Further, the effect of animosity on brand quality was negative and significant (βH3a (Sony) = −0.125, P < 0.05); thus, H3a is supported. The country image has a positive effect on purchase intention (βH4a(Sony) = 0.102). Therefore, H4a was supported. However, the effect of animosity on purchase intention was negative (βH5a (Sony) = −0.285, P < 0.05). Thus, H5a is supported. Finally, the effect of brand quality on purchase intention was positive and significant (βH6a (Sony) = 0.935, P < 0.05). Hence, H6a is supported.

4.2 Testing Chinese Consumers' Responses Towards US Brands

"When testing the model with the US brand, all hypothesized paths were found to be significant and in the expected direction, except for the effect of country image on purchase intention". Chinese consumers' animosity has a negative impact on the US country image (βH1a(DELL) = −0.172, P < 0.05) and the brand quality evaluation (βH3a(DELL) = −0.123, P < 0.05) and the purchase intention (βH5a(DELL) = −0.096, P < 0.05), while the country image has a positive impact on the judgment of brand quality(βH2a(DELL) = 0.419, P < 0.05) "which in turn has a positive effect on the purchase intention" (βH6a (DELL) = 0.757, P < 0.05). However, the effect of the country image on purchase intention that was not significant (βH4a(DELL) = 0.034, P < 0.05).

4.3 Testing South Korean Consumers' Responses Towards Japanese Brand

South Korean consumers' animosity toward Japan was found to be negatively interrelated to Japan's country image (βH1b (Sony) = −0.057, P < 0.05). However, Japan's country image was found to have a positive effect on the judgment of brand quality (βH2b (Sony) = 0.477), which in turn positively influences the purchase intention (βH6b (Sony) = 0.710). The effect of animosity on purchase intention was significant, as hypothesized in H4b (βH5b(Sony) = −0.231); however, the effect on

brand quality was not significant (βH3b(Sony) = −0.046). "The country image's effect on purchase intention was found to be significant (βH4b (Sony) = −0.102). Thus, H4b was supported. Further, the effect of brand quality on purchase intention was significant (βH6b (Sony) = 0.710)"; H6b was supported.

4.4 Testing South Korean Consumers' Responses Towards US Brands

South Korean Consumers' animosity toward the US was found to be negatively interrelated to US country image (βH1b(DELL) = −0.086) H1b is supported. Animosity has no effect on brand quality (βH3b(DELL) = −0.012) neither purchase intention (βH4b(DELL) = 0.070). "Likewise, the effect of country image on purchase intention was not significant" (βH5b(DELL) = −0.021). Hence, H3–5b were not supported. The US country image affects positively the brand quality (βH2b(DELL) = 0.176, $P < 0.05$) which in turns impacts positively the purchase intention (βH6b(DELL) = −0.709, $P < 0.05$). Therefore, H2b and H6b were supported.

5 Discussion

Findings from this study suggest that though the country's image of both US and Japan is negatively affected by Chinese and South Korean consumers' animosity, "the country's image would have a positive effect on the evaluation of their respective brands; more favorable evaluations of products would tend to occur when the consumer perceives that the country's strengths correspond to the skills or conditions necessary to produce such products" (Halkias, Davvetas, and Diamantopoulos 2016). In turn, a positive evaluation of these brands would positively influence the purchase intention; in other words, the country image-brand quality association would positively influence the willingness of Chinese and South Korean consumers to purchase the US and Japanese brands.

Furthermore, South Koreans seem to be reluctant to purchase Japanese brands because of their feelings of hostility towards Japan even they recognize the quality of Japanese brands (i.e. South Koreans consumers' animosity doesn't affect the evaluation of the Japanese brand quality). These results are consistent with other studies (e.g. "Ettenson and Klein 2005; Nakos and Hajidimitriou 2007"), suggesting that animosity does not appear to impact the judgment of the product quality. In this study, the effect of the quality of Japanese brands would circumvent the negative effect of animosity feeling on purchasing intention. However, in contrast with Ang et al. (2004) research pointing to a strong South Korean

animosity towards the US, in this study, no effects of animosity on purchase intention nor on the judgment of US brand quality were found among South Korean consumers. This result is consistent with earlier work by Klein (2002), pointing to no history of animosity between the US and South Korea, as such animosity could be situational and not stable and would recede over time.

Unlike South Korean animosity, Chinese consumers' animosity negatively affects the evaluations of US and Japanese brands. These results are also consistent with Ishii's (2009) study contending "that animosity affects both US and Japanese products' quality judgment, but contradicts the original work by Klein, Ettenson, and Morris (1998) reporting no effect of animosity on the quality judgment of Japanese brands". In fact, Ishii (2009) points to the strengthening nationalism to be behind such a changing effect of Chinese animosity towards US and Japanese brands.

Moreover, findings from this study suggest some differences in the effect of country image on purchase intention. While Japan's country image would have both a direct and indirect effects on the Chinese and South Koreans intention to purchase Japanese brands, "the US country image would only have an indirect effect on the purchase intention"; the US country's image has a positive effect on the brand quality evaluation which in turn affects positively the willingness to purchase US brands.

5.1 Theoretical Contribution and Managerial Implications

This study pertains to understand better the interrelationships between country image, animosity, brand quality, and willingness to purchase South Korean and Chinese consumers, bearing in mind their unique relationships with two countries target of animosity, namely the US and Japan. The study highlights the role of country image in mitigating consumer hostility and influencing consumers' evaluation of the brand quality, which in turn would boost the purchase intention. While Japan's country image would, directly and indirectly, affect purchase intention, the US country image has only an indirect effect on purchase intention. Chinese and South Korean consumers would not buy US brands per se unless the country's image relates to the argument of brand quality.

Notwithstanding the context of animosity, the country image of US and Japan would positively impact the perceived brand quality, which in turn could increase the purchase intention; marketers should capitalize on the positive association between the country image and brand quality (rather than the single country image) to increase the purchase intention. Although country affiliation could bring animosity, it could infer the positive attributes of a brand (e.g. quality). "When a country image is associated with a particular brand that has a positive perception of quality, a prude strategy would be to highlight the brand image. This could

prove useful, bearing in mind consumers tend to use brand perception as a halo to infer country image".

5.2 Implications for Practice

"Albeit, a country image building process is generally out of control of companies, decision-makers and policymakers need to grasp the critical role of the country's image, which could enhance the competitiveness of a nation". Indeed, "countries generate intangible assets in the minds of consumers, which can transfer to market share" (Wang et al. 2012, p. 1041). To improve the association between country image and brand quality evaluation, firms from the US and Japan would greatly benefit from further collaborative efforts between their government agencies and media communication companies toward enhancing the brand-country image association. For example, the US and Japan's trade offices eying emerging markets (e.g. China and South Korea) may work with media companies to set up promotional campaigns in foreign-language media, social media that would enhance the perception of the country image. "For instance, given that Chinese and South Koreans subconsciously perceive Japan as a creative and advanced country producing high-quality technical products" (Kang, Kim, and Lee 2018), Japanese companies may want to leverage Japan's image as a country with technological capabilities.

Results from this study also point to some changes in the effect of Chinese animosity. While the negative effect of animosity towards Japanese products on purchase intention still holds, since Klein, Ettenson, and Morris (1998) pioneer work, nowadays' Chinese animosity would have a significant and negative effect on Japanese products' quality judgment. The rise of Chinese nationalism seems to contribute to such an effect (Tian and Pasadeos 2012). Because animosity may strengthen or weaken over time, managers of US and Japanese brands must systematically reevaluate animosity and carefully consider its spillover effect on the evaluation of brand quality. "Chinese animosity toward a country may be toned down or pronounced, depending on whether they maintain a strong or weak relationship with that country" (Souiden, Ladhari, and Chang 2018).

5.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

While the current study offers some contributions to the literature, it comes with some limitations. Firstly, this study used a convenience sampling design. As a result, the representativeness of the Chinese and South Korean samples has been impeded, which could limit the generalizability of the findings. Secondly, because this research focuses only on one category of products, namely laptops, the findings

from this study have to be interpreted with caution. Indeed, the study findings could differ if the research had considered other categories of products. For instance, future studies could consider low involvement versus high involvement products.

Moreover, the current research uses cross-sectional data. Therefore, a longitudinal study is needed to investigate whether the South Korean and Chinese animosity toward the US and Japan is stable or changing over time. For instance, the current trade war between China and the United States could increase the feelings of hostility, and particularly the animosity toward US products (Ajami 2020). The US and Japanese firms targeting emerging Asian markets should systematically track the changes in consumer animosity. Doing so would help to adjust the positioning of their brands and their communication messages instantly, in accordance with the changes in the influencing roles of consumer animosity and country image in the region.

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