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Do identity-based perceptions lead to brand avoidance? A cross-national investigation

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the effects of identity-based consumer perceptions on the brand avoidance of foreign brands across multiple markets.

Design/methodology/approach – Focussing on general product category brands, the study was conducted across two countries, i.e. New Zealand (Study 1) and Pakistan (Study 2), using online surveys. Study 1 explores the perceptions of university students, whereas Study 2 evaluates the perceptions of a more heterogeneous population across the country. Partial least squares–structural equation modelling was used to analyse the model.

Findings – First, the results confirm that individual-level identity-based drivers (undesired self-congruence and negative social influence) consistently predict brand avoidance for foreign brands across both markets, whereas country-level drivers (consumer ethnocentrism and animosity) have inconsistent effects across the markets. Second, the study demonstrates that avoidance attitude fully mediates the relationship between antecedences and intentions to avoid foreign brands.

Practical implications – The finding that undesired self-congruence is the strongest predictor of brand avoidance across the markets reinforces the importance of brand image congruence with the target audience. Considering the negative effect of social influence, especially on social media (i.e. Facebook and Twitter), this finding cautions managers to constantly monitor the prevailing negative word of mouth (online or offline) about the brand to mitigate its potential effect.

Originality/value – Drawing on social identity theory, this study explores the identity-based pre-purchase determinants of brand avoidance at the country level and at the individual level. These determinants have never been explored yet in the context of brand avoidance.

Keywords Animosity, Ethnocentrism, Anti-consumption, Undesired self, Brand avoidance, Negative social influence

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In this era of globalisation, foreign vs local brand competition has intensified (Dogerlioglu-Demir and Tansuhaj, 2011; Zhou and Wong, 2008). Past studies show that consumers are purchasing more foreign brands compared to domestic brands (Fischer and Byron, 1997; Phau and Siew Leng, 2008) and that imported products have gained significant market shares since the 1990s (Wadud and Nair, 2003). This phenomenon seems to be a global trend (Laroche *et al.*, 2005; Matthiesen and Phau, 2005; Phau and Siew Leng, 2008). The growth in the demand for foreign brands has several potential challenges for marketing managers who strive to make their brands part of consumers' evoked set. Although a positive perspective of a brand's consumption is practically justifiable, there is a concern regarding why at times brands are not being chosen or are rejected (Lee *et al.*, 2009). Fundamentally, it is necessary to be one of the many chosen brands, and it is also important to not be among the avoided brands. A significant number of



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studies have been done on the consumer selection of brands, but very few studies exist that examine consumer-based reasons for brand rejections or avoidance (Lee, 2007). In this regard, this study aims to explore the antecedents of consumers' brand avoidance behaviours towards foreign brands.

Although some studies demonstrate that there is an increasing trend to buy foreign products (Fischer and Byron, 1997; Phau and Siew Leng, 2008), there is also a consumer bias for domestic brands over foreign brands that remains a prevalent phenomenon and is well documented in the literature (Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2008; Watson and Wright, 2000). Generally, researchers employ the construct of consumer ethnocentrism (CET) to explain why consumers prefer domestic products over foreign brands. CET is primarily a consumer's economic perspective for a domestic country bias that believes that it is inappropriate to buy foreign brands and that consumers should support domestic companies (Shimp and Sharma, 1987). This study uses CET in the broader concept of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel and Turner, 1979) and aims to explore other consumers' identity-based predictors of brand avoidance behaviour.

Social identity theory explains and distinguishes consumers' behaviours towards the in-group and the out-groups by focussing on conflict and cooperation between groups. According to social identity theory, people strive to achieve and maintain a positive social identity that largely derives from a favourable comparison made between one's own group prototype (in-group) and the other group's prototypes (out-groups) (Hogg *et al.*, 2017). The group prototype refers to a combination of perceptions, attitudes and behaviours that define the group and differentiate it from other groups. For instance, the in-group prototype defines who we are and describes how we should behave as group members. In cross-national studies, the home country is generally taken as the in-group, whereas foreign countries represent the out-groups (Shankarmahesh, 2006; Zeugner-Roth *et al.*, 2015). CET mainly focusses on the bias against products/brands from foreign countries (out-groups) to explain consumers' preferences for their home country's products (in-group) (Shimp and Sharma, 1987). The parallel construct of consumer animosity (Klein and Ettenson, 1999) measures consumers' biases against products/brands from foreign countries associated with the perceived hostility towards the out-groups (Brewer, 1999). Animosity literature says that people avoid products/brands from specific countries, not because of the quality of the product, but because of the perceived animosity towards the country-of-origin (COO) of the product (Charles, 2012; Klein *et al.*, 1998). There could be many sources of animosity towards another country, including religious ideological differences (Sandlkci and Ekici, 2009), previous military tragedies or economic/diplomatic disputes between countries, such as Japan and China (Klein *et al.*, 1998), Pakistan and India (Dixit, 2003) and the USA and North Korea (Kettley, 2017). In the present study, it is essential to measure consumer animosity to understand whether the avoidance is due to consumers' economic perspectives towards local products (in-group centric) or consumers' perceived animosity towards the COO of foreign brands (out-groups centric).

This study not only considers the country-level constructs (CET and animosity) to predict brand avoidance behaviour for foreign brands but also, drawing on social identity theory, it includes individual-level constructs (undesired self-congruence and negative social influence) that influence consumers' decision making to avoid foreign brands. Social identity theory posits that it is inherent in a person's personality to be associated with a group that is meaningful to him/her (Abrams and Hogg, 1988; Tajfel, 1978). Further, Escalas and Bettman (2005) found that consumers will most likely accept meanings from brands linked with an in-group and reject meanings associated or consistent with an out-group. This shows that consumer's undesired self (out-group prototype) congruence leads to brand avoidance behaviour. Past research also shows that social influence can manipulate consumer decision making (Loh, 2011). Social influence is the degree to which members of a reference group

(in-group) influence one another's behaviours and experience social pressure to perform specific behaviours (Kulviwat *et al.*, 2009). Consumers' attitudes towards products/brands are influenced by others around them; for instance, a person with negative opinions can influence consumer's decisions (Ashraf and Merunka, 2013; Duhacheck *et al.*, 2007).

Previously, the focus of anti-consumption research has been on developed markets such as New Zealand (Cherrier, 2009; Lee, 2007) and the USA (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2010). With the exception of a few scholars (Khan and Lee, 2014), this area is yet to be explored in emerging markets. Izberk-Bilgin (2010) emphasised that research on anti-consumption should be stretched from developed nations to less developed nations or "emerging markets" since these nations are at diverse levels of modernisation and cultural influence and therefore consumers' reasons for avoiding brands may differ from those in developed markets. Thus, the present study aims to empirically examine consumers' identity-based drivers of brand avoidance both at the country and at individual levels across multiple markets.

In the next sections, we provide the theoretical background of our focal constructs with key hypotheses and propose a research model to be tested in this study. We then report on two empirical studies conducted across multiple markets (Study 1: New Zealand and Study 2: Pakistan) to test and validate our model. We conclude with a discussion and the implications of our findings and offer suggestions for future research avenues.

Theory and hypotheses development

Anti-consumption is a relatively new domain of research that deals with why individuals avoid the consumption of particular products/brands (Chatzidakis and Lee, 2012; Sudbury-Riley and Kohlbacher, 2018). Different dimensions of anti-consumption have been studied in the literature, including consumer resistance (Cherrier, 2009), brand hate (Hegner *et al.*, 2017), brand rejection (Khalifa and Shukla, 2017), politically motivated brand rejection (Sandlkci and Ekici, 2009), pre-purchase brand avoidance (Khan and Lee, 2014), anti-branding (Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009), ethical consumption (Zollo *et al.*, 2018) and moral avoidance (Sudbury-Riley and Kohlbacher, 2018). Some of these dimensions are more passive and less noticeable, while others are more active, aggressive and publicly noticeable.

Thompson *et al.* (2006) described brand avoidance as the antithesis of brand loyalty, such that satisfaction leads to brand loyalty, whereas dissatisfaction leads to brand avoidance. Lee *et al.* (2009) were the first to suggest a more precise definition of brand avoidance as the "incidents in which consumers deliberately choose to reject a brand" (p. 170). They considered this avoidance as an anti-choice incident, which is a form of active rejection of a brand and contrary to the no-choice set, where due to unaffordability, unavailability or inaccessibility, consumers are left with no choice (Hogg, 1998). Despite a comprehensive definition of including deliberate and conscious choices, they did not mention the forced choice phenomenon, which is quite common in real-time situations (Strandvik *et al.*, 2013).

In a qualitative study, Lee *et al.* (2009) found three types of brand avoidance, namely, experience based, moral based and identity based. Khan and Lee (2014) further categorised them into pre- and post-purchase avoidance behaviours. Post-purchase avoidance is based on personal experiences with the product/brand, whereas pre-purchase avoidance includes personal, social and societal needs. Past research focussed on post-purchase negative responses, such as dissatisfaction with the functional attributes of products/brands or services (Hegner *et al.*, 2017; Zeelenberg and Pieters, 2004; Zhang and Vásquez, 2014). Recent studies have explored moral (Sudbury-Riley and Kohlbacher, 2018) and ethical (Zollo *et al.*, 2018) avoidance based on consumer's ethical ideology towards the planet, humans and product/brand consumption. However, no study has yet focussed on the identity-based consumer's brand avoidance. Therefore, drawing on social identity theory, this study focusses on consumer's social identity-based determinants that lead to brand avoidance due to their association with a group (in-group).

To identify the relevant antecedents for our study, we reviewed the literature focussing on consumer social identity theory with its sub-theories that focus on self-enhancement, social influence, collective behaviour and social mobilisation and protest (Hogg, 2016). Recent studies propose several determinants based on consumer social identity as follows.

Consumer ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism is a very old concept, but broadly defined, it is the “view of things in which one’s own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it” (Sumner 1906, p. 13). Shimp and Sharma (1987) introduced the construct consumer ethnocentrism that captures consumers’ economic motives for in-group bias, such as choosing foreign products as a threat to domestic industry and a cause of unemployment (Verlegh, 2007). Consumers are considered to be “ethnocentric” when they show a tendency to buy locally manufactured products (Seidenfuss *et al.*, 2013; Sharma *et al.*, 1995). They purchase a local product not because of its merit but because they think that it would be better for their in-group/local economy. In a similar way, foreign products are avoided because consumers believe that it is “wrong” to help an out-group/foreign competition above their own nation (Shimp and Sharma, 1987; Souiden *et al.*, 2018). Elliott and Cameron (1994) showed that ethnocentric consumers prefer locally made products over imported products if the perception of quality and price are equivalent. Further, El Banna *et al.* (2018) emphasised that an ethnocentric consumer has a biased view towards the in-group in such a way that he/she may overrate the attributes of local products and underrate those of foreign goods. Moreover, Shankarmahesh (2006) concluded that CET is one of the most important factors determining consumer’s purchase intentions with respect to foreign and local products. Past studies show a positive relationship between CET and purchase intentions towards domestic products (Han, 1988) and a negative relationship towards foreign products/brands (Batra *et al.*, 2000; Sharma *et al.*, 1995).

Animosity

Klein and Ettenson (1999) found that animosity and ethnocentrism are two separate and distinct factors, and the profile of an ethnocentric consumer is different from a consumer having animosity towards an exporting country. Past studies show that people avoid foreign products/brands from specific countries (out-groups) because of perceived animosity towards their COO (Charles, 2012; Huang *et al.*, 2015; Klein *et al.*, 1998). Consumer animosity is defined in the literature as “the remnants of antipathy related to previous or ongoing military, political, or economic events, affecting consumers’ purchase behaviour in the international marketplace” (Klein *et al.*, 1998, p. 90). The reasons for perceived animosity may be a history of conflict, contentious political positions, religious, ethnic or cultural differences, overt or covert acts of violence or terrorism. More recently, Fong *et al.* (2013) explained three characteristics of animosity towards COO. First, it is a bilateral and country-specific construct. Second, it is an event-specific construct. Third, animosity is independent of product judgement. The third characteristic shows that consumer animosity is related to a consumer’s buying decision and has no quality implications for foreign products. Moreover, Amine (2008) advocated that consumers avoid buying foreign products/brands because of the social pressures and fears of negative psychosocial consequences. Hence, we propose that consumers’ perceived animosity towards the COO of a foreign brand leads them to brand avoidance of that foreign brand.

Undesired self-congruence

Consumers’ self-concept is formed through what they consume or what they choose not to consume (Banister and Hogg, 2001). What an individual chooses not to consume is an

important aspect of that individual's identity (Wilk, 1997). Although self-congruity has not always been widely accepted, researchers have consistently proven its significance to consumers' buying behaviour (Klipfel *et al.*, 2014; Shu and Strombeck, 2017; Sirgy, 1982, 1985). "Not me" is also a part of one's self and is defined by refusing or staying away from an association with related stereotypes (Hogg, 1998). The undesired self (Ogilvie, 1987) is the least desired identity that an individual consistently avoids and is based on negative traits, unhappy experiences, embarrassing situations or unwanted emotions (Bosnjak and Rudolph, 2008). According to social identity theory, it is inherent in a person's personality to be associated with a group that is meaningful to him/her (d'Astous and Li, 2009; Hogg, 2016). The identity of group members is made up of personal identities and a so-called social identity (Tajfel, 1974) defined as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significant attached to that membership" (p. 69). Hogg (2016) stated that, in groups, people maintain their congruence with the group prototype and try to stay away from out-group prototypes. Similarly, Englis and Solomon (1995) argued that consumers may not buy products or may avoid using them due to their reluctance to be identified with their avoidance group.

Negative social influence

People are independent when making their choices, but what others think also influences them, especially when they consider themselves as a member of a group (Gaffney and Hogg, 2017). Previous research shows that social influence can manipulate consumer decision making (Loh, 2011), such as Stafford (1966) who found in his experiments that members of the in-group choose the same brand as that of the group leader. Similarly, Witt (1969) explained the significant correlation between social influence and the similarity of the brand choice within the group. Social influence is the degree to which members of a reference group (in-group) influence one another's behaviours and experience social pressure to adopt specific behaviours (Kulviwat *et al.*, 2009). In general, negative information/feedback influences decisions more often (Hegner *et al.*, 2017), and its impact is stronger than positive feedback (Ham and Midden, 2014). Literature on negative influence in terms of word of mouth (WOM) provides two forms, such as "private complaining", which is talking negatively about a brand to friends, and "public complaining", which is writing posts or blogs about brands on websites and social media (Presi *et al.*, 2014). Social influence has become robust with the emergence of social media, especially with Facebook and Twitter, where people share information and give their opinions frequently. As a result, online social influence has become one of the significant drivers of consumer attitudes (Duhachek *et al.*, 2007). Hence, we propose that people, being a member of a group/social network, are vulnerable to the negative social influences of other members that leads to brand avoidance.

Avoidance attitude (AA) and intention

The theory of reasoned action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) and the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) suggest that attitudes and intentions are determinants of consumer behaviour. Researchers can determine the direct effects of antecedents on consumer behaviour by focussing on these two constructs (Bosnjak and Rudolph, 2008). The literature on consumer behaviour comprehensively concludes that a consumer's attitude influences his/her behaviour (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Honkanen *et al.*, 2006; Ilicic and Webster, 2011). Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) stated that an individual's attitude is his/her positive or negative feeling towards performing or avoiding a particular behaviour. Phau *et al.* (2009) further emphasised that attitudes are relatively stable and consumers are predisposed to behave in a particular way.

Intentions, on the other hand, refer to the efforts that people would exert to perform a behaviour and are the most immediate determinants of any behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Intentions have been used as a dependent variable to assess the likelihood that an individual would buy or avoid a product (Khan and Lee, 2014; Lee *et al.*, 2017; Sallam and Wahid, 2012). Debbabi *et al.* (2010) further recommended that intentions are a cognitive component that mediates the relationship between attitude and behaviour. According to the theory of reasoned action, one's behaviour is the result of his/her intention that itself is predicted by the attitude based on the positive (negative) evaluation to perform that behaviour (Bagozzi, 1992).

Hypotheses development

Previous studies provide evidence that an ethnocentric consumer has positive intentions towards local products/brands (Hamin *et al.*, 2014; Han, 2017; Sharma *et al.*, 1995), whereas they have negative intentions towards foreign products/brands (Batra *et al.*, 2000). More recently, Salman and Naeem (2015) found a negative effect of CET on attitudes and intentions towards foreign brands. Similarly, Rose *et al.* (2009) found that consumer animosity has a negative influence on consumer attitudes towards products/brands from certain countries and Ramadania *et al.* (2014) concluded that consumers avoid products/brands with specific COOs due to negative feelings towards that country.

Bosnjak and Rudolph (2008) empirically tested the negative relation between undesired self-congruity and consumption-related attitudes and intentions and found a significant negative effect of undesired self-congruity on attitudes towards product/brand consumption. Social influence (positive or negative) is one of the important factors affecting consumers' purchase decisions. Past studies found a negative effect of social influence on attitudes towards products/brands that give a negative meaning (Chua and Tiong Tan, 1986; Vries *et al.*, 1995). We propose that the negative social influence will have a positive effect on brand AA.

Hence, based on the theoretical discussion in the previous section, we propose the following hypotheses regarding the antecedents of brand avoidance on consumer AA and intentions to avoid (ITA):

- H1.* (a) Consumer ethnocentrism and (b) animosity have direct positive effect on consumer's AA towards foreign brands.
- H2.* (a) Consumer ethnocentrism and (b) animosity have direct positive effect on consumer's ITA foreign brands.
- H3.* (a) Undesired self-congruence and (b) negative social influence have direct positive effect on consumer's AA towards foreign brands.
- H4.* (a) Undesired self-congruence and (b) negative social influence have direct positive effect on consumer's ITA foreign brands.
- H5.* AA has direct positive effect on ITA.

In consumer behavioural studies, attitudes and intentions have shown parallel relationships (Ting and de Run, 2015). Previous studies, along with exploring the direct effect of attitudes, investigated the indirect (mediating) role of attitudes between the antecedents and intentions (Juharsah and Hartini, 2014; Zainal *et al.*, 2017). For instance, Zainal *et al.* (2017) found a partial mediating effect of attitudes towards electronic WOM between trust and intentions to follow electronic WOM. As the literature suggests regarding the direct and indirect effects (through AA) of antecedents on ITA, we propose a partial mediation effect of AA as follows:

- H6.* AA partially mediates the relationship between (a) consumer ethnocentrism, (b) animosity, (c) undesired self-congruence and (d) negative social influence, and ITA.

COO familiarity

The emergence of global companies results in the availability of a broader range of goods and services in all categories than ever before. Therefore, the need for familiarity with the COO has become essential when assessing foreign products/brands (Jiménez and Martín, 2010). Extensive literature has explored the COO effect on consumers' product evaluations and purchase intentions (Jin *et al.*, 2006; Katsumata and Song, 2016; Koschate-Fischer *et al.*, 2012; Tse and Gorn, 1993). However, the findings are diverse due to the wide range of contextual settings, conceptions and backgrounds involved in the analyses. Elliott and Cameron (1994) emphasised that in the absence of product attribute information, COO knowledge has a strong effect on a product's evaluation. COO familiarity influences consumer's decision-making process and the evaluation of foreign products/brands (Moorman *et al.*, 2004). Familiarity is "a general overall level of acquaintance with the firm/brand, most likely without reference to a specific identifiable source of information" (Luce *et al.*, 2001, p. 401).

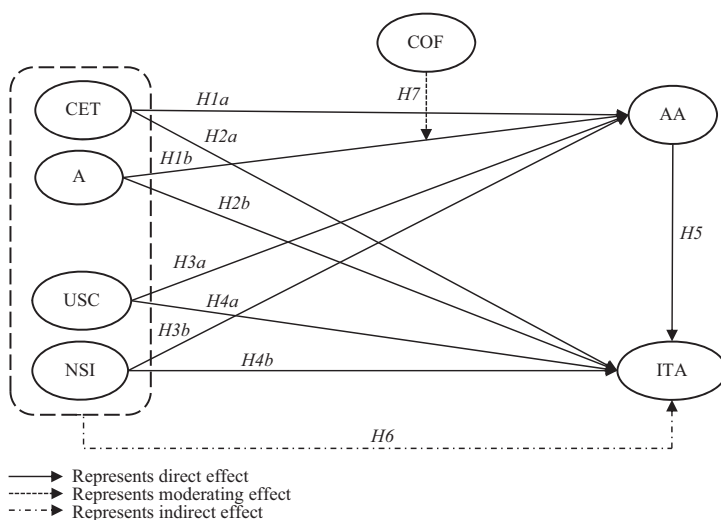
The COO holds country-induced biases that may positively (negatively) affect consumers' purchase intentions for domestic vs foreign brands (Hamin *et al.*, 2014; Josiassen, 2011). Jiménez and Martín (2010) found that COO familiarity is a relevant moderator in the context of foreign products and consumer purchase intentions. In this regard, we propose a positive moderating effect of COO familiarity in avoiding foreign brands due to the perceived animosity towards the COO:

H7. COO familiarity moderates the relationship between animosity and AA, such as higher the COO familiarity, stronger the relationship between animosity and AA.

Based on the aforementioned discussion and hypotheses, we propose following conceptual model (Figure 1) to be empirically tested in this study.

Methodology

We conducted two studies to test the proposed hypotheses (*H1–H7*) across multiple markets where Study 1 was carried out on a New Zealand sample and Study 2 on a Pakistani sample.



Notes: A, animosity; CET, consumer ethnocentrism; USC, undesired self-congruence; NSI, negative social influence; AA, avoidance attitude; ITA, intention to avoid; COF, COO familiarity

Figure 1.
Conceptual model

These two countries, a developed country (New Zealand) and an emerging country (Pakistan), were chosen to obtain diversity in the results. Moreover, the diversity in the results will help us to understand consumers' contextual differences between the individualistic and collectivistic dimensions of culture. Many researchers suggest that consumers' decision making, product evaluations, assessments of risk and uncertainty avoidance are based on their cultural, social, experiential and technological factors (Seva and Helander, 2009). According to Hofstede (2011), Pakistani society is a collectivistic society having a low score on the individualism scale (approximately 15) compared to New Zealand with a high score on the same scale (approximately 80). Since the purpose of this study was not to compare the findings of two contexts but to validate it across multiple markets, no cultural variables (such as individualism/collectivism) were included in this study.

Construct measurement

CET was measured with four items from CETSCALE of Shimp and Sharma (1987). These items were more relevant to the context and had the highest factor loadings in their original scale. Animosity was measured with seven items adapted from Klein *et al.* (1998). Undesired self-congruence was measured with three items adapted from Khan and Lee (2014). Negative social influence was measured with three items: one item from Gupta *et al.* (2008) and two items were taken from Kulviwat *et al.* (2009). COO familiarity was measured with single item adapted from Laroche *et al.* (2005). AA was measured with four items adapted from Khan and Lee (2014). ITA was measured with three items adapted from Baker and Churchill (1977). All the items (see Table AI) were measured on Likert scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).

Study 1

Procedure. We conducted an online survey study to test the hypothesised model (see Figure 1). There were several reasons for choosing the online survey method for data collection. The main reason was the researcher's inclination towards green practices and a nature-friendly environment. Second was the consideration of the costs associated with printing and sending the questionnaire to each respondent. Third, in the online method, follow-up is convenient, and it is easy to send a quick reminder to the non-respondents. The questionnaire link was sent to students' institutional e-mail addresses with the help of a colleague, and a request was made to fill in the questionnaire voluntarily. The respondents were asked to freely select on their own any "brand" that they avoid and answer the subsequent questions. A student sample of 198 valid responses was obtained after deleting one multivariate outlier. The demographic profile is presented in Table I.

Construct reliability and validity. The measurement validation, using partial least squares-structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), was confirmed with average path coefficients, average variance inflation factors (VIFs) and average full collinearity (Kock, 2015). Model's explanatory power was measured with Tenenhaus GoF. Wetzels *et al.* (2009) proposed the criteria to assess models' explanatory power such as the power is small if $GoF \geq 0.10$, medium if $GoF \geq 0.25$ and large if $GoF \geq 0.36$. In our model, $GoF = 0.60$ that showed large explanatory power of the model. All quality indices met the recommended criteria, suggesting that the model was a good fit to the data (see Table II).

The factor structure worked out satisfactorily (see Table III). The composite reliabilities, and Cronbach's α coefficients, were all higher than 0.80, and average variance extracted (AVE) for all the constructs were higher than the minimal cut-off of 0.50. The factor loadings were also higher than the commonly used cut-off of 0.70 (Bagozzi *et al.*, 1991). Thus, our measures demonstrated adequate convergent validity and reliability.

We assessed discriminant validity using Fornell and Larcker's (1981) procedure. The AVE for each construct was higher than the squared correlation coefficient between the

Brand
avoidance

Demographic variables	Study 1		Study 2	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<i>Gender</i>				
Male	77	39	204	73
Female	121	61	75	27
Total	198	100	279	100
<i>Age (years)</i>				
Less than 20	52	26	8	3
20–25	108	55	66	24
26–30	10	5	118	42
31–35	14	7	64	23
36–40	2	1	19	7
More than 40	12	6	4	1
Total	198	100	279	100
<i>Education</i>				
Undergraduate	167	84	76	27
Postgraduate	31	16	203	73
Total	198	100	279	100
Income (median) (\$)	≤2,500		800–1,000	

Table I.
Demographic profile
of samples

	Status	Fit criteria
<i>New Zealand sample (Study 1)</i>		
Average path coefficient (APC) = 0.155, $p = 0.007$	Accepted	$p < 0.05$
Average R^2 (ARS) = 0.420, $p < 0.001$	Accepted	$p < 0.05$
Average adjusted R^2 (AARS) = 0.400, $p < 0.001$	Accepted	$P < 0.05$
Average block VIF (AVIF) = 1.235	Good fit	Acceptable, if ≤ 5 , ideally ≤ 3.3
Average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF) = 1.481	Good fit	Acceptable, if ≤ 5 , ideally ≤ 3.3
Tenenhaus GoF (GoF) = 0.597	Large	Small ≥ 0.1 , medium ≥ 0.25 , large ≥ 0.36
Simpson's paradox ratio (SPR) = 0.929	Accepted	Acceptable, if ≥ 0.7 , ideally = 1
R^2 contribution ratio (RSCR) = 0.975	Accepted	Acceptable, if ≥ 0.9 , ideally = 1
Statistical suppression ratio (SSR) = 1.000	Good fit	Acceptable, if ≥ 0.7
Nonlinear bivariate causality direction ratio (NLBCDR) = 0.929	Good fit	Acceptable, if ≥ 0.7
<i>Pakistan sample (Study 2)</i>		
Average path coefficient (APC) = 0.135, $p = 0.006$	Accepted	
Average R^2 (ARS) = 0.455, $p < 0.001$	Accepted	
Average adjusted R^2 (AARS) = 0.442, $p < 0.001$	Accepted	
Average block VIF (AVIF) = 1.152	Good fit	
Average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF) = 1.545	Good fit	
Tenenhaus GoF (GoF) = 0.627	Large	
Simpson's paradox ratio (SPR) = 0.786	Accepted	
R^2 contribution ratio (RSCR) = 0.992	Accepted	
Statistical suppression ratio (SSR) = 0.929	Good fit	
Nonlinear bivariate causality direction ratio (NLBCDR) = 0.857	Good fit	

Table II.
Model fit and
quality indices

latent variables. Hence, discriminant validity was established. Means, standard deviations, correlations and AVEs are presented in Table III.

Common method variance (CMV) assessment. Data were self-reported and collected using a cross-sectional research design, and so CMV might confound the true relationships

Table III.
Descriptive statistics,
CR, VIF, AVEs
and correlations
among constructs

Constructs	CR	α	VIF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Study 1: New Zealand sample (n = 198)</i>										
1. Undesired self-congruence	0.83	0.70	1.40	0.62	0.13	0.10	0.01	0.02	0.19	0.11
2. Negative social influence	0.90	0.83	1.35	0.36*	0.75	0.10	0.03	0.07	0.12	0.03
3. Animosity	0.97	0.96	1.50	-0.31*	-0.32*	0.84	0.19	0.07	0.04	0.03
4. COO familiarity ^a	1	1	1.40	-0.11	-0.17*	0.44*	<i>I</i>	0.01	0.03	0.01
5. Consumer ethnocentrism	0.94	0.91	1.18	0.15*	0.27*	-0.27*	-0.10	0.78	0.06	0.05
6. Avoidance attitude	0.89	0.83	2.28	0.43*	0.34*	-0.20*	-0.17*	0.24*	0.67	0.46
7. Intention to avoid	0.86	0.76	1.94	0.33*	0.17*	-0.16*	-0.10	0.23*	0.68*	0.67
Mean				5.30	3.73	5.26	4.38	3.48	5.32	5.98
SD				1.27	1.39	1.54	1.62	1.53	1.14	1.01
<i>Study 2: Pakistan sample (n = 279)</i>										
1. Undesired self-congruence	0.88	0.80	1.50	0.72	0.14	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.22	0.19
2. Negative social influence	0.93	0.89	1.35	0.38*	0.82	0.04	0.01	0.09	0.07	0.06
3. Animosity	0.95	0.94	1.44	-0.08	-0.21*	0.74	0.13	0.14	0.00	0.01
4. COO familiarity ^a	1	1	1.28	-0.09	-0.11*	0.36*	<i>I</i>	0.01	0.01	0.02
5. Consumer ethnocentrism	0.91	0.87	1.26	0.14*	0.31*	-0.37*	-0.10	0.72	0.00	0.00
6. Avoidance attitude	0.93	0.89	2.71	0.47*	0.27*	0.07	-0.09	0.04	0.78	0.59
7. Intention to avoid	0.95	0.91	2.63	0.43*	0.24*	0.07	-0.12*	-0.01	0.77*	0.85
Mean				4.20	3.92	5.16	4.53	4.37	4.67	5.33
SD				1.48	1.56	1.38	1.45	1.54	1.57	1.59

Notes: CR, composite reliability; α , Cronbach's α ; AVE, average variance extracted; VIF, full collinearity variance inflation factor. Correlations are below the diagonal. AVEs are on the main diagonal (italic) and squared correlations are above the diagonal. ^aSingle-item construct. * $p < 0.05$ or better

among the constructs of interest (Chang *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, we adopted multiple remedies to control for CMV. First, Harman's single-factor test (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003), the most commonly used method to assess CMV, is based on the hypothesis that the data may suffer from CMV if a single factor accounts for more than 50 per cent of the total variance. Our results of exploratory factor analysis showed that the first factor accounts for only 31.6 out of 70.8 per cent of the total variance explained. Second, Spector (2006) suggested to look for highly significant correlations among the variables of study. We found that the variables were not highly correlated and that none of the correlations with the dependent variables exceeded 0.50. Third, Kock and Lynn (2012) proposed a full collinearity test as a comprehensive procedure to assess CMV. They proposed that the occurrence of a VIF greater than 3.3 is an indication that CMV may contaminate the model. In our study, VIFs were less than 3.3 for all the latent variables (see Table III). Hence, CMV would not be a threat to our study.

Analysis and results. Hypotheses were tested using the PLS-SEM approach (specifically WarpPLS-6). PLS is an appropriate approach of SEM, having less identification issues, handles small and large samples equally well and can be used for both reflective and formative constructs (Hair *et al.*, 2011).

Direct effects. Our results (see Table IV) of structural regression direct paths (i.e. *H1a* and *H2a*) showed that CET effect on AA ($\beta = 0.181$, $p < 0.01$) was significant, but not on ITA ($\beta = 0.069$, ns). On the other hand, the results of *H1b* and *H2b* showed that animosity effects on AA ($\beta = -0.044$, ns) and ITA ($\beta = -0.066$, ns) were not significant. The results of *H3a* and *H4a* showed that undesired self-congruence has significant effect on AA ($\beta = 0.340$, $p < 0.001$), but not on ITA ($\beta = 0.061$, ns). Similarly, *H3b* and *H4b* showed that negative social influence has significant effect on AA ($\beta = 0.232$, $p < 0.001$), but not on ITA ($\beta = 0.086$, ns). Further, the results of *H5* showed that AA has a significant positive effect on ITA ($\beta = 0.656$, $p < 0.001$).

Mediating effects. To analyse the mediating effects (i.e. *H6a-H6d*), we estimate the direct and indirect effects through AA (see Table V). There are many approaches to test indirect effects (Hayes and Scharkow, 2013). In our study, we observed direct, indirect and total effects (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). The results showed that all the direct effects on ITA were non-significant, whereas all the indirect and total effects (which were the sum of direct and any indirect effect) were statistically significant for all the antecedents except for animosity. Our results proved the mediating role of AA between the antecedents and ITA, supporting all the hypotheses except *H6b*.

Variables	Hypotheses	Study 1 (Path coefficients)		Study 2 (Path coefficients)	
		AA	ITA	AA	ITA
Consumer ethnocentrism	<i>H1a, H2a</i>	0.181**	0.069	-0.039	0.030
Animosity	<i>H1b, H2b</i>	-0.044	-0.066	0.112*	0.045
Undesired self-congruence	<i>H3a, H4a</i>	0.340***	0.061	0.404***	0.100*
Negative social influence	<i>H3b, H4b</i>	0.232***	0.086	0.147**	0.016
AA	<i>H5</i>		0.656***		0.730***
<i>Interaction effect</i>					
COF × animosity	<i>H7</i>	0.140*		0.142**	
R^2		0.334	0.507	0.276	0.634
Adjusted R^2		0.316	0.483	0.263	0.621

Notes: AA, avoidance attitude; ITA, intentions to avoid; COF, COO familiarity. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table IV.
Hypotheses
testing results

Moderating effect. The interaction effect (i.e. COF × animosity) was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.140, p < 0.05$), supported our *H7* (see Table IV) that COO familiarity moderates the relationship between animosity and AA.

Discussion on Study 1. Our results about consumers’ identity-related factors at the country level show that consumers do avoid foreign brands because of their ethnocentric view towards their local economy (in-group) (Seidenfuss *et al.*, 2013; Sharma *et al.*, 1995). However, contrary to the past findings (Fernández-Ferrín *et al.*, 2015; Klein *et al.*, 1998), our result does not support that animosity is a significant driver of brand avoidance for foreign brands. These findings infer that in their avoidance of foreign brands, consumer’s ethnocentric view is more effective than perceived animosity towards other countries. Nevertheless, interestingly, our moderation effect of COO familiarity is significant for the relationship between animosity and brand AA. It demonstrates that animosity significantly affects brand AA only in high COO familiarity conditions, and that it remains insignificant when COO familiarity is low. This implies that in the host countries, the products/brands with a strong COO association are at risk in the case of negative prevailing feelings towards the COO.

However, at individual-level consumer decision making, both the constructs (undesired self-congruence and negative social influence) have significant effects on brand AA. This finding shows that staying away from the undesired group prototype and the social influence of the in-group both are important and effective antecedents towards brand avoidance. These findings reinforce the importance of brand image congruence with the target audience and caution managers to constantly monitor the prevailing negative WOM (online or offline) of the brand to mitigate its potential effects.

Although the studies conducted on student’s samples have many advantages, there is a strong concern about the generalisability of the findings (Ashraf and Merunka, 2017). To answer this limit, we collected the data for our Study 2 from a more heterogeneous population in order to have more variation in responses.

Study 2

Procedure. We followed the same online survey method, as adopted in Study 1, to collect the data. Using convenience approach, the questionnaire was sent via social media platforms (Facebook and Twitter). A sample of 279 valid responses was obtained after deleting four multivariate outliers. The demographic profile of the respondents is presented in Table I. The measurement validation was confirmed (see Table II). Study 2 also demonstrates model’s explanatory power (i.e. GoF = 0.63) to be above the acceptable threshold (GoF = 0.36). Construct reliability and validity assessment met the criteria satisfactorily (see Table III). Convergent and discriminant validities were established (see Table III). For CMV assessment, we adopted the same remedial procedure as in

Mediated relationships	Hypotheses	New Zealand (Study 1)			Pakistan (Study 2)		
		Direct	Indirect	Total	Direct	Indirect	Total
CET → AA → ITA	<i>H6a</i>	0.07	0.12**	0.19**	0.03	-0.03	0.00
A → AA → ITA	<i>H6b</i>	-0.07	-0.03	-0.10	0.04	0.08*	0.12*
USC → AA → ITA	<i>H6c</i>	0.06	0.22***	0.28***	0.10*	0.30***	0.40***
NSI → AA → ITA	<i>H6d</i>	0.09	0.15***	0.24***	0.02	0.10**	0.12*

Table V.
Mediating effects

Notes: A, animosity; CET, consumer ethnocentrism; USC, undesired self-congruence; NSI, negative social influence; AA, avoidance attitude; ITA, intention to avoid. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Study 1, and found no harm in the data. Further, Harman's single-factor test accounted for only 26.1 out of 72.0 per cent of the total variance explained also suggested that there was no harm of CMV in data (see Table III).

Analyses and results. Direct effects. The results of structural regression model (see Table IV) showed that CET effects, contrary to our expectation, were not significant on both AA ($\beta = -0.039$, ns), and ITA ($\beta = 0.030$, ns). On the other hand, animosity has significant effect on AA ($\beta = 0.112$, $p < 0.05$), but not on ITA ($\beta = 0.045$, ns). Moreover, at individual level, undesired self-congruence has significant effects on both AA ($\beta = 0.404$, $p < 0.001$) and ITA ($\beta = 0.100$, $p < 0.05$). On the other hand, negative social influence has significant effect on AA ($\beta = 0.147$, $p < 0.001$), but not on ITA ($\beta = 0.016$, ns). As expected, *H5* was supported such that AA has a significant effect on ITA ($\beta = 0.730$, $p < 0.001$).

Mediating effects. We used the same method to assess the mediating effects (*H6a–H6d*) as in Study 1. The direct, indirect and total effects were measured and results (see Table V) showed that all the direct effects on ITA were non-significant except for undesired self-congruence, whereas the indirect and the total effects were significant for all the antecedents except CET, which proved the mediating role of AA between antecedents and ITA. Only for CET, the mediation was not supported in our Study 2.

Moderating effects. The interaction effect (i.e. COF \times animosity) was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.142$, $p < 0.01$), supported our *H7*.

General discussion

Drawing on social identity theory, this study not only considers the country-level constructs (CET and animosity) to predict brand avoidance behaviour for foreign brands but also includes individual identity-related constructs (undesired self-congruence and negative social influence) that have never been explored in past studies. The results of the two studies offer theoretical and practical implications and provide suggestions for future research in this area.

Theoretical implication

Our study theoretically contributes to the anti-consumption literature, particularly in the brand avoidance area, by empirically testing identity-based antecedents that lead consumers to avoid foreign brands. Our findings from New Zealand (Study 1) and Pakistan (Study 2) show that factors that influence consumers' decision to avoid foreign brands differ across both the markets.

At individual level, our findings show that individual-level identity-related factors of undesired self-congruence and negative social influence are significant factors across both the markets. These findings confirm the importance of social identity theory to understand consumer's brand avoidance dynamics in two ways. First, people try to stay away from undesired out-group prototype and make their choices against the consumption of specific products/brands associated with them (i.e. undesired self-congruence). Contrary to approach motivation, where the driving force is actual or ideal self-congruence (Sirgy *et al.*, 1997), undesired self-congruence remains the primary driver in avoidance motivation. Second, the significant effect of negative social influence in our study supports social identity theory such that people belonging to a common group rely on each other for information on how to act and respond in social situations to reduce discrepancies between their opinions and that of group members (Gaffney and Hogg, 2017). Past studies suggest that social influence in terms of WOM is an essential channel of interpersonal influence in consumer decision making (Grewal *et al.*, 2003) and that it has a stronger impact on product judgements than promotional material (Herr *et al.*, 2012). Although paid advertising generates awareness,

consumers rely on WOM (positive/negative) when making their purchase/avoidance decisions (Davis *et al.*, 1979). Our findings are in line with Kulviwat *et al.* (2009), who proposed that people may choose to perform a behaviour that they do not intend to perform at their own judgement, but still they perform it just to comply with the reference group's desirability.

At country level, this study demonstrates that CET and animosity impact consumers' brand avoidance decisions differently across markets. These two concepts have always been useful for understanding consumers' purchase decisions concerning domestic vs imported products (El Banna *et al.*, 2018; Fernández-Ferrín *et al.*, 2015; Klein and Ettenson, 1999). As studies were conducted in a developed and an emerging market, the differences in their economic and political environment were clearly manifested in study findings.

For CET, study findings demonstrate that in Study 1 (New Zealand) CET is a strong predictor of foreign brands' AA. It implies that people who are familiar with the concerns of their local economy (in-group), they may avoid foreign brands to help their local economy. On the other hand, in Study 2 (Pakistan), an insignificant effect of CET on brand AA towards foreign brands was observed. These inconsistent effects across two different countries demonstrate that the role of CET in shaping consumers' brand avoidance behaviour is not universal and that local context does act as an important moderator. Prior studies, on Asian consumers, find that emerging market consumers do not care whether the product originates from their home country or abroad (Guo, 2013; Katsumata and Song, 2016). Upon deeper examination of the avoided brands (in Study 2), it was observed that nearly 83 per cent were from the electronics category. Pakistan, as an emerging economy, lacks the industrial base to produce these products locally (Atique, 2017), and past study demonstrates that in the absence of a local manufacturer, foreign brands gain the market share, which results in better product evaluation of foreign brands (Raju, 1995). Hence, we propose that CET may reduce its influence on future consumers in the absence of domestic products.

Interestingly, the role of animosity differs from CET across both the studies. Animosity is not a significant predictor of brand avoidance in Study 1 but it remains significant in Study 2. A plausible explanation may be due to the student sample (Study 1) characteristics, as Charles (2012) found that age and animosity are correlated such that animosity feelings grow over time and older people tend to have more animosity compared to young ones. On the other hand, Study 2 results are in line with Klein *et al.* (1998) and Heinberg (2017), who confirmed that consumers' perceived animosity leads them to avoid products/brands from foreign countries.

The full mediating role of AA between the antecedents and ITA suggests that consumers' identity-related brand avoidance might not form intentions directly; instead, it goes through the formation of AA towards those brands that leads them to actual brand avoidance. Hence, marketing managers should be vigilant, continuously monitor consumer attitudes towards their brands and take corrective measures before these attitudes convert into their plan of action (i.e. behavioural ITA).

Managerial implication

Our study confirms significance of identity-based perceptions at the country level, and further emphasises the importance of individual-level identity-related predictors in consumer decision making towards foreign brand avoidance. It emphasises that managers should focus their strategies on making their brand more acceptable in terms of their brand image and ensure the positivity in terms of the WOM about their brand in the target market.

Since negative social influence in terms of WOM occurs outside the firm, by default, it remains very difficult to manage and control. Particularly, with the emergence of social

media such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp, it becomes very easy to spread negative WOM among one's social network (in-group). Thus, it should be an essential part of a branding strategy to integrate a complaint management system with social media monitoring (especially Facebook and Twitter) and managers should ensure their online presence with an overall positive image.

Past studies conclude that self-congruity is a key factor in market segmentation that helps marketing managers to position their products (Bosnjak and Rudolph, 2008; Klipfel *et al.*, 2014). In a similar way, this study proposes that in-depth knowledge of undesired self-congruence may help marketing managers in targeting consumers and positioning their products in a better way to appeal to the audience.

Our study findings also demonstrate the importance of CET in developed countries (Study 1). Managers in such markets should strive to emphasise local presence and value for the local economy, such as "collaboration with local manufacturers" label, as it may enhance the acceptability of foreign brands in local markets. However, managers in emerging markets may find CET of little relevance. It is likely because most emerging markets lack developed industrial base to satisfy and compete with foreign products across multiple products categories. Thus, a higher order sense of country-consumer connection as exhibited by CET may not manifest in inducing brand avoidance for such markets across product categories in general. However, it is important that CET should be tracked over time in a given country's market because these opinions can change over time. Hence, managers should monitor consumers' angry feelings/emotions continuously to anticipate their potential behavioural impact over time.

The interaction effect of COO familiarity and perceived animosity shows that the animosity-avoidance relationship becomes stronger with higher COO familiarity. Thus, it becomes essential for international marketers to understand that contrary to positive COO associations, which enhance the acceptability, the negative COO associations will increase the avoidance of their products/brands in foreign markets.

Limitations and future research

No research is without limitation and the limitations inherent in our study present opportunities for future research. First, both the samples were dominated by gender (females 61 per cent in New Zealand) and (males 73 per cent in Pakistan). Such a gender-biased male-dominant sample is typical in most emerging markets (Khan and Lee, 2014). However, future research with more representative samples may increase the generalisability of the findings. Moreover, the use of student sample (Study 1) in marketing studies is often questioned in terms of generalisability and in cross-country comparison with a non-matching sample (Ashraf and Merunka, 2017). Future research may include a wider range of participants from each country and compare their findings for better comparison.

COO having many connotations, such as the country of design, country of assembly, country of manufacture or country of ownership, provides a variety of perspectives on product-country relationships. Our study did not attempt to differentiate among these various points of view of product/brand origin. Although Charles (2012) argued that various dimensions only make the decision-making process more complicated, there is the possibility that consumers may have varying attitudes and interpretations about their avoidance (support) of foreign product purchases.

Attitudes towards rejection (acceptance) of counterfeit brands may increase (decrease) the intentions to buy original brands. Since the availability of counterfeit brands has increased in developing countries, it may be interesting to explore AA towards original brands because of the counterfeit brands availability in the markets. Moreover, what ethical (unethical) motivations are involved in the rejection (acceptance) of counterfeit brands?

Finally, domestic product availability (unavailability) may change AA for foreign brands. As in our Study 2, the majority of the responses were for electronics brands (computers and mobile phones) where no domestic product was available in this category. Therefore, future research can address the differences that may exist because of domestic product availability (unavailability).

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Appendix

Items	Indicator loadings	
	Study 1	Study 2
<i>Undesired self-congruence</i>		
1. The brand does not represent what I wish to become	0.85	0.86
2. I associate that brand with something unappealing, which I do not want to become	0.80	0.89
3. I do not want to be associated with the type of people using that brand	0.71	0.79
<i>Negative social influence</i>		
1. People important to me think I should not use that brand	0.85	0.91
2. It is expected that people like me do not use that brand	0.81	0.88
3. People who influence my behaviour think that I should not use that brand	0.93	0.92
<i>Animosity</i>		
1. I dislike that country	0.91	0.88
2. I feel angry towards that country	0.93	0.89
3. That country is not reliable trading partner	0.89	0.85
4. That country wants to gain economic power over my country	0.93	0.87
5. That country is taking advantage of my country	0.95	0.86
6. That country has too much economic influence in my country	n/a ^b	0.82
7. That country is doing business unfairly with my country	0.89	0.86
<i>Consumer ethnocentrism</i>		
1. It is not right to purchase foreign products/brands because it puts us out of job	0.90	0.81
2. We should purchase products manufactured in our country instead of letting other countries get rich off us	0.90	0.90
3. We should not buy foreign products/brands because this hurts our business and cause unemployment	0.92	0.92
4. We should buy from foreign countries only those products/brands that we cannot obtain within our own country	0.82	0.76
<i>COO familiarity</i>		
1. I know the country of that brand	1 ^a	1 ^a
<i>Avoidance attitude</i>		
1. Using that brand is not a good idea	0.80	0.88
2. I have a negative attitude towards that brand	0.84	0.87
3. In my opinion, it is not desirable to use that brand	0.85	0.86
4. Using that brand is not pleasant	0.78	0.87
<i>Intentions to avoid</i>		
1. I would not buy that brand	0.84	0.94
2. I would not buy that brand if I saw that brand in a store	0.89	0.96
3. I would rather buy any other brand than this brand	0.73	0.87

Table AI.
Scale items and
indicator loadings

Notes: ^aSingle-item construct. ^bItem deleted because of low factor loadings

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