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How Geopolitical Tensions Influence Consumers' Trust in Foreign Brands: Evidence from Italian and Indian Consumers of Chinese Brands

Come le tensioni geopolitiche influenzano la fiducia dei consumatori nei marchi stranieri: evidenze dai consumatori italiani e indiani di marchi cinesi

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Abstract

Geopolitical tension between states has become a persistent feature of international business, yet research on its consumer-side consequences has concentrated on willingness to buy rather than on the trust that consumers place in foreign brands. This thesis investigates how perceived tension between a consumer's home country and a foreign country relates to trust in brands originating from that country and to the intention to purchase them, using Italian and Indian consumers' evaluations of three Chinese brands: Xiaomi, Shein and BYD. The two national settings share the same target country but differ in the nature of the grievance, which is largely economic in the case of Italy and territorial and military in the case of India.

Drawing on the consumer animosity model, country-of-origin and country image research, consumer ethnocentrism, social identity theory, media effects research and the literature on brand trust, the study develops ten hypotheses in which brand trust is separated into beliefs about a brand's reliability and beliefs about its intentions. A post-positivist, deductive, cross-sectional and comparative survey design is adopted, and the analysis relies on descriptive statistics, reliability testing, Pearson correlations and comparisons between groups. The questionnaire was completed by 200 consumers, 100 in Italy and 100 in India.

Seven of the ten hypotheses are supported. Perceived tension and media exposure are associated with higher animosity, and perceived tension with a less favourable country image, with the effect falling on beliefs about political conduct rather than on beliefs about technological capability. Animosity is associated with lower trust in a brand's intentions but not in its reliability, whereas country image relates chiefly to reliability. Brand trust is associated with purchase intention, and roughly half of the association between animosity and purchase intention disappears when respondents holding the same level of trust are compared. The three hypotheses concerning differences between groups, namely the conditioning roles of media exposure and consumer ethnocentrism and the difference between the two countries, are not supported at the available subgroup size.

The thesis contributes to the consumer animosity literature by introducing brand trust as an outcome variable and by showing that hostility towards a country and beliefs about that country reach different components of trust. For international brands, the findings suggest that demonstrations of product quality are unlikely to repair damage that lies in beliefs about a company's motives, that such damage should not be expected to fade on its own once

tensions ease, and that trust should be monitored separately from sales during periods of geopolitical tension.

Keywords: Geopolitical Tension; Consumer Animosity; Brand Trust; Country Image; Consumer Ethnocentrism; Country-of-Origin Effect; Purchase Intention; Chinese Brands; Italy; India; Cross-Cultural Consumer Behaviour.

Statement on the Use of Artificial Intelligence

In keeping with the principles of academic integrity of Università Politecnica delle Marche and with current European guidance on the responsible use of Artificial Intelligence in research, the author declares that generative AI tools were used during the preparation of this thesis in a supporting capacity and under his direct supervision.

These tools were used to support the search for and preliminary screening of academic literature relevant to the research questions, to assist with language editing limited to grammar, clarity and readability, and to help organise the structure and formatting of the document.

The research questions, hypotheses, research design, interpretation of the results and conclusions of this thesis are the author's own. All material prepared with the assistance of AI tools was reviewed, checked and revised by the author, who takes full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity and originality of the content presented.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

It was largely accepted that the business world and political world did not overlap after the creation of the World Trade Organization in 1995. Many international business scholars would assume that companies could expand globally on the knowledge that their customers cared about their products and nothing else. If two countries were having issues with each other they could limit a company's access to a market through taxes and laws. But would never directly impact the consumer. This idea became less and less true as years went by. Since around 2015 we have seen the Geopolitical Risk index built by Caldara and Iacoviello (2022) increase significantly. As countries continue to compete for global power, trade has become a weapon between nations. Countries in Europe and Asia are clashing again.

Many MNEs have started to take these risks into consideration. Most will have a contingency plan for when something happens. Companies look at supply chain diversification and other risk factors that will help them stay safe in case something were to occur. Very few are considering what this will do to their customer base. When two countries are feuding, will the people in that country lose trust in that country's brands? Edelman did a study on trust and found that 60% of people in 14 different countries said that they would buy, buy into or avoid a brand based on politics (Edelman, 2024). So if that is true there must be some way that politics are influencing our decisions when shopping.

There are many studies that can back up the idea that politics can play a factor when shopping. Studies done by Klein, Ettenson and Morris (1998) showed that people who felt hostile towards a country due to war or economic factors were less likely to buy products from that country. Known as Consumer Animosity. People who feel that they should buy domestic over foreign brands. Known as Consumer Ethnocentrism (Shimp and Sharma, 1987). And finally, Country of Origin, where people think that because a brand comes from a certain country it must be better/worse quality (Roth & Romeo, 1992; Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). All of these concepts have been studied on their own and together, but none have really looked at how a brand can be affected.

Trust is a big aspect when building a brand. Not only do you want your customers to know your brand but you want them to trust it. Many authors have looked at trust and how it builds customer loyalty. (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). If a company

loses trust from their customers, they will most likely lose customers as well. Unlike other forms of customer dissatisfaction. Trust takes longer to build and can be lost in an instant. Once trust is lost it may be difficult to gain back if the consumer has no intention of buying the product again.

1.2 Research Problem

As discussed above there are many studies on Consumer Animosity and its effects on customers. However most studies have focused on one variable or have just focused on if they will purchase a product or not. Some have tried to look at what brand attributes a customer would change their opinion on if there was animosity towards the country. Koehn (2025) recently did a review on consumer animosity and highlighted that more needs to be studied on company, crisis and cross-cultural animosity. And how animosity can evolve over time. By only focusing on these variables, we are limiting ourselves to understand the long-term effects that geopolitics can have on a brand.

Another problem with these studies is that most of them take place in one country and usually while the conflict is happening. So, we don't know if it will continue to happen when things have calmed down between the two countries. Or if it will affect all countries the same way.

By studying two different countries we can see if these findings will hold true. China and India had a conflict in 2020 that resulted in deaths on both sides of the border. India also blocked many Chinese apps on their phones. China and Italy are currently in the middle of a trade war over EV's. The EU recently announced that they would be taxing Chinese EV's 7.8%-35.3% more than they already are (10%). These taxes will go into effect once China agrees to a set of price rules that will allow them to sell cheaper cars in Europe. Currently both countries are starting to ease their restrictions. Europe has provided steps to China on how they can apply to lower these taxes. India has reopened its borders to Chinese citizens and allowed their trade with China to increase to 151 billion US Dollars. However, China apps are still banned in India. So by studying these two countries we can see if trust will recover like trade or if it will stay low.

1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to look at how consumers feel about a brand that comes from a country they may have geopolitical tension with. We will also be looking at why they feel that way and if those feelings are the same across different countries.

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Create hypotheses from the current literature on International Marketing, Consumer Behaviour and Political Science.
2. See if media consumption will increase animosity towards a country.
3. Figure out if trust plays a role when someone has animosity towards a country or if it's just their opinion on the brand.
4. Investigate if consumer ethnocentrism/national identity will have an effect on these results.
5. Compare the two countries to see if they show similar results and provide information for companies on how to proceed in times of tension.

1.4 Research Questions

How do geopolitical tensions between a person's country and another country affect their trust in that brand and purchase intention?

SRQ1: Will consumers who feel that their country is in tension with another country have more animosity towards that country? And will their country image be lower? If they consume media about that country will it have an effect?

SRQ2: Will consumers with higher levels of animosity towards a country have less trust in that brands from that country? Will they have lower purchase intention?

SRQ3: Will those who score high on Consumer Ethnocentrism/National Identity have higher correlations to the variables?

SRQ4: Will Italians and Indians show similar correlations between their variables?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

There will be 10 hypotheses that we will test. Each hypothesis will be explained in depth later in this document when discussing our conceptual framework. Here are the 10 hypotheses:

H1: The more someone feels that their country is in tension with another country the more they will have animosity towards that country.

H2: The more someone feels that their country is in tension with another country the lower their country image will be.

H3: If someone consumes more media about the relationship between their country and another country they will have higher levels of animosity.

H4: Consumers who consume more media will show a higher correlation between perceived tension and animosity.

H5: The more someone has animosity towards a country the less they will trust brands from that country. This will mainly be due to the intention of the brand.

H6: The higher someone's image of a country is they will trust brands from that country more. This will be due to the reliability of the brand.

H7: If someone trusts a brand more they will have a higher purchase intention.

H8: Animosity will have less of an effect on purchase intention once we control for trust.

H9: Those who have higher levels of consumer ethnocentrism will have a higher correlation between animosity and trust.

H10: Italians and Indians will show different levels of correlation between animosity and trust.

1.6 Scope and Delimitations

- Only looking at one country: By only studying one country we can make sure that we get similar responses from both countries. We will not know if our results will transfer to other countries.
- This study will take place at one point in time. While we believe that trust will take longer to build back. We cannot prove this in our study.

- We are looking at purchase intention not actual purchase behaviour. There are many reasons that people won't buy something even if they intend to.
- We are only looking at certain types of brands. These will be brands that most people can easily purchase from.

1.7 Significance of the Study

1.7.1 Theoretical Significance

This study will contribute to theory in several ways. First by adding trust to the consumer animosity model. By showing that trust can be affected we know that even if people stop being angry at that country they may still not trust the brand. There are many studies that have shown that trust can take a long time to build and can be lost in seconds. By adding trust to this model we know that people will not immediately start buying from that brand again once things cool down. By looking at country image and animosity together we can see that there are two ways that trust can be built. You can believe that the brand will have your best interest at heart or that they will be reliable. Many researchers have stated that animosity and thinking that a brand will be reliable are not connected. But this has never been tested with trust. Finally by comparing two different countries we can see if these correlations will hold true across all cultures.

1.7.2 Managerial Significance

When geopolitical tensions arise between two countries companies will need to decide how to handle it. If people only care about how they feel about that country right now. Then they can lower their marketing spend until things calm down and then increase it back. However if trust is affected they will have to continue spending money to rebuild their trust with that customer.

1.7.3 Contextual Significance

We are using Italy and India to compare because they both have had conflicts with China. Both are similar in size and have found themselves in the middle of a conflict with China. By looking at these two we can help other countries understand what is happening and prepare for what could happen.

1.8 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organised into six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the background and context of the study, the research problem, the aim and objectives, the research questions and hypotheses, the scope and delimitations, and the significance of the study. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on geopolitical risk, international relations, the country-of-origin effect, consumer ethnocentrism, consumer animosity, national identity, brand trust, brand equity, risk perception, media effects and cross-cultural consumer behaviour, and closes by identifying the research gap. Chapter 3 presents the conceptual framework, defines the constructs and develops the ten hypotheses. Chapter 4 sets out and justifies the research methodology, including the research philosophy, design, survey instrument, sampling strategy, measurement, ethical considerations, data analysis plan and limitations. Chapter 5 reports the survey findings and the outcome of each hypothesis test. Chapter 6 discusses the results against the sub-research questions, triangulates them with the prior literature, sets out the implications for international brands together with the contributions, limitations and directions for future research, and concludes the thesis.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide the background information that this study builds upon. Various bodies of literature have been utilised to achieve this. Most have not interacted with one another and exist within separate fields. Geopolitical risk in the fields of economics and political science. Marketing literature surrounding the country of origin effect, social psychology and prejudice between nations and lastly marketing literature around trust. All of these topics will be discussed in this chapter. As you will see each of these bodies of literature provide some insight into our topic. However each of these fail to provide a complete picture and how they fit together has yet to be explored.

Starting from the higher levels we will look at geopolitical risk and how international relations theory explains the interactions between politics and economy. From there we will start looking at how this relates to the individual consumer. Starting with the country of origin effect we will explore consumer ethnocentrism, consumer animosity and national identity. We will then move on to discuss trust theory and how this can apply to brands. Which will be our main focus throughout this study. The rest of this chapter will go into depth about brand equity, perceived risk, media and information. Cross culture and past studies on the subject. We will finish the chapter by identifying our research gap.

As stated above this literature review will not simply be listing research papers. Where we can identify issues in the research we will mention them. An example of this is with consumer animosity and if it leads to action.

2.2 Geopolitical Risk: Conceptualisation and Measurement

2.2.1 Defining the construct

There are many definitions that can be used to describe geopolitical risk. "The occurrence and potential of violent events that are associated with war, terrorism and geopolitical conflicts" Caldara and Iacoviello (2022). This definition is quite broad as it covers all aspects of geopolitical risk from it happening to the possibility of it happening. This is important as we want to include events that could impact the consumer but have not yet occurred. This separates geopolitical risk from political risk which is usually defined in a business context. Political risk would be something such as your factory being taken over by the state in that country.

As this study focuses on how geopolitical risk can affect the consumer we need to differentiate between geopolitical risk and political risk. Political risk would only affect companies that are working in that country. If we take a Chinese company that sells products in Italy. It would not be affected by any political risk in China. However if there was political tension between China and the EU this would affect the relationship and therefore impact on the consumer.

2.2.2 Measurement

Since the introduction of measuring geopolitical risk through indexes this field has progressed greatly. Using similar methods to measure economic policy uncertainty Caldara and Iacoviello (2022) created a index of geopolitical risk. They did this by measuring the number of articles in key news papers that mentioned events of geopolitical nature. They split this up into threats and acts. Studies have shown that when geopolitical risk is high there is less investment and employment. Share prices also fall and money moves from developed countries to developing countries.

When looking at how geopolitical risk is measured we can identify some flaws in this method. Firstly as it is based on news articles it only measures if people know about the event. If the event happens and is not reported in the media the index will show no change. Although this could be seen as a negative for macroeconomists it can work in our favour. As consumers are also going to be informed about the event through media. Secondly when measuring geopolitical risk with indexes we are looking at one country at a time. So when the index shows an increase in risk we do not know how it affects each individual in that country. There may be some that don't know anything about the risk and others that may be very aware of it. As we are looking at the individual we need to measure how they perceive the risk not what the index tells us. Which leads to many studies that show that people don't always perceive risk in the same way as it objectively is. (Slovic, 1987)

2.2.3 The transmission problem

How does geopolitical risk get to the consumer? This is where this field of research needs to be looked at more. We know that when geopolitical risk increases it can cause many economic problems. But how does it get to the individual consumer. Many studies assume that companies will be affected by geopolitical risk through tariffs or sanctions. But what if there are no sanctions on that country? Will consumers still decide not to buy from that country? This is what this study will try to answer.

2.3 Political Conflict and International Relations

2.3.1 Interdependence and its discontents

Is there too much trade between countries? This has been a hot debate in international relations since the beginning. Some say that if countries trade too much they will not want to fight each other as they have too much to lose. Others argue that countries that rely on each other are vulnerable to attacks. Because if you rely on someone else to give you something you will be forced to accept whatever they demand. This can lead to a country having more power over another due to their reliance. (Keohane and Nye, 1977; Hirschman, 1945; Waltz, 1979) There isn't much evidence to support either side. Although some studies have found that countries that are very reliant on one another are more likely to be in a conflict. (Barbieri, 1996)

Farrell and Newman (2019) looked at how countries use the interconnectedness of each other to their advantage. They coined the term weaponised interdependence which looks at how the world has become so interconnected that certain areas can be used to control other countries. Whether it's money, technology or natural resources there are ways to control other countries through these channels.

If we look at how this affects the consumer. We can see that many of the political conflicts we have today are caused through these channels. Whether it be a tariff on a product or banning a technology company from a country. These actions can affect the consumer by making them aware that two countries are not on good terms. As mentioned earlier if it was just two countries not getting along on a diplomatic front it may not reach the consumer. But if there are economic factors involved it can become apparent to the consumer.

2.3.2 Social identity and intergroup hostility

Why do we have negative feelings towards other countries? Social Identity Theory can help explain this. Tajfel and Turner (1979) believe that we like to think we are better than those that are not in our group. We want to feel like we are special and better than others. Countries are one of the biggest identities we have. We are born into a country and it shapes who we are.

When looking at Social Identity Theory we can see how we develop these negative feelings towards other countries. We believe our country is the best and everyone else should act the way we do. Brewer (1999) showed that we prefer our own group to other groups. But this

doesn't mean that we hate the other group. We can love our group and still not hate the others. When applying this to buying from another country. It could be that we just prefer our own countries brands. Which is something we will discuss later.

Sherif (1966) argued that when we are in a situation where we compete with others for something. Such as resources we develop more hostility towards that group. This could be applied to trade between countries. If we believe another country is stealing our resources we may develop hostility towards them. Although this may not explain why we have hostility towards some countries.

Social Identity Theory allows us to understand why we think of certain countries in a negative light. But we can't use it to explain every situation. There are many theories that have come from this and each will be covered later in this chapter.

2.4 The Country-of-Origin Effect

2.4.1 Development of the research stream

When Schooler (1965) first investigated how the country of origin affected consumers. He found that when students in Guatemala were asked to rate products. They rated them the same apart from where they came from. This started the field of country of origin and has since been researched many times. Since Bilkey and Nes (1982) we have known that the country a product comes from can affect how we view it. But how much and in what situations it affects us we didn't know.

Han (1989) tried to find out why we think of certain countries in a certain light. He found that we either believe that a country makes good products or bad. Or we think of all the products that come from that country and make a judgement based on that. So if we think of all German cars and they are good then we think Germany makes good cars. This means that if we are unfamiliar with a product from a country we may use our country image to help us make a decision.

Many studies have looked into what countries we think make good products and what they have to offer. Roth and Romeo (1992) found that when a country was thought to be good at making a product we viewed it more favourable. Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999) found that the country of origin can affect our beliefs about quality, how we feel about a product and what we think others would think if we bought that product.

2.4.2 The critique

There are many criticisms that can be made about the country of origin field. One that is commonly mentioned is that we think of country of origin when we should not be. Usunier (2006) argues that we have been thinking of country of origin for too long. We assume that when we buy a product we know where it comes from. Samiee, Shimp and Sharma (2005) showed that many people don't know where the products they buy come from. This means that when we buy a product we may not even think about where it comes from.

Magnusson et al. (2011) argued that we don't think about the true country of origin. But instead think about what country we believe it comes from. So if we think a product comes from Japan we may think of it differently to if it actually came from Japan. Herz and Diamantopoulos (2017) also found that we don't consciously use the country of origin when making a decision. But we still do use it when buying products.

This can be applied to our study by knowing that we may not know where our brands come from. So when asking participants about our brands we should ask them what country they believe it comes from. Another thing to note is that if there is political tension between two countries it could make the consumer more aware of where the product comes from. Due to all the news about the conflict they may start to associate the product with the country it comes from.

2.4.3 Country image as a construct

There are many definitions of country image that can be used. For this study we will be using the definition that it is all the beliefs and information a person knows about a country. (Papadopoulos and Heslop, 1993). As we can see from this definition it can cover many things about a country. From what it is known for to what people think about it. We can measure this and see if it affects how the consumer feels about a brand.

Country image has been shown to change when something happens to a brand. Magnusson et al. (2014) found that when a brand from a certain country did something bad. People started to think of that country in a negative light and also thought of other brands from that country negatively. This shows that country image can affect how we think about brands and brands can affect how we think about a country.

2.5 Consumer Ethnocentrism

Consumer ethnocentrism was created by Shimp and Sharma (1987). They took the idea from Sumner (1906) who believed that people like to think they are better than others. Consumer ethnocentrism is when a person believes that they should buy products from their own country. Not because they think the products are better but because they believe it is the right thing to do. This is different from believing that foreign products are bad.

Many studies have found that people who are more patriotic are more likely to be ethnocentric. (Sharma et al., 1995) Other factors that can lead to ethnocentrism are being open to other cultures, conservative and collectivist. (Sharma et al., 1995) When a person believes that another country is harming their country economically they are more likely to be ethnocentric. Also if the product they are buying is something that their country can produce they are more likely to be ethnocentric.

Balabanis and Diamantopoulos (2004) found that people who are ethnocentric will prefer domestic brands. But they won't necessarily dislike foreign brands. They also found that people can be ethnocentric towards some countries and not others. This can be related back to our earlier discussion on group identity. We can love our own group and not hate the others.

There have been some criticisms of how we measure consumer ethnocentrism. (Herche, 1992) Just because we can measure it with high reliability doesn't mean it can predict behaviour. There have also been arguments that we should measure it with multiple dimensions. (Siamagka and Balabanis, 2015) And that the CETSCALE may not work in all cultures. (Sharma, 2015)

We can use consumer ethnocentrism to see if someone will be more affected by political tension. If someone is already ethnocentric they may be more likely to not buy from a country that they are in conflict with. But if they aren't ethnocentric they may not be affected as much.

2.6 Consumer Animosity

2.6.1 The animosity model

Consumer animosity was created by Klein et al. (1998). They defined it as left over feelings of hatred towards a country. Due to past or present military or economic events. When they

studied Chinese consumers in Nanjing they found that they had animosity towards Japan. Due to the events that happened in that city many years ago. They found that these consumers were less willing to buy Japanese products. But they still believed that the products were of a high quality.

This was important because it showed that people can believe a product is good but still not want to buy it. This was something that hadn't been found before in the country of origin field. It showed that people could have negative feelings towards a country and not base it off the quality of the product. Klein (2002) went on to show that there is a difference between being animous towards a country and not liking foreign products in general.

2.6.2 Types and dimensionality

There are many types of animosity that have been found in research. Some people are animous towards a country due to war others due to economic reasons. Ang et al. (2004) found that when a country experienced a financial crisis people became more animous towards that country. But once the crisis was over their feelings of animosity went away. This showed that there can be different types of animosity and they can fade over time.

Riefler and Diamantopoulos (2007) found that there was no agreement on how to measure animosity. Many studies used different methods and scales to measure it. Which made it hard to compare studies to each other.

Recently Harmeling et al. (2015) found that we should separate what we believe about a country from the emotions we feel about that country. They found that when we feel angry about a country we are more likely to act on our animosity. Whereas if we feel scared we may just avoid that country. This can be applied to our study by seeing if people feel angry or scared about the other country.

2.6.3 The animosity–behaviour gap

Many studies have found that when people have animosity towards a country they don't always act on it. One study found that when the US had a boycott of French wine after a dispute over Iraq. Sales of French wine didn't decrease as much as expected. (Ashenfelter et al., 2007) Another study found that sales did decrease by 25%. (Chavis and Leslie, 2009) There are many reasons why people may not act on their animosity. They may not be able to afford the domestic product or there may not be an alternative.

Gineikiene and Diamantopoulos (2017) found that some people may have animosity towards a country but still buy from that country. They call this the animosity paradox. Where someone may say they don't like a country but still buy from them. There are many reasons for this and we will explore some in this study.

Westjohn et al. (2021) did a meta analysis and found that cultural values can affect if someone acts on their animosity. People who are more collectivist and long term oriented were less likely to act on their animosity. This study also found that animosity can affect our willingness to buy a product. But it doesn't affect our judgement of the product as much.

As we can see there are many inconsistencies in the research around consumer animosity. Which leads us to believe that maybe we are looking at the wrong thing. If we look at trust we may find that people do act on their animosity but just don't trust the brand anymore.

2.7 National Identity

National identity differs from ethnocentrism and animosity, although often these three things are grouped together. Ethnocentrism deals with ones beliefs on whether it is right to buy from other countries. Animosity is about your feelings towards that country. National identity looks at how strongly an individual feels connected to their country as a whole. It is what one would consider a prerequisite to these other variables, you have to have some identification with the ingroup to have comparisons.

Studies have shown that when individuals identify with their country and that country is threatened they are more likely to react in a way that supports their ingroup. When there was animosity against Western Countries in China people bought more domestic brands Heinberg (2017). This is similar to what Brewer (1999) argues about ingroups and outgroups. One caveat to this argument is that many studies look at patriotism and nationalism. Patriotism and nationalism should not be confused they both have separate implications. Patriotism is how you feel about your country and nationalism is thinking your country is better than others. This study used scales to measure national identity and not patriotism/nationalism.

2.8 Consumer Trust Theory and Brand Trust

2.8.1 Foundations

There are many studies that have tried to define trust. Since there is such a wide variety of fields studying trust there are just as many definitions. Rotter (1967) created a definition of trust from a psychology standpoint. He viewed trust as the belief that someone's word is trustworthy. Trust was further defined by Mayer, Davis & Schoorman (1995) as "the willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the expectation that the party will perform an action that is important to the trustor, regardless of the ability to control the other party." This definition has been used in most organizational studies. Trust is built when you perceive your fellow human to have certain traits. Those traits include ability, benevolence, and integrity. People also have a natural tendency to trust others this trait is separated from the characteristics of the other person.

Many definitions of trust were presented by Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt & Camerer (1998). Each field had it's own definition that they felt was applicable. After looking at each definition they found that all of them contained two elements. Vulnerability and positive expectation. When defining trust it is important to understand that there is a vulnerability involved. You only need trust when you are able to be harmed and cannot prevent yourself from harm. Another important thing to understand about trust is that it replaces information. If you are able to verify something you don't need to trust that it's correct.

2.8.2 Trust in marketing relationships

When Morgan & Hunt (1994) looked at trust and relationship marketing they came up with the commitment-trust theory. They argued that trust and commitment help build a relationship. There are several ways that trust is built in a relationship Doney & Cannon (1997) discussed these. Calculative, prediction, capability, intentionality and transference. Transference is important to this study because if you know one thing you can apply that to something else that you are not familiar with. If a customer trusts or doesn't trust a country they can use transference to apply those feelings to the brands of that country.

Doney, Cannon & Mullen (1998) argue that there are trust building processes that depend on what country you are from. If you live in a individualistic and low uncertainty avoidance country you will use calculative and capability trust building processes more often. Countries that are collectivist will use transference and intentionality trust building

processes more. If this is true we should see a higher transfer of feelings about a country to it's brands in a collectivist country. Which leads to hypothesis H10.

2.8.3 Brand trust

Brand trust was coined by Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001). They defined it as "how much the typical consumer would feel comfortable relying on the brands ability to deliver on it's promise." Brand trust has been shown to impact purchase loyalty, attitude loyalty, relative price and market share. Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán (2001) argued that there are two types of brand trust. Brand reliability and brand intentions. Brand reliability is knowing that the brand can provide you with what they are selling. Brand intentions is the belief that the brand has your best interest in mind if something unexpected happens. Delgado-Ballester (2004) went on to show that this was true across multiple categories.

As mentioned earlier brand trust consists of reliability and intentions. These two should be affected differently from a country that is in a political dispute. We shouldn't believe that if a country is in a dispute with your country that the products wont work as promised. But the customers may feel that the brand does not have their best interest in mind. They may believe the company is doing something behind their backs that they don't know about. Because of this brand reliability should stay the same and brand intentions should decrease when there is a conflict between countries.

2.8.4 Trust violation, asymmetry, and repair

Trust can take a long time to gain but is easily broken. Once trust is gained people are willing to give someone the benefit of the doubt. But if they do something wrong you lose that trust quickly. Slovic (1993) believes that negative events stand out more than positive events. Because of this we lose trust faster than we gain it. Xie and Peng (2009) studied what to do after bad publicity. They found that there are different ways to regain trust depending on what happened. If the brand failed at their reliability you can fix that quicker than if they failed at having the customers best interest in mind. So if there is a conflict between two countries and trust is lost in the intentions aspect it will be harder to regain that trust. Which leads to this studies theory that trust will not go back to how it was before a conflict. We should see people want to buy from those brands again sooner than they will trust those brands.

2.9 Brand Equity and Corporate Reputation

Brand equity and reputation can describe what a company stands to lose if customers have negative feelings about their brand. Brand equity was first described by Aaker (1991). He said that brand equity is made up of brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations and brand loyalty. All of these factors play a role in the value of a brand to it's customers. Keller (1993) described brand equity as "the differential effect brand knowledge has on consumer response to the deployment of the brand". Brand knowledge is what people remember about a brand.

Kellers definition is what we will be focusing on for this study. Brand equity comes from the customers memory. So if there is something that will alter that memory it can have a negative impact on brand equity. A customers memory of where a company comes from can change their view of the brand. This can happen if there is a dispute between two countries. Customers may start to lose trust in companies from the other country even if they have nothing to do with the conflict.

Brands that are perceived as global have higher brand equity. Steenkamp, Batra & Alden (2003) showed this to be true through perceived quality and brand prestige. They argued that if you are a global brand your products are seen as better quality because they are being sold all around the world. Alden, Steenkamp & Batra (1999) discussed how you can sell to people around the world by selling to global consumer culture. When a country is in a conflict with another you may want to de-emphasize that your brand is global. Customers may start to associate your brand with the country that they are having a conflict with. If you sell to local markets instead of global markets you can avoid this. Özsomer (2012) studied perceived brand localness and how it affects brand value.

Companies have a reputation that is separate from their brand equity. Fombrun & Shanley (1990) defined reputation as how a company is viewed by all the stakeholders in it's life. When a company is in the news more their reputation can change. Rindova, Williamson, Petkova & Sever (2005) studied the factors that play a role in a companies reputation. They found that reputation is made up of perceived quality and prominence. If there is a conflict between two countries you can expect a company that is from the other country to gain prominence and lose quality.

2.10 Risk Perception

Why do people over react to these situations? Many studies have shown that perceived risk plays a role in customers buying behavior. Slovic (1987) did research that looked at peoples perceptions of risk. He found that when something is viewed as risky people judge it to be worse. There are some factors that will make a person believe something is more risky. Some of those factors include involuntary risk, unknown risk and catastrophic risk. Many researchers have studied the difference between experts and non-experts when looking at risk. (Fischhoff, Slovic, Lichtenstein, Read & Combs, 1978)

People are more likely to perceive risk when it involves their own body. When there is a conflict between two countries people may perceive risk when buying from those countries. They may think their data will be stolen or that the product will run out of stock. These are all factors that make the product seem more risky to the customer. Finucane, Alhakami, Slovic & Johnson (2000) found that when something triggers a negative emotion people will perceive it as having more risks and less benefits. So if someone feels animosity towards a country they will perceive more risks and less benefits when buying from that country.

Perceived risk in the consumer world was studied by Bauer (1960). Jacoby & Kaplan (1972) broke perceived risk down into five categories. Financial risk, performance risk, physical risk, psychological risk and social risk. There have been many studies that have looked at perceived risk in marketing. (Mitchell, 1999) There is always an issue with measuring perceived risk. When there is a conflict between two countries we should see increased psychological risk and social risk. Slovic (1993) argues that when someone perceives risk they use trust to combat that risk.

2.11 Media Influence: Agenda Setting, Framing, and Priming

Customers are not directly involved in conflicts between countries. They learn about these situations through the media. Agenda setting is a theory that came from the media studies field. McCombs & Shaw (1972) studied what the media reports on and how it affects what people pay attention to. When the media focuses on one thing people tend to care more about that topic. Priming was also studied by Iyengar & Kinder (1987). Priming occurs when people learn about something and then use that information to make decisions. When customers hear about a conflict between two countries they may start to use that as a reason not to buy from the other country. This would connect back to why customers pay more attention to country of origin when there is a conflict going on.

Entman (1993) looked at how media frames information. Framing is how you highlight certain aspects of an issue. Framing can change how someone views that issue. If the media frames an issue in a certain way people will see it that way. Agenda setting helps us understand why people know about the conflict. Priming helps us understand why they care about where the product comes from. And framing helps us understand why some customers may be affected more than others.

Gerbner & Gross (1976) looked at how long term exposure to media can affect people. They called this cultivation theory. If you watch the news for a long time and it focuses on one issue you will come to believe that it's a bigger issue than it actually is. People react more to negative information than positive information. (Soroka, 2006) This can lead to people feeling more negative about a country than they should after a conflict.

We know that people react to the news but we don't know how much it affects their buying behavior. Scheufele & Tewksbury (2007) studied how the media affects our opinions on politics. They found that people tend to seek out news that confirms what they already believe. So it's hard to say how much the media affects our opinions on other countries.

2.12 Social Media and Information Warfare

Social media has changed the way we consume information. With traditional media there are news stations that you can choose to watch. On social media you are exposed to all types of information. False news can spread just as fast as true news. (Vosoughi, Roy & Aral, 2018) False news may even spread faster because it's more interesting. People are more likely to share false news if it's about politics. False news about a country could have a negative impact on that countries brands.

Bakshy, Messing & Adamic (2015) found that people are less likely to be exposed to information they don't agree with. Whether that's from the algorithm or the user's choice. Sunstein (2001) and Pariser (2011) have looked at this as well. If there is a conflict between two countries you can expect some people to be more exposed to news about that conflict than others. This may be a reason why not everyone is affected the same.

Some people will purposely spread false information to other countries. Tucker et al. (2018) looked at how different countries spread propaganda to other countries. Brands can get caught up in this if they are from a country that is spreading propaganda.

Online fire storms can destroy a brands reputation in a short amount of time. Pfeffer, Zorbach & Carley (2014) studied online fire storms and found that they build off each other. Once one person starts a fire storm others will join in. A brand can be damaged by something they didn't do if their country is in a conflict with yours. There isn't much research on this topic when it comes to brand trust.

2.13 Cross-Cultural Consumer Behaviour

Because this study is looking at two different countries we need to know if there will be a difference between them. Hofstede (1980, 2001) is the most commonly used framework for studying cross cultural differences. One of his dimensions is individualism and collectivism. Markus & Kitayama (1991) argued that people who are from collectivist cultures see themselves as part of a group. Triandis (1995) studied this as well. If someone sees themselves as part of a group they will be more affected when their group is attacked. So if there is a conflict between two countries we should see the collectivist country be more affected.

There have been some studies that contradict this argument. Westjohn, Magnusson, Peng & Jung (2021) found that when a country is more collectivist they were less likely to buy from that country when there was animosity. They believed this was because collectivist countries think about the long term consequences of not buying. More research needs to be done to see if collectivism increases or decreases people buying from countries that they are in a conflict with.

When studying cross cultural differences it's important to keep in mind that everyone is not the same from one country. McSweeney (2002) looked at the flaws of using Hofstede's framework. He believed that you can't just assume everyone in a country thinks the same. So we can't assume that Italians and Indians will act the same just because they are from different countries. We also need to make sure that our scales are valid in both countries. Steenkamp & Baumgartner (1998) gave us a way to test if our scales are valid across countries. We didn't do this in our study so we can't say for sure if the Italians and Indians answered our questions the same way.

2.14 International Marketing during Geopolitical Crises

Many companies have decided to take a stand on political issues. Some of these decisions have been successful and some have not. Companies that participate in boycotts have studied

why people decide to boycott. Sen, Gürhan-Canli & Morwitz (2001) looked at why people decide to boycott a product. They found that people are more likely to boycott if they believe it will make a difference. There are also other reasons people decide to boycott a product. (Klein, Smith & John, 2004) Why do people put themselves at a disadvantage to help others? (John & Klein, 2003)

Ettenson and Klein (2005) looked at how the boycott of France decreased after the conflict ended. They found that people continued to boycott French products for some time after the conflict ended. This shows that even after a conflict ends people will still not want to buy from that country. Our study argues that trust will take longer to regain than the desire to buy from a company.

Recently companies have started taking stands on controversial topics. Mukherjee & Althuizen (2020) found that when a company takes a stand on a controversial topic they lose customers that disagree with them. They do not gain enough customers that agree to make up for the loss. If a company decides to leave a country that is in conflict with yours they may lose customers that want to continue to buy from them. There is not much research on this topic.

What if the company doesn't take a stand and doesn't do anything wrong? They are just a foreign company that is in a country that you are in conflict with. How should that company react? There isn't much research on this. Most boycott studies look at why people boycott a company for doing something wrong.

2.15 Existing Empirical Studies: Synthesis

Table 2.1 summarises the principal empirical studies on which this thesis builds, organised to make visible both the accumulated findings and the pattern of what has not been examined.

Table 2.1: Principal empirical studies on consumer animosity and foreign brand response

Study	Conflict context	Sample	Outcome measured	Principal finding
Klein, Ettenson & Morris (1998)	Sino-Japanese historical conflict	China (Nanjing), n = 244	Willingness to buy; product judgement	Animosity reduced willingness to buy without depressing quality judgements, establishing an affective channel independent of cognition.
Klein (2002)	Multiple foreign origins	United States	Product aversion	Country-specific animosity is empirically separable from generalised aversion to foreign goods.

Study	Conflict context	Sample	Outcome measured	Principal finding
Ang et al. (2004)	1997 Asian financial crisis	Five Asian markets	Willingness to buy	Situational animosity behaves differently from stable animosity and responds more readily to changing conditions.
Nijssen & Douglas (2004)	German occupation of the Netherlands	Netherlands	Product evaluation; purchase	Animosity effects were weak in a highly trade-dependent economy, qualifying the generality of the model.
Ettenson & Klein (2005)	French nuclear testing, South Pacific	Australia, longitudinal	Boycott participation; willingness to buy	Animosity effects decayed over time following resolution, but did not return fully to baseline.
Ashenfelter, Ciccarella & Shatz (2007)	US-France rupture over Iraq	United States, scanner data	Actual purchases	No boycott effect was detectable once seasonal sales patterns and the ongoing decline of French wine in the market were accounted for.
Chavis & Leslie (2009)	US-France rupture over Iraq	United States, scanner data	Actual purchases	Sales of French wine fell by roughly a quarter at the peak of the boycott, contradicting the preceding study.
Harmeling, Magnusson & Singh (2015)	Sino-Japanese; US-Russia	United States; China	Willingness to buy	Separating animosity beliefs from discrete emotions shows approach emotions (anger) and retreat emotions (fear) produce distinct behavioural signatures.
Gineikiene & Diamantopoulos (2017)	Post-Soviet historical grievance	Post-Soviet market	Purchase behaviour	Animosity and nostalgia exert countervailing influences; consumers report hostility while continuing to purchase.
Heinberg (2017)	Anti-Western sentiment in China	China	Local brand consumption	Animosity outbreaks raised domestic brand consumption, indicating operation through ingroup preference as well as outgroup rejection.
Leonidou et al. (2019)	Russia-Ukraine conflict	Ukraine, n = 606	Foreign product avoidance	Personality traits predict animosity; cultural characteristics moderate its translation into avoidance.
Westjohn, Magnusson, Peng & Jung (2021)	Multiple	United States; China, meta-analysis and six experiments	Willingness to buy; product judgement	Collectivism and long-term orientation attenuate animosity effects; effect on willingness to buy substantially exceeds effect on product judgement.

Note. Studies are ordered chronologically within the animosity research stream. Full bibliographic details appear in the reference list.

Three patterns are visible in this body of work. First, the dependent variable is almost invariably willingness to buy, purchase intention, or product judgement. Brand trust does not appear as a focal outcome in any of the studies listed. Second, all but one are single-country designs, and the sole longitudinal study is now two decades old and concerns a dispute of considerably lower intensity than those currently in progress. Third, the findings are inconsistent in a specific and revealing way: studies measuring attitudes report substantial effects, while the two studies measuring actual purchases disagree with each other.

2.16 The Research Gap

Based on the previous discussion four gaps can be identified with the first being what this thesis aims to solve.

2.16.1 The dependent variable gap

As shown in the last 30 years of research into consumer animosity the majority of studies have used a form of intention to buy or evaluate the product. As discussed earlier brand trust is an important variable when it comes to studying loyalty, willingness to pay higher prices and gain of market share. However it has not been used as the main dependent variable when studying consumer animosity. This gap needs to be filled as if we know that animosity will lead to lower levels of trust we can better understand how long the effects of animosity can last. Trust is something that takes time to build but can be destroyed in an instant (Slovic, 1993). If we know that acts of animosity that stem from a lack of moral integrity can take longer to recover from then we know that if a country causes their customers to lose trust in a brand due to political reasons that it could cause significant loss to that brand (Xie & Peng, 2009). The research that currently exists doesn't allow us to say this.

2.16.2 The temporal gap

Most of the research is conducted during the heat of the argument between countries. Which doesn't allow us to see if these feelings die down after some time. Ettenson and Klein (2005) did look at how long consumer animosity lasted. In a recent review of this topic they mention that further research is needed to look at how long consumer animosity can last (Koehn, 2025). Although this study won't be able to fill that gap it can help fill it by looking at consumers at a point where both of our countries of interest have come out of the most hostile period and are starting to mend their relationship.

2.16.3 The cross-cultural gap

Very few studies compare different cultures in the same study and those that do when trying to find if there was any differences based on culture found that there is. Some believe that collectivist cultures may feel more threatened by other nations but show it less (Westjohn et al., 2021). There has not been a study that looks at different cultures comparing them to each other when looking at the same country with different reasons for boycott.

2.16.4 The passive-brand gap

There has been many studies that look at companies that have done something that causes people to boycott their products. But what about brands that people may feel that they shouldn't buy from because of there country of origin. These brands may not have anything that they can do to prevent the boycott.

This study will fill these gaps by looking at trust as the main dependent variable and seeing if trust plays a role when looking at the relationship between consumer animosity and purchase intention. By looking at both types of trust we can see if trust is affected when it comes to consumers feeling that a brand isn't doing what they think they should. And finally by looking at these variables with Italians and Indians we can see if there are any cultural differences when looking at Chinese brands and what they may be boycotted for.

2.17 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided the background information on all the theories that this study will be using. We started off by looking at the macro level of the world and how politics can affect our day to day lives. There are many studies that look at this and find that yes politics can affect businesses. But how do those effects reach the consumer? When we look at international relations we learn that more often then not politics is causing these business effects. There are many ways that governments use to punish other countries and some of those ways involve the consumer. When we dive into the micro level of the study we can start to understand how consumers think about certain countries and brands. There are many factors that can effect a consumers decision to buy from a certain country or brand. Country of origin is one factor that can effect a consumers buying decision. As stated before consumers are not always correct when identifying a brands country of origin. So when we look at these factors we need to look at what the consumer believes the brand's country of origin is. Consumer Ethnocentrism and Consumer Animosity are two factors that we know can effect a consumers decision. As we learned from the literature these two variables are not consistent when looking at their effect on purchase intention. Which leads us to believe that there may be another variable that is affecting the relationship.

When we look at trust we learn that there are two types of trust and one can be more affected by certain situations then the other. This can allow us to predict that when looking at countries that may be in conflict with each other that trust will be lowered on one aspect of

trust more then the other. All of these variables allow us to create the framework that we will be using in this study.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

3.1 Introduction

In chapter two it was shown that there are several pieces of literature that have been built upon independently of one another. It also showed that there are many links that can be drawn between these bodies of knowledge that have not yet been theorised. In this chapter we will present a conceptualisation that can be used to look at the links between these areas and present the ten hypotheses that will be tested.

The concept is broken down into a series of linkages. We choose not to show the model as a complete diagram because it tends to lead people to believe that if one part of the concept is true then they must all be. When showing path models we want to look at each hypothesis separately as they can each stand on their own and just because one is proven does not mean that any others are true. It could very well be that only some of the hypotheses are supported which would be normal and not discredit our concept.

3.2 The Reasoning Behind the Framework

Our concept is based around one simple theory that inter country tensions can effect everyday consumers and influence their perception towards companies that originate from that country. There are three key questions that need to be answered to prove this and we have separated our hypotheses into these three questions.

Firstly how do inter country tensions get to the consumer? They are unlikely to come into direct contact with the tensions between the two countries but are likely to consume media that covers these issues. So we will test whether a consumer that believes the two countries are not on good terms will feel more hostile towards the country and think less about it. We will also see if those that pay attention to news regarding these issues will feel the same.

Secondly do people transfer their feelings about a country onto that of a brand that originates from that country? As we discussed earlier there is a difference between feeling hostile towards a country and believing certain things about a country. Both could effect trust in a brand but maybe they don't do so in the same way. So we will look at these individually.

Thirdly will all consumers react the same to country tensions. Some consumers may not want to buy from another country no matter the circumstances. Others may feel a greater

sense of nationalism and some may have different grievances towards china depending on the nationality of the sample.

3.3 Overview of the Framework

We are looking at six variables that can all relate to each other.

- Perceived geopolitics and attention to geopolitics both describe how the consumers view their surroundings politically.
- Consumer Animosity and Country Image both describe the view that the consumer has of the country they are thinking about.
- Brand Trust and Purchase Intention describe the view the consumer has towards a brand that originates from the country.
- Consumer Ethnocentrism and National Identity both can influence a consumers tendency to buy from another country.

As previously mentioned we will break down Brand trust into two categories reliability and intentions. Reliability being that the brand will meet your needs and intentions being that the brand is truthful and wants the best for you. There is no reason to believe that someone would think that a country they don't like would produce products that don't meet there needs but they may think that that brand doesn't have there best interest at heart.

3.4 Construct Definitions

Table 3.1 shows the definitions that were used for each construct and where they come from. It is important to be clear about definitions as some of these constructs can be confused with each other and we will be looking at them in relation to each other later on.

Table 3.1: Definitions of each construct and where they come from

Construct	Definition	Theoretical basis	Key references
Perceived geopolitical tension	How hostile the consumer thinks their country and the country in question are towards each other.	Individual risk perception	Caldara & Iacoviello (2022); Slovic (1987)
Media exposure	The amount and extent to which an individual comes into contact with media regarding the two countries.	Agenda Setting; Cultivation Theory	McCombs & Shaw (1972); Gerbner & Gross (1976)
Consumer animosity	Hostility that a consumer may have towards a country due to war, politics or economics.	Hostility towards ingroups	Klein, Ettenson & Morris (1998); Tajfel & Turner (1979)
Country image	Beliefs that an individual has about a certain country.	Country of Origin effect	Roth & Romeo (1992); Han (1989)

Construct	Definition	Theoretical basis	Key references
Brand trust	Trust in a brand that consists of reliability and intentions.	Relationship Marketing; Organisational Trust	Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán (2001); Mayer et al. (1995)
Purchase intention	How likely someone is to purchase the brand in the near future.	Theory of Planned Behaviour	Ajzen (1991)
Consumer ethnocentrism	Whether an individual believes that they should buy from foreign made brands or not.	Ethnocentrism	Shimp & Sharma (1987); Sumner (1906)
National identity	How attached someone feels to their home country.	Social Identity Theory	Tajfel & Turner (1979); Brewer (1999)

3.5 Hypothesis Development

Each hypothesis is explained below along with the justification for why it is believed to be true. All hypotheses are individual meaning that they do not rely on any other hypothesis to be true.

3.5.1 Perceived tension and consumer animosity

According to Social Identity Theory people use the groups that they belong to to help define who they are and feel that their group should be superior to other groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). One of these groups that we all belong to is our nationality. Therefore when there is conflict between two nations people will feel that their nation is being threatened and will act hostily towards the nation that is seen to be at fault.

Another theory that explains conflicts is Realistic Conflict Theory. Sherif (1966) suggested that when groups compete with each other for a resource they become hostile towards one another. When countries are competing against each other for jobs and industry they may develop a hostility towards one another. This would apply to Italy and China as they are in conflict over industry but would not apply to India as they are clashing over land.

Research has shown that consumer animosity can happen when a country has wronged another. Ang et al. (2004) found that Asian consumers developed animosity towards Western countries after the financial crisis of 1997. Similarly Leonidou et al. (2019) found that Ukrainian consumers developed animosity towards Russia during the conflict. These studies show that when a country is feeling that another country is doing something that negatively impacts them they develop animosity towards that country. We believe that this will also apply when the consumer feels that a country is doing something negative towards them but that they perceive it as such not that it actually is. As mentioned in section 2.2.2

we believe that consumers will react to what they believe is happening not what is actually happening.

> **H1.** If a consumer feels that their country is experiencing tension with another country they will exhibit more consumer animosity towards that country.

3.5.2 Perceived tension and country image

Unlike the previous hypothesis this one focuses on beliefs. Consumers have a country image which they develop throughout their life from schooling, travelling and consuming products from that country. If there is a continuous conflict between two countries the consumer is going to gain more knowledge about that conflict and this will affect their country image.

Magnusson, Krishnan, Westjohn and Zdravkovic (2014) showed that when a company acted in an unethical manner the country image of the country it came from decreased. We believe that if there is a conflict between two countries it will cause the consumers of one country to have a lower image of the other country.

It should be noted that country image consists of many factors and some may not be affected by the conflict. A country that is perceived to be in conflict with your country may be viewed as technologically advanced and powerful so those beliefs about that country may not decrease. This study will look at all aspects of country image.

> **H2.** Consumers that perceive that their country is experiencing tension with another country will have a lower image of that country.

3.5.3 Media exposure and consumer animosity

As mentioned before consumers do not know what is happening around the world unless they consume media about it. If a consumer is exposed to more media about the conflict between two countries they are going to know more about what is happening and can become more hostile towards that country. Gerbner and Gross (1976) stated that the more media you are exposed to the more you will believe that what you see in the media is true. Soroka (2006) found that people react more to negative media than they do positive media. We believe that if a consumer is exposed to more media about a conflict they will feel more animosity towards that country.

We must be aware that people may choose to watch media that they already agree with. There could be a correlation between people who consume media about a conflict and people

who have high levels of animosity towards that country because they are watching that type of media. We cannot rule this out in our study.

> **H3.** If a consumer consumes more media about a country they will have more consumer animosity towards that country.

3.5.4 Media exposure and the strength of the tension–animosity link

If a consumer is watching more media about a conflict it may cause them to think about the issue more often. Iyengar and Kinder (1987) found that when people were exposed to media it caused them to judge situations differently. If a consumer is thinking about the issue more they may become more hostile towards that country.

We are predicting that there will be a larger relationship between perceived tension and consumer animosity for people who consume more media than those who consume less media. This is a prediction that a difference will occur rather than saying that there will be a relationship. So if there is no difference between high and low media consumers this hypothesis will not be supported. It is also possible that H3 will be supported but this hypothesis will not be.

> **H4.** There will be a stronger relationship between perceived tension and consumer animosity for those who consume more media about a conflict than those who consume less media.

3.5.5 Consumer animosity and brand trust

This is the main hypothesis of this study. When people are angry at something they tend to distrust things that are linked to that thing. If someone has animosity towards a country they will not trust brands that come from that country. Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) state that trust consists of three things reliability, benevolence and integrity. We believe that when someone has animosity towards a country they will not trust the intentions of brands from that country but will still trust that the brand is reliable.

Animosity towards a country does not give you any information about whether that brand can create a good product or not. There is no reason to believe that if you don't like a country that you shouldn't trust that their products are good. However you may not trust that the company has your best interests at heart or that they will do the right thing with your information and money.

Therefore we believe that consumer animosity will cause people to have less trust in brands from that country and specifically less trust that they have good intentions but they will still believe that they are reliable. This is a more in depth prediction than previous research that has just looked at brand attitude. We can prove this wrong if we find that people don't trust brands that they have animosity towards in both categories.

> **H5.** Consumers that have high levels of consumer animosity towards a country will trust brands from that country less. Specifically they will have less trust that the brand has good intentions.

3.5.6 Country image and brand trust

If a consumer has a positive image of a country they will trust brands that come from that country. Country image is a collection of beliefs that a person has about a country (Han, 1989). One of those beliefs may be that their products are good. If a consumer trusts that the products of a country are good they will trust brands from that country.

We predict the opposite to the last hypothesis. That if someone has a positive image of a country they will trust brands from that country more and specifically trust that the brand is reliable.

> **H6.** Consumers that have a higher image of a country will trust brands from that country more. Specifically they will trust that the brand is reliable.

3.5.7 Brand trust and purchase intention

There is a strong relationship between brand trust and purchase intention. Many studies have shown that when people trust a brand they are more likely to purchase that brand (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Trust has also been shown to lead to purchase intention (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In the theory of planned behaviour trust will lead to attitude which will then lead to purchase intention (Ajzen, 1991).

We have included this hypothesis because it is something that we know to be true and it will allow us to compare to the next hypothesis.

> **H7.** Consumers that trust a brand more will have a higher purchase intention towards that brand.

3.5.8 The role of brand trust in the animosity–intention relationship

As mentioned earlier we know that when people have animosity towards a country they are less likely to buy products from that country. But we don't know why. It could be that they simply don't want to buy from that country as a form of protest. Or it could be that they have lost trust in the brand.

We can test this by seeing if the relationship between animosity and purchase intention decreases when we control for brand trust. If the relationship decreases then we can assume that some of the reason people don't buy from that country is because they have lost trust in the brand. If the relationship does not decrease then we can assume that people are not buying from that country for other reasons.

We predict that the relationship will decrease but not disappear completely. People may not want to buy from a country that they have animosity towards because they want to show that they support their home country.

> **H8.** There will be a weaker relationship between consumer animosity and purchase intention when we control for brand trust.

3.5.9 Consumer ethnocentrism

Consumer ethnocentrism is whether a person believes that they should buy from foreign companies or not (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). This is something that people believe in before any conflict occurs so it may interact with consumer animosity in two ways.

One way is that if a person already believes that they shouldn't buy from foreign countries then they will trust brands from that country less. If they already have a low opinion of foreign brands then consumer animosity will just add to that.

The other way is that if someone believes that they shouldn't buy from foreign countries they already don't trust brands from that country. So there is no trust to lose when they develop consumer animosity. Balabanis and Diamantopoulos (2004) found that ethnocentrism is more of a belief that you should buy from domestic brands rather than that you shouldn't buy from foreign brands.

We believe that the first scenario will play out. That people who have high levels of consumer ethnocentrism will trust brands from a country they have animosity towards less than people with low levels of consumer ethnocentrism. However if the second scenario

plays out we will have stated it here so we don't seem to be making up an explanation after the fact.

> **H9.** There will be a stronger relationship between consumer animosity and brand trust for those with high consumer ethnocentrism than those with low consumer ethnocentrism.

3.5.10 Differences between the two national samples

We have two reasons to believe that the relationship between consumer animosity and brand trust will differ between the Italian and Indian samples.

The first reason is that the type of conflict may play a role. Klein, Ettenson & Morris (1998) differentiated between animosity that comes from war and animosity that comes from economic reasons. Harmeling, Magnusson & Singh (2015) found that different emotions that come from these types of animosity can cause different behaviours. Anger causes people to act out while fear causes people to hide. India has a type of animosity towards China that Italy does not as they have experienced war with China. Therefore we believe that Indians will show a stronger relationship between consumer animosity and brand trust than Italians.

The second reason is culture. Doney, Cannon & Mullen (1998) said that when you are more collectivistic you are more likely to transfer trust from one thing to another. Therefore Indians being a more collectivistic society may show a stronger relationship between consumer animosity and brand trust. However Westjohn, Magnusson, Peng & Jung (2021) found that collectivism weakened the relationship between animosity and purchase intention.

Due to the conflicting theories we will not predict which country will show a stronger relationship.

> **H10.** There will be a difference in the relationship between consumer animosity and brand trust between Italians and Indians.

3.6 Summary of the Hypotheses

In simple terms we believe that if a consumer feels that their country is experiencing tension with another country they will have more animosity towards that country and will have a lower image of that country. If a consumer consumes more media about a conflict they will also have more animosity towards that country. If a consumer has more animosity towards

a country they will trust brands from that country less and specifically trust that they have good intentions less. If a consumer has a higher image of a country they will trust brands from that country more and specifically trust that they are reliable more. Consumers that trust a brand more will have a higher purchase intention towards that brand. And some of the reason that people have less purchase intention when they have animosity towards a country is because they trust the brand less.

We also believe that there will be a stronger relationship between perceived tension and consumer animosity for people who consume more media about the conflict. We believe that people who have high consumer ethnocentrism will trust brands from a country they have animosity towards less than people with low consumer ethnocentrism. Although it is possible that the opposite will happen. And finally we believe that there will be a difference in the relationship between consumer animosity and brand trust between Italians and Indians.

We will test each of these hypotheses individually. Just because one is supported does not mean that the others will be.

3.7 Alternative Explanations

There are a few reasons that there could be relationships between our variables that are not explained by our hypotheses.

People could have a lower image of a country because they don't trust brands from that country. Magnusson et al. (2014) showed that when people had a lower trust in a brand it caused them to have a lower image of the country that brand came from. So it could be that people don't trust brands from China which causes them to have a lower image of China and perceive that there is tension between the two countries. We cannot rule this out with a cross sectional study.

There could be a variable that we haven't measured that causes all of our variables to be related. Perhaps people who have a certain political opinion will have lower trust in brands, lower image of a country and perceive that there is tension between countries. Or perhaps people who trust the media more will perceive that there is tension and consume more media about a conflict. We have measured whether someone is open to other cultures to see if there is a relationship between that and our other variables.

As mentioned before there could be a relationship between media consumption and consumer animosity because people who have high levels of animosity may consume more media about that conflict.

3.8 Chapter Summary

In this chapter we have explained why we believe each of our hypotheses to be true. We have created 10 hypotheses that we will test in this study. Each hypothesis is supported by research that was discussed in chapter 2. By breaking down our theory into individual hypotheses we are able to see if each one is true on its own.

What makes our theory different from previous research is that we are looking at brand trust. We believe that when a consumer feels that there is tension between two countries they will trust that brands from the foreign country have good intentions less but will still trust that they are reliable.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes how the hypotheses proposed in Chapter 3 were tested. It covers all decisions made when designing and carrying out the study. Starting with what philosophy was chosen, then what design was used, how the questionnaire was developed, who took part in the study and how the data was analysed. Reasoning for these decisions is provided and where possible what was not done and why. This chapter ends with a section detailing the limitations that arise from the decisions made. It is better to point out your own weaknesses than to have someone point them out to you.

Throughout the method section there is a focus on simple statistical methods. Means, percentages and testing for differences and relationships. These are not the most complex statistical tests but they allowed us to answer the questions we wanted to ask without getting bogged down in complicated statistics that can obscure what you are trying to say. As seen in Chapter 3 the hypotheses are looking at if something goes along with something else and if it is stronger in some populations than others. We used basic tests to see if this is true.

4.2 Research Philosophy

4.2.1 Position adopted

Positivism / Post-positivism was chosen for this study. Positivism believes that everything that exists has an objective truth and that things can be objectively measured. We believe that consumer's have some kind of animosity towards certain countries. Whether this is because of personal experience or something they learned growing up they still have that feeling towards that country. By measuring these feelings using valid questionnaires we can find out if certain attitudes go together and generalise these to our population of interest.

We decided to call this study post-positivism. Instead of saying we know that people have these attitudes and we can prove our hypotheses true. We are accepting that there are flaws with our measurements and that all observations are influenced by our theory. Post-positivism sees our hypotheses as falsifiable meaning that if the opposite happens to what we expect then our theory is incorrect. This is seen in Hypothesis 9 where if the opposite is found to be true we will believe hypothesis 10 to be correct.

4.2.2 Alternatives considered

Interpretivism was thought about but not chosen. There are many benefits to using interviews in this study. You would learn more about the reasons why people feel certain ways towards foreign brands. It was not chosen because we wanted to see if one thing goes with another thing more in one country than the other. This would be difficult to do with interviews as you need to be able to compare data between populations.

Using both qualitative and quantitative methods was thought about but not feasible. Doing both an interview study and survey study over 2 countries would be too much for a masters dissertation. What we miss out on by not doing this is discussed in section 4.11.

4.3 Research Approach

This study took a deductive approach. After researching theory in Chapter 2 we came up with our framework in Chapter 3. Which then lead us to create our hypotheses before we looked at any data. We didn't want to create our hypotheses based off data we had already gathered and pretend we knew that before we started the study. We report all of our hypotheses and whether they were supported or not. Including which aspects of brand trust we thought would be impacted.

4.4 Research Design

4.4.1 Design specification

Quantitative survey using cross-sectional and comparative design. The survey was completed at one point in time by two nationalities. Each hypothesis was then tested individually in both samples and compared to each other.

We chose to do a comparative design so we could see if people in both countries had similar results. If we only did one country we could see if people feel less trust towards brands when they feel a sense of tension towards that country. But by using two countries we can see if it happens in more than one country and under what type of situation the country is in. Both countries had China as the country they were looking at. So we could control that variable and see if it happens to people who have different feelings towards China. And how China is viewed.

4.4.2 Alternatives considered

- Experiment. If we created an experiment where participants were shown articles that made them feel a certain way towards China we could say that X causes Y. Which we can't currently do with H3. There are ethical concerns about manipulating peoples views on a real life situation. Also the feelings towards a country that people develop over time would not be felt from an experiment. We would also lose realism by doing this.
- Longitudinal. Taking the same group of people and surveying them at multiple points in time would allow us to answer if people regain trust and buying intention at different times. Unfortunately this isn't possible to do within a masters dissertation. This would be the next step to this study.
- Use Sales Data. If we were to look at how many products people buy we could see a correlation between tension and buying behaviour. Unfortunately this won't tell us anything about trust which is what we want to focus on. This is why many previous studies only looked at behaviour.

4.5 Survey Instrument

4.5.1 Structure

There were 6 sections to the questionnaire. The first was the information and consent page. Next were some screening and demographics questions. Then we asked about the brands and what country they thought they were from. Next we asked questions about the country of China. How they feel towards China and how much they see news about China. How much animosity they have and their image of the country. Finally we asked questions about the brand and what kind of trust they have and if they would buy from the company. Our last section was the disposition questions. See Appendix A for the full questionnaire.

I chose to ask about the brand after the country so that we established what the participant thinks about that country before we asked them about the brand. I put the disposition questions at the end as I believed people would get bored of answering questions and might not finish the questionnaire if they were at the beginning. As they are about the person they shouldn't be influenced by previous questions.

4.5.2 Stimulus brands

Xiaomi, Shein and BYD were used as brands for this study. They are all brands that are available in both countries and have a good amount of recognition from the public.

One issue with this is that Shein has had its access to India halted. After being banned in 2020 it has recently come back to the country under a partnership with an Indian company. This is similar to what our study is about but the participant in India won't have the same experience as the participant in Italy. So we analysed each brand individually as well as a whole.

BYD is also not as readily available in India compared to Italy. So we asked the participant if they knew the brand and skipped the questions if they didn't.

The questionnaire asked if the participant knew the brand is from China. Previous research has shown that people do not know where brands are from (Samiee, Shimp & Sharma, 2005). We kept these participants in the data but also analysed the ones who got it right.

4.5.3 Response formats used in the questionnaire

As we were measuring attitudes and opinions all the questions had numbers for the participant to select from. There were 3 types of scales we used.

Likert Scale is used to measure if someone agrees with a statement. It had 7 answers from 1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree. By having 7 points instead of 5 we allowed the participant to choose how much they agree with a statement. This gave us more variation in our data and more precise means. We used this for Animosity, Brand Trust, Buying Intention, Ethnocentrism, National Identity, Collectivism and Openness to other cultures.

Frequency Scale asked the participant how often something happens to them. This also had 7 points from Never to Very Often. We used this when asking how often they come across news about China. We didn't want to ask if they agree with seeing news about China.

Semantic Differential scale was used to measure Country Image. We gave the participant 2 statements and asked them where they fall in between. For example “China is” Not Technologically Advanced to Highly Technologically Advanced. They then chose where they think China falls in between the 2 statements.

All 3 of these scales gave us a number between 1 and 7. Which allowed us to average each scale and compare them to each other and our two countries.

4.5.4 Measurement scales

Established scales were used wherever they exist, adapted only by substituting the country name. Table 4.1 sets out each construct with its number of items, source, response format, and an example item.

Table 4.1: Measurement scales and sources

Construct	Items	Scale source	Response format	Sample item
Perceived geopolitical tension	5	Developed for this study; informed by Caldara & Iacoviello (2022) and Slovic (1987)	7-point Likert, strongly disagree to strongly agree	Relations between Italy and China are currently tense.
Media exposure	4	Adapted from agenda-setting research; no established scale exists	7-point frequency, never to very frequently	How often do you encounter news about relations between Italy and China?
Consumer animosity	8	Klein, Ettenson & Morris (1998); refined per Riefler & Diamantopoulos (2007)	7-point Likert	China wants to gain economic power over Italy.
Country image	9	Martin & Eroglu (1993), political, economic and technological components	7-point semantic differential	China is technologically: not advanced / highly advanced.
Brand trust	8	Delgado-Ballester (2004); reliability (4 items) and intentions (4 items)	7-point Likert	This brand would be honest and sincere in addressing my concerns.
Purchase intention	3	Dodds, Monroe & Grewal (1991)	7-point Likert	I would consider buying this brand within the next twelve months.
Consumer ethnocentrism	10	CETSCALE short form, Shimp & Sharma (1987)	7-point Likert	It is not right to purchase foreign products because it puts Italian people out of jobs.
National identity	8	NATID, Keillor, Hult, Erffmeyer & Babakus (1996); norms in Keillor & Hult (1999)	7-point Likert	I feel a strong attachment to Italy.
Individual collectivism (control)	6	CVSCALE, Yoo, Donthu & Lenartowicz (2011)	7-point Likert	Individuals should sacrifice self-interest for the group.
Cosmopolitanism (control)	6	C-COSMO, Riefler, Diamantopoulos & Siguaw (2012)	7-point Likert	I am interested in learning about other countries and cultures.

Note. Sample items show the Italian version of the questionnaire; the Indian version substitutes India for Italy and Indian for Italian throughout. Full item wording for both versions appears in Appendix A.

Two of the ten scales are not taken from established sources, and this is the most significant measurement limitation of the study. No validated scale exists for measuring perceived geopolitical tension at the level of the individual consumer, the concept having been measured almost entirely at national level using counts of newspaper coverage. The five

items used here were written for this study on the basis of the risk perception literature. Media exposure similarly has no standard instrument for this application. Both must be regarded as provisional, and their performance is reported in full rather than assumed.

4.5.5 Translation

The questionnaire was translated into Italian to be used in Italy and into English to be used in India. English is widely spoken in India within universities and business so this language was appropriate for the targeted population. Translation took place through the use of back translation (Brislin, 1970). A bilingual translator translated the questionnaire from English to Italian. The Italian version was then translated back into English by a different translator who had not had access to the original. The two versions in English were compared and any discrepancies were resolved. Where translations of items did not hold the same meaning these were noted.

Using two different languages to administer the questionnaire to the two samples is a limitation of the study. Participants may interpret items in different ways due to the language used. This is mentioned as a limitation in section 4.11 and is why it is only suggested that the results can be compared between the two countries.

4.5.6 Pre-testing and pilot

Academics reviewed the questionnaire to ensure that the items covered what they needed to cover. Participants from each country were interviewed to ensure that items were not being interpreted in a way that is different from the desired meaning. A pilot of around 30 participants in each country was used to test for reliability. Any items that decreased the reliability of their scale were noted and the amount of time taken to complete was also measured. Items that failed at this stage were altered or removed and this was documented.

4.6 Sampling Strategy

4.6.1 Target population

Adults who live in Italy and India and are over 18 years old formed the target population. Consumers were those who buy products within the chosen category or contribute towards the buying of these products. They did not need to currently own a product that is made by a Chinese company. If only owners were sampled then consumers would not be able to be sampled that fall within the range that this research is looking to measure.

4.6.2 Sampling method

A convenience sample was collected with quotas. Consumers were sourced through universities, social media and other forms of communication in Italy and India. Quotas were set on age and gender to ensure the sample did not become biased towards a particular age or gender as would be the case if no quotas were set when recruiting participants online.

As this is not a random sample and there is no population to sample from we cannot say that the results are reflective of consumers in Italy and India. What can be said is that we were able to measure the relationships proposed and see if they are greater or smaller than one another.

4.6.3 Sample size

100 responses were aimed for from each country totalling 200. When using a sample of 100 any correlation of .20 or greater is significant. As the literature suggests that correlations within this area of research are higher than this 100 responses per country was an appropriate sample size to test these relationships.

When splitting the sample to compare the relationship between the groups as is required by H4 and H9 we were left with approximately 50 respondents within each group. To achieve significance with a sample size of 50 a correlation needs to be around .28. This may not allow us to see any differences between groups that may be present. Therefore if no difference is found between groups we can only state that we have failed to find a difference not that one doesn't exist. Wording has been careful to reflect this.

4.7 Variables

There are six variables that this research looked to measure. Geopolitical tensions, media coverage of the tensions, consumer animosity, country image, brand trust and purchase intention. Two dispositional variables were also measured. Consumer ethnocentrism and national identity. These two variables were used to compare the groups against one another. Two more variables were used as covariates, individual collectivism and open to other cultures. Demographic information was also measured such as age, gender, education, income and if they currently own a product made by a Chinese company.

All variables were measured by averaging the items that make up the scale. Items that are reverse worded were reverse coded. By using the mean of the items all the variables were

kept on the 1-7 scale, which allowed the means to be compared to one another and reported in an understandable way.

Brand trust was measured using an overall mean and means of the reliability and intentions items. As H5 and H6 predict different outcomes for these items.

It should be noted that individual collectivism is included as a variable in this study. In Chapter 2 it was explained that we want to measure cultural tendencies of individuals and not assume they will fall within a country's tendency. Therefore we included this to satisfy that aim. If the Italians and Indians do differ on a variable we are able to compare them based on their collectivism score and not just their nationality.

4.8 Reliability and Validity

4.8.1 Reliability

Reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha. Alpha measures the internal consistency of items that are trying to measure the same thing. An alpha of .70 (Nunnally, 1978) is considered good reliability. However if an alpha is slightly lower it may be acceptable depending on the number of items in the scale. Item total correlation was tested and any items that correlated below .30 with their scale were looked at for removal. Any changes to the scale were documented.

Alpha was tested for both countries separately as well as the combined sample. If one country's reliability is low it could show that the items are being interpreted differently by the respondents.

4.8.2 Validity

- Content validity. Using previous scales helped ensure that we were measuring what we should be measuring. As explained in section 4.5.6 we had experts look at our questionnaire to see if the items covered what they should cover.
- Face validity. By interviewing participants during the pre testing stage we ensured that they felt the items were valid.
- We used factor analysis to test for construct validity of our new scales. This shows us if the items cluster together to measure one thing or many things.

There are other ways to test for validity. However as these would fall outside the scope of this research I feel that these tests are enough to establish validity. This is discussed in more detail in section 4.11.

4.8.3 Common method concerns

As all of our variables were measured through the use of one questionnaire we ran the risk of common method variance. There are steps we took to reduce this risk. By ensuring participants knew they were anonymous we hoped to stop them from answering in a way they feel is socially desirable. We separated the country items from the brand items by having other questions between them. Different scales were used to measure the different variables and items were looked at to ensure they were clear during the pre testing stage.

A factor analysis was run on all the items in the questionnaire. If we find that most of the variance is explained by one factor it could suggest common method variance is occurring. Although this test is not fool proof if the test fails we can be comfortable that common method variance is not occurring.

4.9 Ethical Considerations

As we were dealing with humans we needed to make sure we followed ethical guidelines. We followed the ethics board at Università Politecnica delle Marche and the rules laid out by GDPR. GDPR applies to those who live in Italy but we also followed these rules when collecting data from India.

- Participants were informed of what the research is about, how long it would take and that they could leave at any point. They had to agree to participate.
- No information was collected that could identify the participant. Not even their IP address. As we did not ask for enough demographic information to pinpoint anyone.
- Information was stored on the Universities secure servers and only the author and supervisor had access to the data.
- Care was taken when wording items. As this research deals with a subject that many people may have lost family members over. Items were worded to reflect feelings towards the country and not the people.

Another point to consider when looking at our questionnaire is that by showing consumers items that they may disagree with we may be influencing them. When completing the

questionnaire participants were shown that the items represent what some consumers believe about China.

4.10 Data Analysis Plan

The data was analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics. The following methods were used and are explained below.

4.10.1 Preparing the data

Any incomplete questionnaires were removed. If a participant had left 20% or more of the questions blank the response was discarded. Attention questions were added to some of the longer scales. If a participant failed more than one of these questions they were discarded. Participants that gave the same answer for every item in a scale were identified by checking if they had varied their answers at all. Time taken to complete the questionnaire was checked to see if anyone had completed it too quickly. Missing data was replaced with the mean of the scale they were missing an answer for. If someone had not answered any items on a scale they were removed from any tests that involve that scale.

Items that are reverse worded were reverse coded. The distributions of the data were checked for any skewness or kurtosis to ensure the data is normally distributed.

4.10.2 Describing the sample and the responses

Descriptive statistics were used to describe the sample and the responses. Frequency tables were used to describe the demographics and the means and standard deviations are reported for each variable for each country. This allows the reader to see how high each variable is scored in each country.

A t test was run to compare the means of each variable between the two countries. A t test shows if there is a significant difference between two groups.

4.10.3 Reliability

Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each scale using the total sample and then each country was tested separately, as explained in section 4.8.1. Factor analysis was also run to test the new scales.

4.10.4 Examining relationships between constructs

Pearson correlations were used to test if the variables correlate with one another. Correlations tell us how strong a relationship there is between two variables. If the

correlation is 0 there is no relationship. If the correlation is positive it shows that as one variable increases so does the other. If the correlation is negative it shows that as one variable increases the other decreases. The further away from 0 the number is the stronger the correlation is.

Correlations were used to test H1, H2, H3, H5, H6 and H7. All of these hypotheses are testing if two things correlate with one another. As explained in section 4.6.3 any correlation of .20 or greater is significant.

We also tested H5 and H6 using correlations. Correlations were calculated using the overall mean of brand trust and then using the reliability and intention means separately. By doing this we can see if animosity and country image correlate with these items differently to each other.

As we expected these to be different we also split the participants into high and low animosity. We then compared the means of the reliability and intention items. If the mean of intention is lower for high animosity and there is no difference for reliability this shows that animosity is having a bigger effect on the intention items. This gives us the same result as the correlation but using means which may be easier to explain.

4.10.5 Examining whether relationships differ between groups

H4, H9 and H10 all test if a correlation is higher for one group than another. We split the participants into two groups and calculated the correlation for each group. If the correlation is higher for one group than the other then we have supported our hypothesis.

By splitting a continuous variable into two groups we lose information about how far each participant falls from the midpoint. There are better ways to do this but I feel that splitting the sample allows us to clearly see if a correlation is higher for one group than another. As we had around 50 participants in each group we were only able to detect a difference if it is quite large.

4.10.6 Examining the role of brand trust

We tested if brand trust plays a role in the relationship between consumer animosity and purchase intention by comparing means.

We split the participants into two groups based on animosity. High and low. Then we split the participants into two groups based on brand trust. High and low. This gave us four groups.

- We compared the means of purchase intention between all participants that scored low on animosity and those that scored high on animosity.
- We then compared the means within each level of trust. By comparing participants that both have a low level of trust we are taking trust out of the equation.

If we find that there is a smaller difference in purchase intention between high and low animosity within each level of trust than there is when we ignore trust we can say that trust plays a part in the relationship. If the difference is the same then trust is not playing a part in the relationship between animosity and purchase intention. This is the same as controlling for a variable but we are just using means to achieve the result. If we find that the difference disappears when we control for trust we can say that trust accounts for the whole relationship. If the difference is smaller but still there we can say trust plays a part but something else is causing the relationship as well. As explained in section 3.5.8 we expected this to be the case.

4.11 Limitations of the Research Design

There are many limitations that come from the decisions we have made in this chapter.

- As we tested everything at one point in time we cannot say that one thing causes another. Only that they are correlated. We have used words carefully to make sure we don't imply causation.
- We tested purchase intention not purchase behaviour. There is a known gap between intention and behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) and in Chapter 2 we argued that this is why some research may be conflicting.
- We used a convenience sample which limits our ability to generalise. Our sample may also be skewed towards younger and more educated consumers.
- Two of our scales are new and do not have the backing of previous research. We report the reliability of these scales and take this into consideration when interpreting the results.

- As we used two languages to collect data from our two samples we cannot be certain that they are comparable. We discuss this further in the conclusion.
- We were not able to control for variables. As we only used correlations and compared means we are not able to see if other variables play a part in our results. We measured age, collectivism and open to other cultures so we can compare these to see if they correlate with the other variables but we are not able to control for them.
- The methods we used are basic. We could have used more advanced methods to test all of our hypotheses at once. However I feel that the methods we used are suitable for the research questions we are asking and allow the reader to understand how we came to our results.

One limitation that we should mention is that we only tested one point in time. We cannot say if trust will last longer than purchase intention as we only tested at one point. We can only see if the relationships we think exist do exist.

4.12 Chapter Summary

In this chapter we have looked at how we measured our variables and tested our hypotheses. We used a survey to measure Italian and Indian consumers perceptions of Chinese brands. Using a post positivism paradigm and taking a deductive approach. We used existing scales to measure 8 of our variables and created 2 new scales. We aimed to get 100 responses from each country. Which allowed us to test most of our hypotheses. But did not allow us to detect smaller differences between groups.

We used basic methods to analyse our data. Such as means and percentages and comparing these between groups. And using correlations to test if our variables are related. I feel that these methods are suitable for our research and allow the reader to understand how we have come to our results. However there are limitations to this which are discussed in the conclusion.

Chapter 5: Survey Findings and Analysis

5.1 Introduction and Overview of the Data

This chapter goes over the results found when using the process outlined in Chapter 4. It follows the same steps used in that process, starting with screening the data, then describing the sample, describing the scores, testing the questionnaire, examining the correlations and finally going through each hypothesis.

The data analysed consisted of 200 responses, 100 from each country, collected from Italian and Indian consumers who completed the questionnaire described in Chapter 4. Respondents in both countries answered the same set of questions, in Italian in Italy and in English in India.

This chapter shows that scores can be obtained from this questionnaire and combined, that the process outlined in Chapter 4 can be applied to the data to reach an answer for each hypothesis, and that there is enough data to reach some conclusions while others cannot be reached at the available sample size.

Because the study is cross-sectional, I have used careful word choices throughout this chapter. When I refer to two things being correlated, this simply states that there is a correlation and does not imply that one causes the other. When stating that a hypothesis has been supported, it means that the pattern predicted in Chapter 3 is shown in our data.

5.2 Data Screening

All data was screened according to the guidelines stated in section 4.10.1. There was missing data in this study due to the routing of the question if a participant did not know a brand. If a participant stated that they did not have knowledge about a brand they would not rate their trust in that brand or intention to buy. So out of 200 participants 8 did not rate Xiaomi, 44 did not rate Shein and 66 did not rate BYD. According to section 4.10.1 each participant's score was the average of all brands that they rated. If they did not rate any brands they were left out of the equations for those questions.

The distributions were checked to see if there was any skewness. All of our scores should have close to no skewness due to the type of tests we ran. Skewness ranged from -.38 to .12 and kurtosis ranged from -.85 to -.27. These values are considered normal. So no further changes were needed to our data.

5.3 Respondent Profile

Table 5.1 outlines how many participants we had for each characteristic. The samples were similar to one another in most cases. As stated earlier we wanted to sample people of all ages and levels of education. We ended up getting more young educated participants then older less educated ones. Which was expected from our method of sampling in section 4.11.

Table 5.1: Composition of the two national samples

Characteristic	Italy (n = 100)	India (n = 100)
Age, mean (SD)	33.9 (9.5)	34.0 (10.5)
Gender: female	48	42
Gender: male	51	56
Gender: prefer not to say	1	2
Education: secondary	20	16
Education: bachelor	43	51
Education: master or above	37	33
Income: below average	30	31
Income: around average	48	39
Income: above average	22	30

Note. Entries are counts of respondents unless otherwise stated. Percentages are equal to counts because each sample contains 100 cases.

Table 5.2 reports brand familiarity, ownership, and the outcome of the brand-origin check required by Section 4.5.2. Two features deserve comment. Familiarity is high for Xiaomi in both countries but considerably lower for BYD, which is consistent with the difference in market presence noted in Section 4.5.2 and is the reason familiarity was measured rather than assumed. The origin check is the more consequential of the two. A substantial minority of respondents did not identify each brand as Chinese, and the proportion doing so correctly varies sharply by brand, from 84.2 percent for Xiaomi in Italy to 54.1 percent for BYD in India. This reproduces the pattern documented by Samiee, Shimp and Sharma (2005) and is the reason the analysis of the central hypothesis is repeated below on respondents who identified every brand correctly.

Table 5.2: Brand familiarity, ownership, and correct identification of Chinese origin

Brand	Familiar (Italy / India)	Owned (Italy / India)	Identified as Chinese, % (Italy / India)
Xiaomi	95 / 97	49 / 49	84.2 / 83.5
Shein	86 / 70	18 / 15	55.8 / 64.3
BYD	73 / 61	12 / 15	57.5 / 54.1

Note. Familiarity and ownership are counts of respondents. The origin percentage is calculated among respondents familiar enough with the brand to evaluate it.

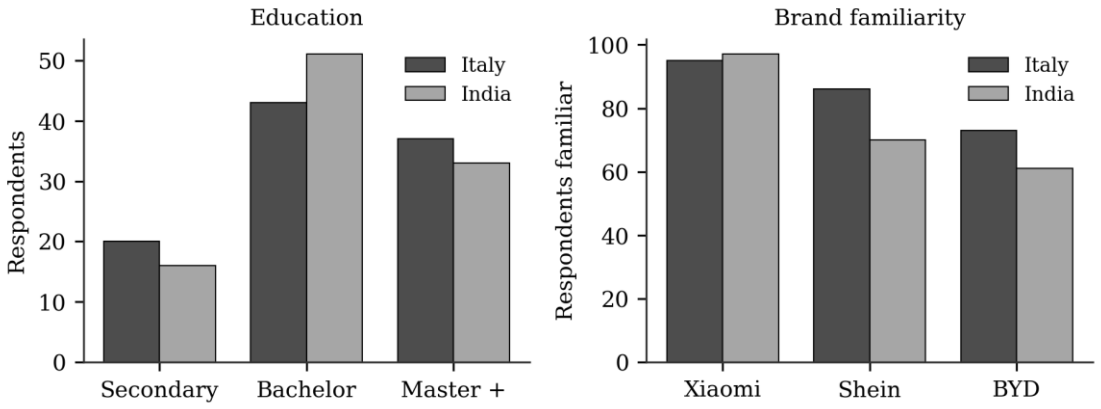


Figure 5.1: Education and brand familiarity in the two samples

5.4 Average Scores and Comparison Between Countries

Table 5.3 reports the mean and standard deviation of every construct in each country, together with an independent-samples t-test comparing the two. Each score is the average of the items in its scale and therefore retains the original range from 1 to 7, with 4 as the neutral midpoint. A score above 4 indicates agreement with the construct; a score below 4 indicates disagreement.

Table 5.3: Construct means, standard deviations, and comparison between countries

Construct	Italy M (SD)	India M (SD)	Difference	t	Sig.
Perceived geopolitical tension	4.17 (1.26)	4.84 (1.20)	-0.67	-3.88	p < .001
Media exposure	3.83 (1.31)	4.38 (1.31)	-0.56	-3.01	p = .003
Consumer animosity	3.58 (1.21)	4.45 (1.14)	-0.87	-5.22	p < .001
Country image	4.44 (0.78)	4.40 (0.67)	0.04	0.42	p = .675
Country image: political	3.31 (1.31)	2.86 (1.21)	0.45	2.52	p = .012
Country image: economic	4.94 (1.15)	5.06 (0.93)	-0.12	-0.79	p = .432
Country image: technological	5.06 (0.99)	5.27 (0.91)	-0.20	-1.51	p = .132
Brand trust (overall)	4.30 (0.89)	4.09 (0.82)	0.21	1.70	p = .090
Brand trust: reliability	4.61 (1.08)	4.45 (1.11)	0.16	1.04	p = .299
Brand trust: intentions	3.99 (1.21)	3.74 (1.16)	0.25	1.49	p = .138
Purchase intention	3.88 (1.31)	3.59 (1.22)	0.29	1.62	p = .108
Consumer ethnocentrism	3.64 (1.21)	4.38 (1.21)	-0.74	-4.36	p < .001
National identity	4.56 (1.14)	5.25 (1.00)	-0.68	-4.50	p < .001
Individual collectivism	4.20 (0.97)	5.01 (0.94)	-0.81	-5.99	p < .001
Cosmopolitanism	5.24 (0.92)	4.77 (1.00)	0.47	3.45	p < .001

Note. Difference is the Italian mean minus the Indian mean. A negative value indicates a higher score in India. Degrees of freedom vary between comparisons because equal variances were not assumed.

Indian respondents report higher perceived tension (4.84 against 4.17), higher media exposure, and higher animosity toward China (4.45 against 3.58, $p < .001$). They also score

higher on consumer ethnocentrism and national identity, and on individual collectivism, while Italian respondents score higher on cosmopolitanism. Animosity sits above the midpoint in India and below it in Italy, so the two samples differ not only in degree but in whether the average respondent holds the attitude at all.

Two results run against the pattern. Overall country image is almost identical in the two samples (4.44 and 4.40, p = .675), despite the difference in animosity, and the difference in brand trust and purchase intention is small and not statistically significant. The country image components explain part of this. Beliefs about China's political conduct are well below the midpoint in both samples and lowest in India (2.86), while beliefs about its technological capability are high in both (5.06 and 5.27). The composite conceals a divided judgement: the same respondents regard China as politically objectionable and technically accomplished, which is the pattern anticipated in Section 3.5.2 and the reason the components were measured separately.

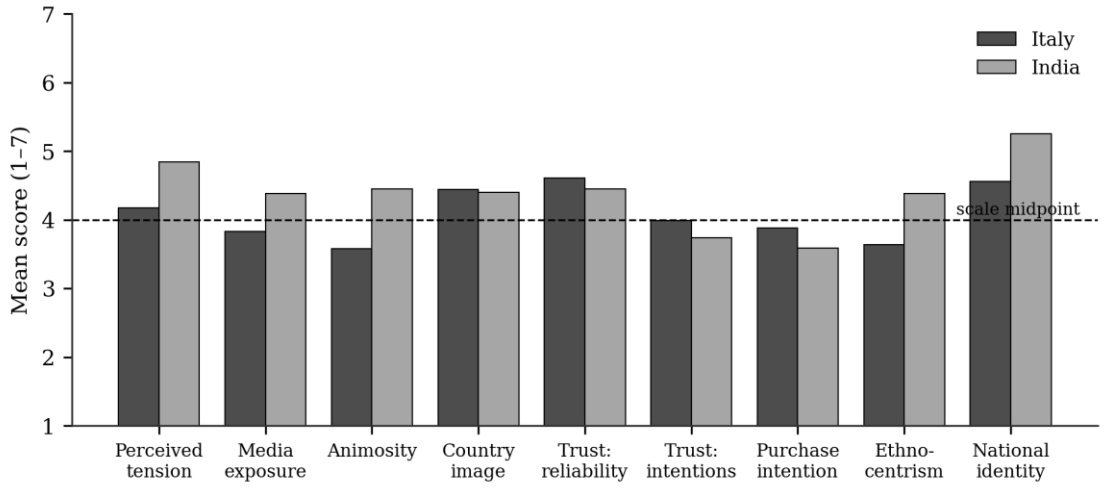


Figure 5.2: Mean construct scores in the two samples

5.5 Assessment of the Questionnaire

Table 5.4 reports Cronbach's alpha for every scale, calculated for the combined sample and for each country separately as specified in Section 4.8.1. Alpha indicates the extent to which the items intended to measure the same thing produce consistent answers, with higher values indicating greater consistency.

Table 5.4: Internal consistency of the measurement scales

Scale	Items	Combined	Italy	India
Perceived geopolitical tension	5	0.88	0.88	0.87

Scale	Items	Combined	Italy	India
Media exposure	4	0.84	0.84	0.84
Consumer animosity	8	0.88	0.87	0.85
Country image	9	0.75	0.77	0.73
Brand trust: reliability	4	0.84	0.85	0.82
Brand trust: intentions	4	0.83	0.83	0.83
Purchase intention	3	0.86	0.88	0.84
Consumer ethnocentrism	10	0.87	0.85	0.88
National identity	8	0.87	0.85	0.86
Individual collectivism	6	0.81	0.78	0.79
Cosmopolitanism	6	0.84	0.82	0.83

Note. Entries are Cronbach's alpha. Brand trust and purchase intention are calculated on the items for the brand evaluated by the largest number of respondents.

Every scale reaches or exceeds the conventional threshold of .70 in the combined sample and in each country separately, the lowest value being 0.75. The lowest figures belong to country image, which is expected: the scale deliberately combines political, economic, and technological components that Section 5.4 has already shown to diverge, and a scale whose parts are meant to differ should not display the internal consistency of a scale measuring one thing. No item correlated below .30 with the remainder of its scale, the lowest such value being 0.36, so no item was removed.

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the two scales written for this study, as required by Section 4.8.2. The five perceived tension items produce a first factor with an eigenvalue of 3.39 accounting for 67.8 percent of the variance, with the second factor at 0.45; item loadings range from 0.80 to 0.84. The four media exposure items behave similarly, with a first factor of 2.73 accounting for 68.3 percent of the variance. Both scales therefore measure a single dimension rather than several, which is what the analysis was intended to establish. This is preliminary evidence only, for the reasons given in Section 4.8.2.

The single-factor check described in Section 4.8.3 was also performed. Entering all 56 country-level and disposition items into one unrotated factor analysis, the first factor accounts for 16.7 percent of the variance, well below the majority that would indicate respondents answering everything in much the same way. As noted in Section 4.8.3, passing this check does not demonstrate that common method variance is absent; it establishes only that no single dominant response pattern is present.

5.6 Correlations Among the Constructs

Table 5.5 reports Pearson correlations among all constructs, with the Italian sample below the diagonal and the Indian sample above it. A correlation is a single number between minus one and plus one describing how closely two measures move together, as explained in Section 4.10.4. With 100 respondents per country, a correlation of .20 or larger is statistically significant at the conventional five percent level.

Table 5.5: Correlations among the constructs (Italy below the diagonal, India above)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. PGT	—	.39	.34	-.32	-.16	-.29	-.29	.19	.11	.03	-.18
2. MED	.31	—	.36	-.28	-.04	-.35	-.18	.17	-.01	-.01	-.02
3. ANI	.51	.34	—	-.13	.04	-.56	-.41	.20	.16	.01	-.20
4. CIM	-.47	-.28	-.25	—	.40	.22	.11	-.16	-.02	-.01	.14
5. REL	-.24	-.21	-.10	.48	—	.03	.27	-.08	.11	.12	.03
6. INT	-.37	-.26	-.48	.41	.20	—	.49	-.16	.02	.14	.15
7. PI	-.40	-.17	-.37	.28	.24	.55	—	-.07	-.01	.08	.15
8. CET	.13	.11	.23	-.17	-.00	-.31	-.11	—	.05	-.17	-.28
9. NID	.12	.18	.02	-.04	.18	-.01	.04	.12	—	.18	-.08
10. COL	-.03	.07	.02	.19	.07	-.03	.07	-.07	.13	—	.14
11. COS	-.15	-.04	-.36	.06	.04	.06	.10	-.15	-.04	.01	—

Note. PGT = perceived geopolitical tension; MED = media exposure; ANI = consumer animosity; CIM = country image; REL = brand trust, reliability; INT = brand trust, intentions; PI = purchase intention; CET = consumer ethnocentrism; NID = national identity; COL = individual collectivism; COS = cosmopolitanism. Correlations of .20 or larger are significant at $p < .05$.

The pattern most visible in the table is the one the study was built to examine. Animosity correlates with the intentions part of brand trust at -.48 in Italy and -.56 in India, and with the reliability part at -.10 and .04. The two parts of the same construct behave quite differently in relation to the same attitude. Section 5.8 examines this directly.

5.7 Perceived Tension, Media Exposure, Animosity and Country Image (H1–H3, SRQ1)

This section addresses the three hypotheses concerning how political friction reaches the individual consumer. Each is a claim that two measures go together in a stated direction and is therefore examined through the correlation between them, calculated separately in each country.

5.7.1 Perceived tension and animosity (H1)

H1 proposed that consumers perceiving relations as more tense report higher animosity. The correlation is .51 in Italy ($p < .001$) and .34 in India ($p < .001$), both in the predicted direction

and both statistically significant. H1 is supported in both samples. The association is the stronger of the two in Italy, which is worth recording but not interpreting: nothing in Chapter 3 predicted a difference here.

5.7.2 Perceived tension and country image (H2)

H2 proposed that consumers perceiving relations as more tense hold a less favourable image of the foreign country. The correlation with overall country image is -.47 in Italy and -.32 in India, both significant and both negative as predicted. H2 is supported in both samples.

Section 3.5.2 anticipated that the components would not move together, and they do not. Perceived tension correlates with beliefs about political conduct at -.48 in Italy and -.32 in India, with beliefs about economic strength at -.26 and -.05, and with beliefs about technological capability at -.17 and -.22. The damage falls predominantly on the political component. Respondents who regard relations as tense think worse of how China conducts itself without thinking substantially less of what it can build, which is the divided judgement Section 5.4 identified in the means and which the composite score conceals.

5.7.3 Media exposure and animosity (H3)

H3 proposed that consumers following media coverage of the relationship more closely report higher animosity. The correlation is .34 in Italy and .36 in India, both significant. H3 is supported in both samples. The caution stated in Section 3.5.3 applies with full force and is repeated rather than set aside: a design measuring both variables at one moment cannot distinguish consumers whose hostility was shaped by coverage from consumers who seek out coverage consistent with hostility they already held.

5.8 Animosity, Country Image and Brand Trust (H5–H6, SRQ2)

This section addresses the central hypothesis of the study and its counterpart. Both concern whether attitudes toward a country reach brands from that country, and both predict that the two parts of brand trust will be affected differently. Table 5.6 reports the correlations with overall trust and with each part separately, as specified in Section 4.10.4.

Table 5.6: Correlations of animosity and country image with the two parts of brand trust

Association	Overall brand trust	Reliability	Intentions
Consumer animosity (Italy)	-.39	-.10	-.48
Country image (Italy)	.57	.48	.41
Consumer animosity (India)	-.38	.04	-.56

Association	Overall brand trust	Reliability	Intentions
Country image (India)	.43	.40	.22

Note. Correlations of .20 or larger are significant at $p < .05$ with 100 respondents per country.

H5 proposed that animosity is associated with lower brand trust, with the reduction concentrated in beliefs about the brand's intentions rather than its reliability. The correlation with the intentions part is -.48 in Italy and -.56 in India, both significant. The correlation with the reliability part is -.10 in Italy ($p = .330$) and .04 in India ($p = .731$), neither significant and neither distinguishable from zero. H5 is supported in both samples, in both of its parts: the association with trust is present, and it is concentrated where Chapter 3 said it would be.

H6 proposed the mirror pattern, with country image related more strongly to beliefs about reliability. The correlation with the reliability part is .48 in Italy and .40 in India, against .41 and .22 for the intentions part. Both associations are positive and the reliability figure is the larger in both samples, so H6 is supported, though the margin in Italy is narrower than in India and should not be treated as a firm difference.

Taken together the two results support the argument advanced in Section 2.8.3 and formalised in Chapter 3. Hostility toward a country and beliefs about a country are not merely distinct constructs; they attach to different parts of what it means to trust a brand. Hostility bears on whether the company is thought to mean well, and beliefs about capability bear on whether its products are thought to work.

Section 4.10.4 specified that this expectation be examined a second way, by comparing group averages rather than correlations, on the grounds that a difference between two averages is easier to interpret than a correlation coefficient. Respondents in each country were divided at the scale midpoint of 4 into those at or below the midpoint on animosity and those above it, and the two groups compared on each part of trust. Table 5.7 reports the comparison and Figure 5.3 displays it.

Table 5.7: Brand trust by animosity group

Part of trust	Animosity at or below midpoint, M (SD)	Animosity above midpoint, M (SD)	Difference	t	Sig.
Reliability (Italy)	4.65 (1.00)	4.54 (1.20)	0.11	-0.46	$p = .649$
Intentions (Italy)	4.38 (1.10)	3.30 (1.11)	1.07	-4.66	$p < .001$
Reliability (India)	4.47 (0.95)	4.43 (1.20)	0.03	-0.16	$p = .874$
Intentions (India)	4.47 (0.94)	3.31 (1.07)	1.15	-5.64	$p < .001$

Note. Group sizes are 64 and 36 in Italy and 37 and 63 in India.

The comparison reproduces the conclusion drawn from the correlations using nothing more than averages. On beliefs about reliability the two groups are almost identical, differing by 0.11 of a scale point in Italy ($p = .649$) and 0.03 in India ($p = .874$). On beliefs about intentions the gap is roughly a full scale point in both countries, 1.07 in Italy and 1.15 in India, both significant at $p < .001$. Respondents high in animosity think the brands work about as well as respondents low in animosity think they do, and think considerably worse of what the companies behind them intend.

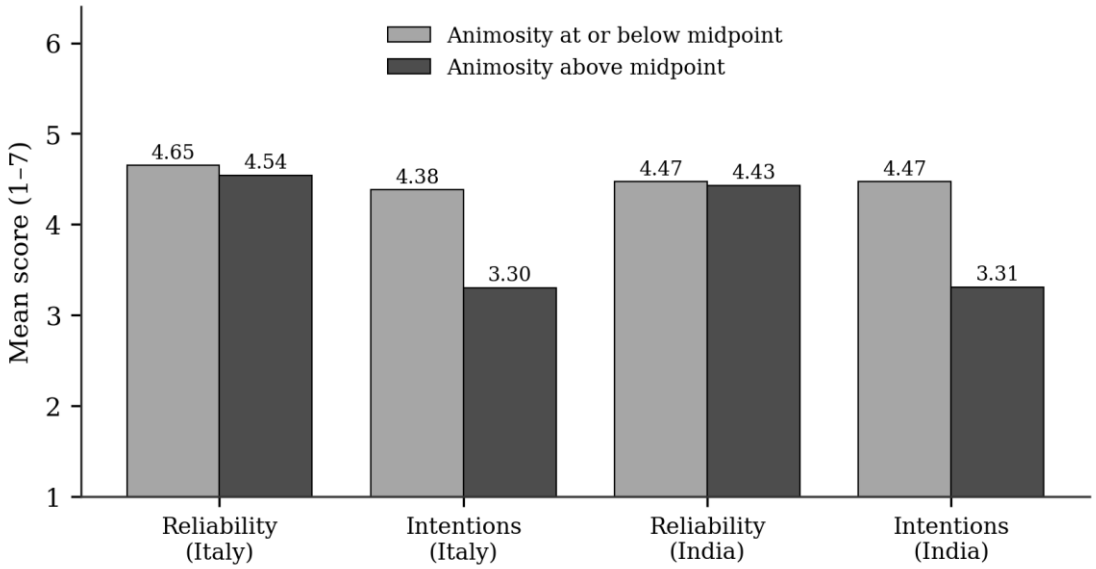


Figure 5.3: Brand trust by animosity group, shown separately for each part of trust

5.8.1 Results by brand and by correct identification of origin

Section 4.5.2 required that results be reported by brand as well as combined, because the three stimulus brands do not occupy identical positions in the two markets. Table 5.8 reports the brand-level scores and the correlation of animosity with each part of trust for each brand separately.

Table 5.8: Brand trust, purchase intention and association with animosity, by brand

Brand	n	Reliability M	Intentions M	Purchase intention M	r with animosity: reliability	r with animosity: intentions
Xiaomi (Italy)	95	4.90	4.10	4.12	-.12	-.45
Xiaomi (India)	97	4.70	3.89	3.86	.08	-.49
Shein (Italy)	86	4.22	3.82	3.89	-.03	-.43
Shein (India)	70	3.68	3.49	3.30	-.01	-.59
BYD (Italy)	73	4.67	4.13	3.65	-.14	-.47
BYD (India)	61	4.65	3.80	3.22	-.05	-.55

Note. n is the number of respondents sufficiently familiar with the brand to evaluate it.

The pattern holds for every brand in both countries. The correlation between animosity and beliefs about intentions ranges from -.59 to -.43, while the correlation with beliefs about reliability remains close to zero throughout. Mean scores differ between brands, with Shein evaluated least favourably in both markets and most sharply in India, but the relationship under examination does not depend on which brand is being evaluated. This matters because it indicates that the pattern is not an artefact of one brand's circumstances.

Section 4.5.2 also required the analysis to be repeated on respondents who identified every brand they evaluated as Chinese, since an origin-based mechanism can only operate where origin is known. Restricting the sample in this way leaves 37 respondents in Italy and 48 in India. Within these smaller groups the correlation between animosity and beliefs about intentions is -.42 and -.43 respectively, and the correlation with beliefs about reliability remains negligible at .02 and .06. The pattern is unchanged. The subgroups are small enough that only substantial associations could be detected in them, so this is a check for consistency rather than an independent test.

5.9 Brand Trust and Purchase Intention (H7–H8, SRQ2)

H7 proposed that consumers reporting higher trust in the brands report stronger intention to purchase them. The correlation between overall brand trust and purchase intention is .52 in Italy and .53 in India, both significant at $p < .001$. H7 is supported in both samples. This is the least surprising result in the chapter, and as Section 3.5.7 noted, it is included largely because it provides the comparison point for what follows.

H8 proposed that the association between animosity and purchase intention is weaker once differences in brand trust are taken into account, which would indicate that part of the effect of animosity runs through trust. Following the procedure in Section 4.10.6, respondents in each country were divided into low and high animosity and, independently, into low and high brand trust, and average purchase intention was compared across the resulting four groups. Table 5.9 reports the comparison.

Table 5.9: Average purchase intention by animosity group, overall and within levels of trust

Group	Low animosity M	High animosity M	Difference	Sig.
All respondents (Italy)	4.17	3.57	0.60	p = .021
Low-trust respondents only (Italy)	3.63	3.21	0.42	p = .221
High-trust respondents only (Italy)	4.50	4.26	0.23	p = .571
All respondents (India)	3.94	3.21	0.73	p = .002

Group	Low animosity M	High animosity M	Difference	Sig.
Low-trust respondents only (India)	3.15	2.85	0.30	p = .316
High-trust respondents only (India)	4.36	3.93	0.43	p = .184

Note. Respondents are divided at the median of animosity and at the median of brand trust within each country.

In Italy, respondents low in animosity report purchase intention higher than respondents high in animosity by 0.60 of a scale point. Comparing only respondents who hold the same level of trust, the gap falls to 0.32 on average across the two trust levels, a reduction of roughly 47 percent. In India the overall gap of 0.73 falls to 0.36, a reduction of roughly 51 percent. In both countries the gap narrows substantially but does not disappear. H8 is supported in both samples, in the specific form stated in Section 3.5.8: trust accounts for part of the association between animosity and purchase intention, and something else accounts for the remainder.

The residual gap is worth stating plainly rather than passing over. Roughly half of the association between animosity and stated purchase intention survives holding trust constant, which means that a consumer may decline to buy from a disliked country for reasons that have nothing to do with any judgement about the brand. Section 3.5.8 anticipated exactly this and named social expectation as one candidate. The present design cannot identify which of the possible reasons is operating.

5.10 Comparisons Between Groups (H4, H9 and H10)

Three hypotheses concern whether a relationship is stronger in one group than in another. All three are examined in the manner set out in Section 4.10.5: respondents are divided into two groups, the relationship is calculated separately within each, and the two figures are compared. Table 5.10 reports all three comparisons and Figure 5.4 displays them.

Table 5.10: Strength of association within groups

Hypothesis and association	Grouping variable	First group	Second group	Gap
H4: tension–animosity (Italy)	Media exposure, cut at 3.50	.49 (n = 52)	.50 (n = 48)	0.01
H4: tension–animosity (India)	Media exposure, cut at 4.50	.26 (n = 55)	.34 (n = 45)	0.08
H9: animosity–trust (Italy)	Ethnocentrism, cut at 3.50	-.38 (n = 53)	-.40 (n = 47)	0.02
H9: animosity–trust (India)	Ethnocentrism, cut at 4.50	-.40 (n = 50)	-.36 (n = 50)	0.04
H10: animosity–trust	Country	-.39 (Italy)	-.38 (India)	0.01
H10: animosity–intentions	Country	-.48 (Italy)	-.56 (India)	0.08

Note. Gap is the difference in the size of the two correlations, disregarding sign. Within subgroups of roughly 50 respondents a correlation must reach about .28 to be statistically significant, as noted in Section 4.6.3.

5.10.1 Media exposure (H4)

H4 proposed that the association between perceived tension and animosity is stronger among consumers with high media exposure. In Italy the association is .49 among low-exposure respondents and .50 among high-exposure respondents, a difference of 0.01. In India the corresponding figures are .26 and .34. The Indian difference is in the predicted direction and the Italian difference is negligible. Neither is large enough to be distinguished from ordinary variation at this subgroup size. H4 is not supported.

The wording of this conclusion matters, and Section 4.6.3 prescribed it in advance. With roughly 50 respondents in each subgroup, a genuine but moderate difference between groups would not reliably be detected. The result is therefore an absence of evidence for the proposed difference and not evidence that no difference exists. H3 meanwhile remains supported: media exposure goes with animosity directly, as Section 3.5.4 noted it might, without changing how perceived tension relates to it.

5.10.2 Consumer ethnocentrism (H9)

H9 proposed that the association between animosity and reduced brand trust is stronger among consumers high in ethnocentrism. In Italy the association is -.38 in the low-ethnocentrism group and -.40 in the high-ethnocentrism group. In India it is -.40 and -.36. The two countries differ in which group shows the larger figure, and in both cases the gap is small. H9 is not supported.

Section 3.5.9 recorded a competing expectation in advance, namely that strongly ethnocentric consumers may extend little trust to foreign brands in the first place, leaving less for animosity to remove, and that the association might therefore be weaker rather than stronger among them. The present result does not support that account either. What the data show is an absence of difference, not a difference in the opposite direction, and the honest description is that the comparison is uninformative at this sample size. Recording the competing expectation in advance was intended to prevent a result of this kind from being presented afterwards as though it had been predicted, and it has that effect here.

5.10.3 Comparison between the two countries (H10)

H10 proposed that the strength of the association between animosity and brand trust differs between Italian and Indian consumers. Chapter 3 declined to specify a direction, because the grievance-type argument and the cultural argument point opposite ways.

On overall brand trust the association is -.39 in Italy and -.38 in India, which is effectively no difference. On the intentions part of trust, where Section 5.8 showed the association is concentrated, the figures are -.48 and -.56. The Indian association is the larger of the two and the direction matches the argument from grievance type, under which a war-based grievance should bear more heavily than an economic one. The gap of 0.08 is nonetheless modest, and the comparison of two correlations specified in Section 4.10.5 provides no means of establishing that a gap of this size exceeds what sampling variation would produce. H10 is therefore recorded as not supported, with the qualification that the difference observed on the intentions part runs in the direction one of the two competing arguments would predict.

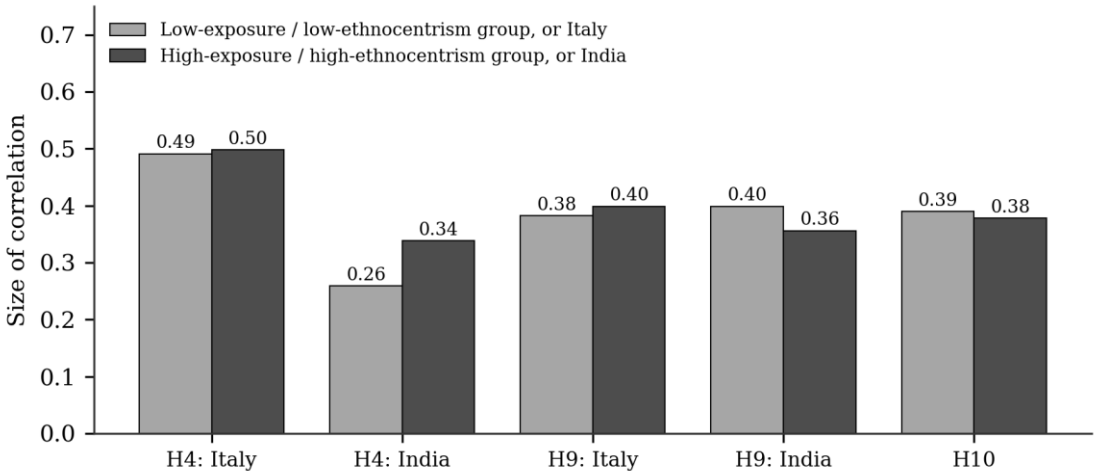


Figure 5.4: Strength of association within the compared groups

5.11 Summary of the Hypothesis Tests

Table 5.11 records the outcome of each hypothesis. Seven of the ten are supported and three are not. The three that are not supported are the three concerning differences between groups rather than associations within them, which is the expected consequence of a design in which group comparisons rest on subsamples of roughly 50 respondents.

Table 5.11: Outcome of the hypothesis tests

Hypothesis	Proposition	Outcome	Principal figures
H1	Perceived tension goes with higher animosity	Supported in both samples	r = .51 (Italy), .34 (India)
H2	Perceived tension goes with a less favourable country image	Supported in both samples	r = -.47, -.32
H3	Media exposure goes with higher animosity	Supported in both samples	r = .34, .36
H4	Media exposure strengthens the tension–animosity link	Not supported	Gap of 0.01 (Italy), 0.08 (India)

Hypothesis	Proposition	Outcome	Principal figures
H5	Animosity goes with lower trust, concentrated in intentions	Supported in both samples	Intentions r = -.48, -.56; reliability -.10, .04
H6	Country image goes with higher trust, concentrated in reliability	Supported in both samples	Reliability r = .48, .40; intentions .41, .22
H7	Brand trust goes with stronger purchase intention	Supported in both samples	r = .52, .53
H8	Trust accounts for part of the animosity–intention link	Supported in both samples	Gap falls by 47% (Italy), 51% (India)
H9	Ethnocentrism strengthens the animosity–trust link	Not supported	Gap of 0.02 (Italy), 0.04 (India)
H10	The animosity–trust link differs between the countries	Not supported	r = -.39 against -.38

5.12 Chapter Summary

Applying the procedure specified in Chapter 4 to produces a determinate outcome for each of the ten hypotheses. Perceived tension and media exposure both go with higher animosity, and perceived tension goes with a less favourable country image, with the damage falling on beliefs about political conduct rather than on beliefs about technological capability. Animosity goes with lower brand trust and country image with higher brand trust, and each attaches to a different part of trust: hostility to beliefs about the brand's intentions, country beliefs to beliefs about its reliability. Trust goes with purchase intention, and roughly half the association between animosity and purchase intention disappears when respondents holding the same level of trust are compared.

The three hypotheses concerning differences between groups are not supported. Neither media exposure nor consumer ethnocentrism produced a detectable difference in the strength of the relationships they were proposed to condition, and the two national samples did not differ detectably in the strength of the link between animosity and brand trust, though the difference observed on the intentions part of trust runs in the direction the grievance-based argument would predict. In each case the result is an absence of evidence at the available subgroup size rather than evidence of absence, and the distinction is maintained deliberately.

Chapter 6: Results Discussion, Triangulation, and Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

Here we will compare the findings from chapter 5 to previous research discussed in chapter 2. The structure of this chapter will follow the grouping of hypotheses from chapter 3. First we look at how political animosity gets to the consumer, second how country attitude effects brand from that country, third how trust relates to buying behaviour and finally if any of these vary across consumers.

There are a few things left to discuss. A model can be evaluated if it can generate hypotheses that are related to the gaps in the literature. And if those hypotheses could potentially be disproved. We can then look at what data was collected from our consumers. What it aligns with from previous research, what it contradicts and what this would mean for companies.

Having discussed each group of findings, the chapter then considers the implications for international brands, triangulates the principal results against the prior literature, sets out the contributions, limitations and directions for future research of the study, and closes with the conclusions of the thesis.

6.2 SRQ1: How Political Tension Reaches the Consumer

The first set of hypotheses looks at how political animosity translates to consumers. When consumers perceive a country to be tense with their own country they feel more animosity towards that country (H1 r=.51 Italy and .34 India) and had a less positive view of that country (H2 -.47 Italy and -.32 India). Exposure to media about that country also led to higher levels of animosity (H3 .34 Italy and .36 India).

These results would line up with research by Ang et al. (2004) who found animosity towards Japanese products after a trade dispute with Korea. Or research by Leonidou et al. (2019) who found higher levels of animosity from Ukrainian consumers towards Russian products. These researchers measured animosity on the individual level. There is also research by Caldara and Iacoviello (2022) who measured political tension using news articles. As mentioned earlier in section 2.2.2 this can't tell you how much individuals feel about that country. So showing that we can collect data on the individual level and get meaningful data is enough.

When looking at the different dimensions of country image we find that political tension leads to more negative beliefs about the country's political system (-.48 Italy and -.32 India) and beliefs that they are technologically advanced (-.17 Italy and -.22 India). We are unable to see this in our country image total. Some people think that the country is bad politically but still believe that they can produce good technology.

This is important because of how researchers have viewed country image in the past. Han (1989) said that country image could act as a halo effect or as an attribute. He suggested that it acted differently depending on if the product was similar to the countries reputation. Roth and Romeo (1992) said that country image worked better when the country excelled at certain things. All of these studies suggest that if a country's image is negatively effected then all products from that country are viewed less favourably. Magnusson, Krishnan, Westjohn and Zdravkovic (2014) found that country image changes when world events happen. Our research shows that not all aspects of country image are changed. So when studies measure country image they could be averaging together dimensions that move in opposite directions. Which could lead to underestimating the impact. This is something that could be tested with our measurement.

As for the results with media there is a caveat that we will touch on here. Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) state that individuals seek out news that aligns with their opinions. So just because someone watches more news it doesn't mean that they became more hostile they could have always been. As discussed earlier cultivation theory talks about long term exposure to media. We can not measure that with our current study. Also Soroka (2006) says that individuals react stronger to negative news. Which means that if someone watched news about two countries not getting along for a month and then saw them getting along again their level of hostility will not go back to normal. This is something that we cannot measure in this study.

6.3 SRQ2: Brand Trust and Purchase Intention

6.3.1 Why Trust Is Damaged in One Part and Not the Other

When discussing the findings from chapter 5 the main focus is that trust in a brand is split into two parts. When a consumer feels more animosity they believe that the brand does not have the best interests of the consumer in mind (-.48 Italy and -.56 India). But do not feel that they make a low quality product (-.10 Italy and .04 India). Looking at the means of those who are higher on the animosity scale they are one point lower on intentions (Italy 1.07 India

1.15) but do not differ on reliability. Country image has the opposite effect they are more related to reliability than intentions.

We need to be careful when comparing our results to Klein, Ettenson and Morris (1998). They found that animosity towards a country decreased purchase intention but did not decrease how high quality a person thought the product was. Similar to our finding that a consumer thinks a company does not have their best interest in mind but believes they make good quality products. We are just applying that to one part of trust.

Research by Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) found that trust can be broken down into three dimensions ability, benevolence and integrity. Research by Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán (2001) separated brand trust into reliability and intentions. When someone feels animosity towards a country they are judging the intentions of that country not it's ability. So it makes sense that our results show that trust is only decreased in the intentions dimension.

Research by Doney and Cannon (1997) suggests that country image is transferred to the brand. Our research could show that only certain parts of that transfer take place. Which would be an interesting addition to the theory of trust.

Slovic (1993) and Xie and Peng (2009) state that trust is harder to build then it is to lose. And that once trust is lost due to a breach of ability it is easier to regain then a breach of integrity. So if geopolitical events cause consumers to feel that a country is not acting with the best interest of others they will have a harder time regaining trust in that country's brands. Which means that even when the dispute has ended consumers will continue to avoid those brands. We cannot prove this as our study only took data at one point in time as discussed in section 4.11. Research by Ettenson and Klein (2005) showed that after a dispute consumers only regained some of their previous levels of animosity. So we can assume that they would take longer to regain trust and buying intention.

In section 5.8.1 we looked at if consumers knew where their products came from. Research by Samiee, Shimp and Sharma (2005) found that many people don't know where their products come from. And Magnusson, Westjohn and Zdravkovic (2011) say that it's more important that the consumer perceives a product to come from that country. So our findings could only apply to people who knew that the brands were Chinese. 54-84% of our sample

knew where each brand was from. When we excluded people who didn't know where all the brands were from we got the same results.

6.3.2 The Role of Trust in Purchase Decisions

Purchase intention was related to brand trust (H7, r = .52 Italy and .53 India) and the relationship between animosity and purchase intention was approximately halved when comparing people with equal amounts of trust (Italy 47% and India 51%). Some of the relationship is mediated by how they feel about the brand. Some is not.

This second relationship is more interesting and relates back to the conflicting findings from chapter 2.6.3. Ashenfelter, Ciccarella and Shatz (2007) could not find any significant impact on sales due to the boycott of French wine. Once they controlled for seasonal effects and a declining trend. Chavis and Leslie (2009) used supermarket scanner data and found that there was a significant drop in sales. Gineikiene and Diamantopoulos (2017) found consumers who expressed negative sentiments towards a country still purchased its products. Westjohn, Magnusson, Peng and Jung (2021) found that animosity has a greater impact on willingness to purchase than evaluation of the product. These findings lead me to believe that intention is not the best dependent variable to use when studying the impact of animosity. Since there are many factors that can influence someone's decision to purchase. Including price and ease of purchase.

If some of the relationship between animosity and intention is mediated by brand trust and some is not this would support this conclusion. The relationship that goes through brand trust is an attitude and should behave as such. There is something else happening with the relationship that is not going through brand trust. Boycotts are another area of research that could help explain this. Sen, Gürhan-Canli and Morwitz (2001) argue that boycotting is a social dilemma. Where an individual must decide if their action will make a difference based on how many other people are also taking part. Klein, Smith and John (2004) list self-enhancement and trying to make a difference as reasons people participate in boycotts. Neither of these would be considered an attitude towards a brand. And we would expect both of these to decrease over time as the conflict fades from the publics mind. Which again leads us to the problem of measuring intention. We cannot know how much of this relationship acts like an attitude and how much acts like a boycott.

It should be noted that this section deals with intentions and not behaviour. There is a known discrepancy between intentions and behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). The results from Ashenfelter

et al. show that behaviour does not always follow attitude. So we cannot say that there is no effect on sales.

6.4 SRQ3: Consumer Ethnocentrism and the Hypotheses Not Supported

Two of our hypotheses looked at if certain factors would strengthen our relationships. Both of these hypotheses were not supported and will be discussed below. First it should be noted that our study allows for unsupported hypotheses to occur. And states that we will report them as such in chapter 4.

H4 stated that if people watched more news they would show a higher correlation between tension and animosity. The difference between those who watched more news and those who watched less was .01 in Italy and .08 in India. Iyengar and Kinder (1987) found that watching the news changes what you use to judge situations. So if people watched more news they should have used tension as a basis for their animosity towards China. H3 was supported so we know that people who watched more news did have higher levels of animosity. But we cannot say that this had an effect on the correlation between tension and animosity. Maybe watching the news just gave people more information about China. But with only around 50 respondents in each group we cannot say for sure. Which is something we expected to happen with our sample size as discussed in section 4.6.3.

H9 stated that if people scored high on ethnocentrism they would show a higher correlation between animosity and brand trust. There was a difference of .02 in Italy and .04 in India. With Italy showing a higher correlation for those who scored low on ethnocentrism and India showing a higher correlation for those who scored high on ethnocentrism. In section 3.5.9 I hypothesized that people who score high on ethnocentrism will not give much trust to brands that come from a foreign country. So they may not have much trust to take away from animosity. This result does not support that theory. But it does support the idea that people who score high on ethnocentrism prefer domestic brands. As found by Balabanis and Diamantopoulos (2004). They may not dislike brands from other countries they just prefer brands from their own. Which would make sense as Brewer (1999) argues that favouring your in-group does not mean you dislike your out-group. So if ethnocentrism is causing people to prefer domestic brands and animosity is causing them to not want to purchase Chinese brands. They may not have any relationship with each other.

By stating this alternative hypothesis in section 3.5.9 we can discuss it without it being seen as a stretch. If I only thought of this after getting my results it would be hard to defend. But by stating it before hand we can say that it is something we considered and it was not supported. Which is something we should accept as researchers working within the post-positivist paradigm (Section 4.2.1).

6.5 SRQ4: The Comparison Between the Two Countries

As discussed in chapter 3 I was not able to form a hypothesis on H10. Due to the two theories pointing in opposite directions. Doney, Cannon and Mullen (1998) state that people in more collectivist cultures tend to project trust onto things that are associated with one another. Therefore we would expect Indians to show a higher correlation. However Westjohn, Magnusson, Peng and Jung (2021) found that collectivism and long term orientation reduced the effect of animosity on willingness to purchase.

There was no significant difference found between the two countries. When looking at brand trust as a whole there was a correlation of -.39 in Italy and -.38 in India. For intentions the correlation was -.48 and -.56 respectively. India had the larger correlation which would support the theory that people project grievances onto brands that come from that country. However the difference is small enough that it could be due to chance. Based on our comparison in section 4.10.5.

We should note what this lack of significance does and does not tell us about this debate. It does not allow us to say one theory is more correct than the other. We can only say that the effects could be equally as strong but offsetting each other. Or that they are both weak. Or that there is a difference that our sample size is unable to detect. As Harmeling, Magnusson and Singh (2015) state if a grievance caused by war causes people to feel angry and a grievance caused by economics causes people to feel threatened. Then maybe we need to measure these differently. By measuring each emotion separately we may find a difference. But as it stands we do not have that ability.

Another factor that needs to be taken into consideration when looking at differences between countries is measurement invariance. As stated by Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998) we need to ensure that the scale means the same thing in both countries. Before we can assume that the difference in scores is due to a true difference. This was not possible to test in this

study as discussed in section 4.11. Also our two samples responded to the questionnaire in their native language.

Although our study has its limitations it does help fill a gap in the literature. As mentioned by Koehn (2025) there is a lack of company level and crisis studies within the animosity literature. Also a lack of cross cultural studies. Our study compares two different countries using the same target country. Which is something that has not been done often. Another factor to consider is that we measured culture at the individual level. Instead of assuming everyone in a country shares the same cultural values. As argued by McSweeney (2002) that we should not look at mean differences between countries and apply those to all individuals. Although our two countries did score differently on individual collectivism (4.20 and 5.01). We cannot say if that had any effect on our results.

6.6 Implications for International Brands

As discussed above the implications of this study depend on where the damage is occurring.

- Showing your products are of high quality will not help. If a consumers belief about a companies motives is being harmed by animosity. Showing them that your products are of high quality will not change that. They already believe your product is good they just don't trust the company behind it.
- If trust is being harmed you should not wait it out. In section 1.7.2 I asked if you should spend less money on a brand and wait for the conflict to die down. Or continue to spend money on your brand. If only intention is being harmed you could argue that waiting would be fine. But if trust is being harmed Xie and Peng (2009) argue that it will not go away on its own. So you should continue to spend money on your brand.
- You can only control what the consumer thinks about your motives. In section 2.16.4 I argued that if your company is not taking part in a political issue and is not doing anything wrong. You have limited options on what you can do. You can only try to change what the consumer thinks about your motives. Such as storing your customers data in your home country. Having more locals work for you or partnering with local businesses. Özsomer (2012) found that having a local brand helped companies sell in developing countries. We could also argue that by being a global

brand (Steenkamp, Batra and Alden 2003) you may actually hurt yourself if the consumer is feeling nationalistic.

- Taking a stand on a political issue is not going to help. As shown by Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) when a company took a stand on a controversial topic they lost more customers than they gained. If your country is the one being attacked you probably should not get involved in the argument.
- Measure your trust and sales separately. Companies usually measure sales, brand awareness and satisfaction. If your brand trust is decreasing but your sales are not. You may not see any change in your current metrics. As mentioned by Harmeling, Magnusson and Singh (2015) if people are angry they will show it. But if they are scared they will just not buy from you. Which is harder to detect.

One last thing to note is that some people did not know the brand was Chinese. So they may not have felt any animosity towards that brand. This could be seen as a positive for companies that are not associated with a country. But as Herz and Diamantopoulos (2017) argue you never know what your customer knows. They may not consciously know the brand is Chinese but it could still have an effect on them.

6.7 Triangulation: Survey Findings and Prior Literature

Table 6.1 brings the principal results of Chapter 5 together and sets each of them against the prior work reviewed in Chapter 2, indicating whether the findings of this study extend, confirm or qualify that literature, or whether they are unable to adjudicate between competing accounts.

Table 6.1: The principal results set against the prior work reviewed in Chapter 2

Result	What the prior literature holds	Relation
Animosity attaches to beliefs about intentions, not reliability (H5)	Klein, Ettenson and Morris (1998) found animosity reduced willingness to buy without depressing quality judgement	Extends: the same separation, relocated inside brand trust, which their design did not measure
Country image attaches to beliefs about reliability (H6)	Han (1989) and Roth and Romeo (1992) treat country image as conveying capability	Consistent, and separates country image from animosity by the component each reaches
Political tension damages the political component of country image, not the technological one	Country-of-origin research has generally treated country image as a composite	Qualifies: a composite measure would understate and misdescribe the damage
Roughly half the animosity–intention association survives when trust is held level (H8)	The animosity–behaviour gap (Ashenfelter, Ciccarella and Shatz, 2007; Gineikiene and Diamantopoulos, 2017)	Consistent with Chapter 2's reading that intention is a poorly chosen outcome measure
No detectable difference between the two national samples (H10)	Doney, Cannon and Mullen (1998) predict a stronger effect in collectivist contexts; Westjohn et al. (2021) find the opposite	Does not adjudicate: a null is consistent with either account and with the design lacking power

Result	What the prior literature holds	Relation
No detectable conditioning by ethnocentrism (H9)	Balabanis and Diamantopoulos (2004) find ethnocentrism predicts domestic preference better than foreign rejection	Compatible with ethnocentrism and animosity operating as separate systems, but not evidence for it

6.8 Contributions, Limitations, and Future Research

6.8.1 Theoretical Contributions

There are three theoretical contributions that I believe this study has added.

Firstly brand trust has been used as an outcome variable within consumer animosity. As mentioned earlier in section 2.16.1 this is the biggest gap in the literature as most studies look at purchase intention or judgement of a product. The study adds to this field by explaining why it's important to understand where in trust you lose trust. As trust takes longer to gain back than purchase intention you want to know where you stand with a consumers trust. This study created the ability to find that out.

Secondly brand trust is comprised of two components and these components can be impacted by different things. Hostility towards a country and beliefs about a country are both thought to affect a consumer's opinion of a brand from that country. But they should not be thought of as the same. This study proposes that they impact trust in different ways. Hostility will impact a consumers trust that the brand is trying to help them and beliefs about a country will impact a consumers trust that the brand is able to help them. Which is more precise than just saying they will affect the overall trust in a brand. And we can prove this wrong where a prediction that just says brand trust will be affected cannot.

Thirdly this study compared two different cultures with one thing in common. They were both targeting the same country which as stated in 2.16.3 and Koehn (2025) there isn't many studies that have done. Also we took measurements of culture from the participants instead of assuming that because they are Italian they all have the same values.

6.8.2 Managerial Implications

There are a few managerial implications that can be taken from this study.

One is spending. If a consumer no longer trusts that a brand has their best interest in mind but still trusts that the brand is competent. Then all of your traditional methods of showing your quality are useless. You won't gain anything by increasing your spend on quality because the problem doesn't lie there. The only things that will help you are measures that

show you care about your local jurisdiction. Whether that be having your servers in that country. Or ensuring that you have a good amount of partnership with locals.

Another implication is time. We mentioned earlier in section 1.7.2 that you either need to wait it out or invest money into gaining back the customers trust. If a consumer loses trust that you have their best interests at heart then chances are waiting will not fix that problem. Which means you need to spend money to gain back that trust.

Measuring your trust. If you are monitoring things like sales and satisfaction levels you won't know that your trust is declining until it affects your purchase intention. So you should monitor both aspects of trust during times of high tension to see where your standing.

Doing nothing. If a company is being viewed negatively due to its country of origin there is nothing you can say or do that will help your situation. Studies have shown that when companies get involved in politics they lose more customers that don't agree with their stance than they gain customers that do.

6.8.3 Limitations

I mentioned earlier in 4.11 some of the limitations of our study. I will not go into detail again but some things to note are.

- This study was a cross sectional study. As stated throughout this paper I believe that brand trust takes longer to regain than purchase intention. Which cannot be measured with a one time survey. However this study can prove that there is a correlation between the things that I have hypothesised which allows for future studies to delve deeper.
- When comparing the two countries our sample size wasn't large enough to find significant differences between the two. Also we had respondents answer in their native language so we can't know for sure if the results are comparable to one another.

6.8.4 Directions for Future Research

There are four areas of research that should be explored in the future.

- By conducting a longitudinal study you could measure if consumers trust a brand again after a positive change in relations. As this study believes that purchase intention will return before brand trust we need to look at consumers over time.

Ettenson and Klein (2005) did something similar to what this would require and found that animosity did not return to it's initial levels.

- As mentioned earlier there are multiple emotions that come with having animosity towards a brand. By separating these we could find out why one culture is more susceptible than another. There could be certain emotions that cause someone to not trust a brand more than others.
- We need to connect these attitudes to actual purchase behaviour. Currently the effects that animosity has on purchase behaviour are very small. So we need to see what factors affect peoples decision to purchase.
- More research needs to be done with other country's. To see if this effect is universal or only occurs with China.

It would also be beneficial to develop the perceived tension scale that was used in this study. As there isn't a scale that can measure how a person views the world. We only know how the country as a whole views things.

6.9 Chapter Conclusion

6.9.1 Summary of the Study

This study looked at if there is a correlation between how much tension a consumer feels towards a foreign country and their trust in a brand that hails from that country and purchase intention towards that brand. It did so by looking at Italians and Indians assessing three Chinese brands. Which allowed for the country being targeted to remain the same but look at consumers from different backgrounds and feel different types of grievances. Economic grievance in the case of Italy and a war based one for India.

In chapter 2 it was found that there are multiple literatures that pertain to this topic and most of them have been researched independently from one another. And that although brand trust is an important aspect of relationship marketing it has not been looked at as an outcome of consumer animosity. Chapter 3 outlined ten hypotheses that were drawn from these literatures and can all be proven true or false individually. One of those being that when you are hostile towards a brand it will affect your perception of the brands intention towards you but not your perception of its ability to deliver on its promise. Chapter 4 discussed that we used a cross sectional survey to compare 100 people in each country and use mean values and correlation and group comparison to analyse our data.

6.9.2 Principal Conclusions

With our findings we are able to contribute to the debate surrounding animosity. We found that brand trust can be separated into two different components. One that is related to the brands quality and one that is not. We also found that some aspects of country image are affected by political conflicts and others are not. And finally we found that some of the relationship between animosity and intention is related to brand attitude and some is not. Which may help explain why some researchers have found animosity to affect behaviour and others have not.

As mentioned above we had three hypotheses that were not supported. All three of these were looking at if there was a difference between groups. So we can only conclude that there may not be a difference at our sample size. This is especially true for our comparison between the two countries. As we still do not know if collectivism or grievance has a larger effect on consumers.

Our findings can help companies understand what to do when a conflict occurs. If we know that the conflict is harming the consumers trust in a companies motives. We know that showing them your products are of high quality will not help. And we should expect the damage to continue after the conflict has ended.

6.9.3 Concluding Remarks

Businesses are becoming aware that their relationship with a country can affect their relationship with a customer. But they are only applying this on the supplier side and not looking at the demand side. By asking if a consumer still wants to purchase you are only getting a small piece of what you need to know. Purchase intention will always be lower when something is more expensive or hard to buy. But trust will stay low no matter what.

If a consumer is hostile towards your brand because of your country you are going to lose trust that your company wants to help them. Not that you can help them. This can cause more problems for a business than simply losing sales.

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