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# Explicit and implicit catalysts of consumer resistance: The effects of animosity, cultural salience and country-of-origin on subsequent choice

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## Abstract

This paper identifies conditions that activate animosity feelings and in turn affect global consumers' choices. Three experiments conducted in two countries test the effects of a movie's country-of-origin and consumers' levels of animosity on subsequent movie choices. Two catalysts of animosity are explored: an explicit scenario and an implicit cultural salience prompt. Cultural resistance emerges in the form of increased preference for domestic movies when animosity is activated and consumers are exposed to related country-of-origin information about a first movie. A similar pattern of cultural resistance appears when, instead of consciously activating animosity, cultural identity is made salient.

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This research draws from the extant consumer research to identify and experimentally test conditions that activate animosity feelings and in turn affect consumers' choices. It investigates the impact of several important factors on consumer resistance: country-of-origin (Bilkey & Nes, 1982; Gürhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 2000; Johansson, Douglas, & Nonaka, 1985), animosity (Klein, 2002; Klein, Ettenson, & Morris, 1998), and cultural salience (Aaker & Lee, 2001; Briley & Wyer, 2002). A series of experiments manipulating these factors sheds light on explicit and implicit drivers of consumer resistance and extends the current state of research in those three highly relevant areas of international business scholarship.

The research is conducted in the context of cultural industries, which are an important component of the international business environment as cultural products influence consumers' understanding of the world (Hesmondhalgh, 2002). Movies in particular have been recognized for their ability to disseminate a country's culture and values (Hofstede, 2001; Lull, 1995; Tambyah & Thompson, 1999) and to convey consumption habits and ideology (Holbrook & Grayson, 1986; Nowell-Smith & Ricci, 1998). The movie industry is especially significant to international business practitioners and research-

ers considering that the U.S. alone generated \$25.2 billion in revenues worldwide in 2004, including \$15.7 billion from international sales (MPAA, 2003). The U.S. is by far the largest exporter of movies and, in an era marked by strong anti-U.S. feelings, the interplay of animosity and consumption of cultural products is a relevant and important venue for research.

## 1. Processes of resistance

Previous research suggests that consumer resistance usually requires strong awareness or deep resentment (Ger & Belk, 1996). Yet, at the same time, some evidence suggests that consumers may be able to separate their feelings toward a nation from their purchasing behavior. This appears especially true in the global cultural industries. For instance, according to a recent PEW Research Center (2005) report, anti-Americanism is now at an all time high and yet, as global citizens reject the spread of American ideas and customs, the majority of respondents reported liking American cultural exports (i.e., movies, music and television programs). It thus appears that global consumers are able to disconnect their anti-U.S. feelings from their consumption of American cultural products. This research is interested in identifying the conditions under which resistance against foreign cultural products may be heightened. To do so, it builds upon existing country-of-origin research as well as two

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areas of research relevant to resistance: animosity and cultural salience.

### *1.1. Country-of-origin research*

Existing country-of-origin research has mainly focused on the effects of country-of-origin information or stereotypes on product evaluations and intentions to purchase (Bilkey & Nes, 1982; Gürhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 2000; Hong & Wyer, 1989; Johansson et al., 1985; Maheswaran, 1994; Peterson & Jolibert, 1995; Samiee, 1994). Country-of-origin is often viewed as a piece of information that helps consumers assess the quality/reliability of products from that country and subsequently affects purchase intentions (Peterson & Jolibert, 1995). A product's country-of-origin activates concepts about the country and the general quality of products originating from there (Hong & Wyer, 1989) and the psychological processes underlying these evaluations can be affected by consumer factors such as motivation – the personal relevance of the decision or product to evaluate – (Gürhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 2000) or product familiarity or experience (Maheswaran, 1994).

This research proposes that information about a product's country-of-origin (domestic vs. foreign) serves as a cue affecting consumers' future receptiveness or resistance to domestic versus foreign products. For instance, in the context of movie consumption, triggering the thought of a foreign movie in countries such as the U.S., where domestic movies dominate, may offset consumers' inherent bias against foreign movies (Schooler, 1971). However, triggering the thought of a domestic movie in countries where foreign movies dominate, may, conversely, remind consumers of local productions. This latter effect may be especially visible in markets where imported cultural materials are perceived as a challenge to local cultural diversity and uniqueness; in those cases, exposing consumers to movies from a country perceived as culturally invasive may activate resistance. This factor will thus be at the core of our research.

### *1.2. Explicit and implicit catalysts of resistance*

The underlying construct of consumer resistance against products from a particular country is animosity, which reflects the “remnants of antipathy related to previous or ongoing military, political, or economic events” (Klein et al., 1998, p. 90). Animosity can adversely impact the consumption of products from another country, regardless of judgments of product quality (Klein et al., 1998), a characteristic that distinguishes it from ethnocentrism (Shimp & Sharma, 1987), which also affects product judgments (Klein, 2002). Since the entertainment industry is dominated by U.S. productions, the construct of animosity is necessary to explain resistance mechanisms linked to high degrees of economic, political, and war animosity toward the U.S. Recent international tensions over the war in Iraq have increased anti-American sentiments and consumers' boycotting of U.S. products throughout the world (CNN, 2003; Economist, 2005). The same pattern was

also visible within the U.S. against countries that expressed disagreements with American policies.

There are a few gaps in existing animosity research which this research attempts to address. For one, effects have concentrated on consumer preferences or existing ownerships or choice likelihoods (Klein, 2002), not actual choice. This is a potentially important limitation given the extensive debate regarding whether consumers' stated preferences coincide with their subsequent behavior (see e.g., discussion in Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, pp. 168–192). A related area that remains open to investigation is that feelings of animosity may be latent and resistance due to animosity may occur through implicit as opposed to explicit means. Further, instead of measuring animosity, this research suggests that animosity may be subject to manipulation.

This research proposes and explores two factors that may serve as catalysts of animosity feelings and, in turn, may affect consumer behavior. The first is an explicit scenario designed to enhance or reduce animosity. Indeed, the possibility that media coverage of situations between two nations affect animosity – for example via exposure to different press coverage – has not been previously explored. The second is an implicit catalyst, cultural identity salience, which may also impact consumers' animosity (Aaker & Lee, 2001; Briley & Wyer, 2002). The consumer psychology literature suggests that calling people's attention to cultural identity is likely to affect how consumers respond to domestic or foreign products (Briley & Wyer, 2002; Druckman, 1994). Research has shown that calling people's attention to their own cultural identity induces feelings of allegiance to one's country and increases the tendencies to espouse values common in that culture (Briley & Wyer, 2002; Druckman, 1994). Thus, making one's own cultural identity salient could increase one's preference for products from their own country. Similarly, prompting another culture could impact resistance to foreign products but, unlike an explicit scenario designed to openly activate animosity, it might do so in a more implicit fashion. In particular, making salient a culture perceived as invasive might increase the threat of cultural incursions and render consumers more defensive and resistant to foreign products. Thus, cultural salience is likely to affect resistance processes by increasing the perceived threat of cultural invasion and activating a prevention-focus in the form of resistance to products from powerful competitors.

## **2. Research objectives and context**

To test the effects of animosity and cultural salience on consumers' reactions to domestic versus foreign products, this research focused on consumer movie choices. This extends country-of-origin and animosity research, which to date has been mainly confined to functional products, such as cars or appliances, in the realm of experiential products. The context is especially fitting given that the threat of worldwide domination by Hollywood and the presumed cultural homogenization by the U.S. through film and television are common in many movie markets (Ger & Belk, 1996; Mathy, 2000). Non-American audiences may reject overpowering messages from U.S.

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