Understanding the Role of Political Relations in Consumer Decision Making: A Grounded Theory Approach

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Abstract

Previous animosity studies have been conducted in single-target contexts where the effects of hostility towards one product's country of origin were examined. This current study is an attempt to investigate the animosity construct in the multi-target boycott case of the Middle-East conflict where more than one party (countries and companies) are involved in the political conflict, as reports show that consumers have inconsistent reactions to these involved parties. One-on-one in-depth interviews, supported by documentation, were conducted with Arab consumers who are presumably involved in the conflict. It has been found that animosity is multi-level which belongs to the political relations (there after POLR) continuum and performs as a product attribute. POLRs' effects on the consumer are subject to parties' involvement level in the conflict and consumer prioritized needs. Research findings imply that "political positioning" can be applied by brands with "good quality" POLR, while others need to highlight other product attributes.

Keywords: Animosity, consumer needs, grounded theory, international markets, Middle-East, political relations, product attributes

1. Introduction and Gap in the Literature

The animosity construct and its implications on marketing has been studied by researchers in a number of contexts including Chinese animosity toward the Japanese due to the Nanjing massacre in 1937 (Klein, Ettenson, & Morris, 1998), Dutch toward the German due to German aggression against the Netherlands during World War II (Nijssen & Douglas, 2004), and Australians toward the French due to the nuclear tests in the Pacific Ocean in 1996 (Ettenson & Klein, 2005).

These studies have generated models which helped explain the political consumer behavior. However, these models had a single-target approach in which one country was involved in some aggressive political actions against the other, and did not investigate the different consumer reactions to numerous parties (products' country of origin (thereafter COO) and companies/brand) which are involved in the same conflict, as it is the case in relation to the Middle-East conflict.

Although Israel is the main party at conflict with the Arab states, the boycott call extends beyond Israel and encompasses the United States (Gulfnews, 2002) and other companies claimed to be supporting Israel (Karkar, 2010). Even within Israeli products, the literature states that the Palestinians in the West Bank are buying Israeli products despite the anti-Israel sentiments (animosity factor) which are widespread in the Arab world (Zanotti, 2012) and the boycott calls against Israeli products. Al-Bayader Palestinian magazine (2012) states that the Palestinians have no choice in purchasing Israeli products as there are no alternatives for them since the Palestinian industries have not yet developed in all phases. Nevertheless, Palestinians distinguish between general Israeli citizens in mainland Israel and the Jewish settlers in the West Bank. Such a report suggests that the influence of animosity on consumer willingness to buy (thereafter WTB) is restricted by consumer need for the offensive country's product. This link between animosity and consumer needs was not clearly discussed in the literature.

This study endeavors to explore this untapped phenomenon through a multi-target approach which blends macro-boycotting (directed at countries) with micro-boycotting (directed at companies) behavior (AbouAish, 2013) and investigates how consumers are reacting to these different parties involved in the conflict and seeks

in-depth understanding of the underlying reasons behind their behavior. Due to the newness of this multi-target approach, and considering the nature of the queries of this research (how consumers react to this phenomenon and why they react the way they do), it is deemed by the researchers that qualitative-interpretive research methodology is the appropriate choice for answering these questions (Carson, Gilmore, and Perry, 2001). It works on building theory rather than testing existing ones.

2. The Arab-Israeli Conflict

2.1 Background

The conflict in the Middle-East between Israel and Arab states is a stable (Leong et al., 2008) political and religious animosity case originating from a long-standing political issue upon the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 in Palestine as a home for the Jews (Smith, 2010). The Arab League, formed in 1944 and comprising 22 Arabic-speaking countries (Weiss, 2013), did not recognize Israel's right to existence (Kaikati, 1977). They considered that the Zionists are occupying their fellow Arab Palestinians' land. Hostility between Arab states and Israel was further strengthened in 1967 when Israel captured further lands from Arab states comprising the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Sinai Peninsula in Egypt, and Golan Heights in Syria (Smith, 2010).

Attempts to end the state of war between the parties have been made upon the condition that Israel withdraws from the lands occupied since 1967 (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs [IMFA], 2002). However, the conflict remains unresolved as this condition is not fully met, in addition to the establishment of Jewish settlements in the West Bank, the construction of the security wall between Israel and the West Bank(Karkar, 2010), and Israeli military operations against Gaza Strip.

2.2 The Boycott

As a result of this political conflict, Arab states imposed a commercial boycott against the Jewish migrants. The boycott operates on three levels: primary, secondary, and tertiary (Weiss, 2013). The primary boycott bans all direct trade between the Arab countries and Israel. Secondary boycott pressures foreign companies to refrain from dealing with Israel and forces them to end certain commercial relationships with Israel. The Arab League maintained a blacklist of such firms (Weiss, 2013). Foreign firms wanting to do businesswith an Arab country observe a long list of regulations not allowing it to contribute to the Israeli economy or war potential. The tertiary boycott prohibits companies dealing with other companies on the blacklist.

Nevertheless, the boycott has weakened since its establishment at the state level. Egypt, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority have abandoned the boycott as a result of the peace treaties and agreements that have been made with Israel as a result of its withdrawal from Sinai Peninsula and parts of the Palestinian territories (Weiss, 2013). Gal's (2012) report shows that Israeli products are available in Egypt, Jordan, and Palestinian territories, while other Arab countries have abandoned the secondary and tertiary boycott (Bard, 2007).

2.3 Third Party Involvement in the Conflict

The US has been the main target of the third party boycott campaign, which is based on its support for Israel in its conflict against the Arabs (Alhamad, 2000). The boycott against American products was "kicked off by the religious scholar, Youssef Al Qaradawi" (Gulfnews, 2000) who emphasizes that buying American products must also be stopped for its support to the "Zionist entity" through its money, weapons, and the use of its veto in the Security Council (Inminds, n.d.). In 2002, people in the Palestinian territories, angry at the Israeli military operation in the West Bank, marched in rallies urging civil societies, non-government and student organizations to switch from American products to local and European products (Al-Jazeera, 2002).

According to Zunes (2002), the US has maintained its large-scale military, financial, and diplomatic support to Israel. Western countries also share the United States' strong support for Israel's legitimate right to exist in peace and security; however, these countries refused to provide arms and aid to Israel.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Definition of Animosity

Klein et al (1998) described animosity as "the remnant antipathy related to previous or ongoing military, political, or economic events" towards a particular country, ethnic group, or entity" (Leong et al, 2008).Others (Averill, 1982; Rieflerand & Diamantopoulos, 2007) suggest that animosity can arise for a number of reasons, including political, economic, and religious conflicts, and agree that it is associated with strong feelings of dislike and enmity.

Animosity's influence on the consumer is independent of ethnocentrism (Klein et al., 1998) measured by CETSCALE (Shimp & Sharma, 1987), which refers to the preference for domestic national products over

foreign alternatives. Klein and Ettenson (1999) explain that consumer animosity is a negative attitude toward a particular country while ethnocentrism is a general negative attitude toward foreign countries. Similarly, economic nationalism differs from consumer ethnocentrism (Sullivan Mort & Duncan, 2003).

3.2 Effects of Animosity on the Consumer

Klein et al (1998) were the first to introduce the animosity construct to the literature in the context of the Nanjing massacre committed by the Japanese against 300,000 Chinese in 1937. Klein et al proposed that animosity toward a country can negatively affect the purchase of its products. The consumer might feel reluctant or refuse to buy a product (Nijssen & Douglas, 2004) due to the COO's engagement in offensive acts which are difficult to forgive; the more animosity consumers feel toward a country, the less willing they are to buy its products (Leong et al, 2008). Such influence is independent of product judgment denoting that animosity has no effect on product judgments.

Maher and Mady (2010), who support this hypothesis, suggest that consumers' WTB is also influenced by the anticipated emotions which "result from imagining how certain events might play out in the future". The consumer, in the context of animosity, would imagine and compare the consequences of both situations of buying and not buying from the enemy. Buying the enemy's product may deliver a mixture of positive anticipated emotions (PAE)–expected satisfaction and negative anticipated emotions (NAE)–expected dissatisfaction (e.g. cheap product leading to saving money but feeling guilty) while not buying the enemy's product may lead to inverted mixed results.

This is supported by Kozinets and Handelman (1998) from the boycott literature, who found that consumer boycotts are used as vehicles to reach moral self-realization and that their purchases are free from guilt. Boström, Føllesdal, Klintman, Micheletti, and Sørensen (2005) also explained that political consumers consider non-economic values such as human rights and environmental responsibility when purchasing a product, in addition to seeking to satisfy their personal wellbeing.

3.3 Antecedents of Animosity

A number of studies have discussed the antecedents of animosity. Of particular interest to this study is Jung, Ang, Leong, Tan, Pornpitakpan, and Kau's (2002) study which distinguishes between situational and stable animosity, used in Leong et al. (2002) model in the context of the 1997 Asian economic crisis. Situational refers to animosity sparked by a particular episode over a limited time, while stable refers to a long-lasting hostility. If, for example, there were several economic crises occurring one after another, and the same country was responsible for these occurrences, then the animosity becomes stable. Both forms of animosity have influence on WTB.

Situational animosity has two antecedents: external attribution and external control, in addition to stable animosity. In relation to stable animosity, information pertaining to the current event triggering situational animosity may be processed in a manner biased by stable animosity towards that entity. Hence, Leong et al hypothesize that the greater the stable animosity a consumer has towards a country, the more situational animosity this consumer will feel towards that country.

External attribution refers to the extent that external entities are responsible for the occurrence of an event that had negative consequences on the consumer. External control refers to the power that an external entity (e.g. a country) has to modify the course of events. This indicates that the greater the external controllability, the greater the situational animosity towards the COO.

Both types of animosity (situational and stable) toward the COO perceived responsible for the occurrence of the negative consequences on the consumer may reduce WTB products from this COO. Situational, but not stable, animosity negatively influenced cognitive judgments and affective judgments of responsible COOs.

Cognitive judgments refer to beliefs held about the product while affective judgments are associated with consumer emotional reactions toward the product. According to Leong et al (2008), stable animosity may impact cognitive judgments and affective evaluations only through situational animosity.

3.4 Animosity, Product Judgment, and Consumer Needs

Product judgment and subsequent purchase decisions are made based on the evaluation of product's various attributes (Klein et al, 1998). An attribute is a feature that the product possesses (Mowen, 1993), such as price and quality. A product, which can be viewed as a set of tangible and intangible attributes, works on satisfying consumer needs (Akpoyomare, Adeosun, & Ganiyu, 2012) through its attributes. Thus, in order for marketers to offer a satisfactory product to consumers, it is important to understand consumer needs which can be fulfilled through these attributes. Maslow's hierarchy is a well-known theory which explains human motivation and needs.

It arranges human needs into five categories: physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1987). This sequence denotes the priority given to each set of needs.

The political consumer may feel reluctant to buy a product from an aggressive country. Nevertheless, this consumer may have a greater reluctance to refuse a product made by the offensive country if its attributes serve needs of high priority, especially those which belong to the lower level basic needs (physiological and safety categories), which may explain why Palestinians in the West Bank are buying Israeli products. Such a connection between consumer needs and the animosity construct has not been covered in the literature (to the best knowledge of the authors).

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Method

Qualitative-interpretive approach was employed in order to achieve research's objectives. This is based on a number of reasons. This research is explorative in nature, as the Arab boycott case appeared to be understudied, and the multi-target animosity approach was not used in previous studies (to the best knowledge of the researchers). Also, the nature of the research questions, how and why consumers react to more than one boycott target based on the same political issue, can best be answered through qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews (Carson et al, 2001). This research aims to gain insight into informants' experiences, which has the advantage of capturing real-time reactions to boycott (Klein et al, 2004) calls in their natural settings. Hence, informants' reports would come from their own natural interaction with the boycott case rather than giving them a scenario to imagine and report their 'artificial' reactions, as it may be the case in laboratory studies.

4.2 Sampling

Thirty one-on-one in-depth interviews were conducted with Arab nationals from the Palestinian territories and other Arab countries. This choice reflects the national nature of the conflict which affects this group. Respondents were chosen from various demographics and psychographics, particularly self-reported level of religiosity and patriotism/nationalism, a theme that emerged while conducting the research, in order to have richness in the data from the experiences of this variety. This number seemed to be sufficient as saturation was achieved within this number (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).Twelve of the respondents were males. Age of respondents ranged from 19 to 76. Telephone and face-to-face interviews were conducted in Melbourne in 2012–2013. Each interview took an average of 30-40 minutes.

4.3 Interview Guide Design

The interview guide was semi-structured. The funneling technique (Minichiello, Madison, Hays, & Parmenter, 2003) was used, beginning with broad open-ended questions then narrowing down. Informants were given the opportunity to freely express their feelings and share their experiences about the topic in their own words, followed by more specific questions. For instance, rather than asking informants whether they participate in the boycott, they were asked about their reaction to the boycott calls. The recursive model of questioning was used in which previous conversation influences the structure and content of what would be asked next (Minichiello et al, 2003).

The discussion guide consisted of six main sets of questions related to the topic in context (which ramify to approximately ten sub-questions):

- A brief discussion about the respondent's demographics and concern/relation to the conflict in the Middle East.
- Respondent's perception of the state of Israel and its political actions (animosity/hostility).
- Investigating influence of such perception on respondent's WTB in the marketplace, and the effect of the boycott calls on the informant ['how' questions'].
- Questions 2 and 3 are repeated for other non-Israeli parties (USA, European countries, in addition to companies involved in supporting Israel) ['how' questions'].
- Examining the underlying reasons for their perception and subsequent behavior; factors influencing their WTB ['why' questions].
- How do you rate products coming from Israel and the US (priori themes – effect of animosity on product evaluation)?

4.5 Triangulation

In order to establish credibility, i.e. congruency between findings and reality, according to Merriam (1998) cited in Shenton (2004), triangulation was used, which refers to the use of different research methods to collect data

(Shenton, 2004). Data collected through the in-depth interviews were compared with data from documents related to the case. The use of a wide range of informants was another triangulation strategy used to ensure credibility of the research (Shenton, 2004).

4.6 Data Analysis

Grounded theory methodology was used to generate theory which is grounded in the collected data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In order to move from raw data to a theory, thematic analysis was conducted, which is, according to Ryan and Bernard (2003), the process of extracting themes from the data through the inductive approach and the investigator's prior theoretical understanding of the phenomenon in the literature (priori approach, using what previous researchers have done). Themes were identified through repetition of topics reported by respondents. Systematic comparisons between units of data (Ryan and Bernard, 2003) were made in order to find similarities and differences between respondents' reports, which were in turn compared against the respondents' concern to the political conflict. Iteration was used through which preceding operations shape the subsequent ones (Spiggle, 1994). The interview guide was updated according to themes that emerged from the analysis of data collected from previous interviews.

5. Findings (Themes)

5.1 Theme: Hostility (Animosity)

An interesting point raised by a number of respondents is that they do not like to refer to any individual or nation in the world as an enemy including Israel, but it is their concern that Israel chose to be an enemy of the Arabs through its political practices:

'I prefer not to use the word enemy against anyone, but Israel's practices against the Palestinians are causing all these problems'.

Respondents reported their resentment at the Israeli political practices towards the Palestinians and the Arabs in general:

'... I dislike Israel … So how can I eat what they produce? They sell these products and use the money

I pay to buy weapons and fight my people'

'I feel angry at the Israelis as they want to destroy Al-Aqsa mosque (Mount Temple) and build their claimed Temple on it'.

5.2 Theme: Consumer Involvement Level

When questioned about the reason about their participation in the boycott against Israel, respondents reported that their participation is driven by their connection to the political issue through the national and the religious roots. Palestinians reported their 'obvious' concern about the conflict as they are directly affected by Israel's actions. Non-Palestinians explained that their participation is a religious and/or pan-Arab national duty. These views were not shared by all participants. A Lebanese female respondent aged 41 stated that the conflict with Israel does not concern her. Hence, she would not consider Israel as an enemy, and have no problem to buy Israeli products. Another two Lebanese respondents, a male and female in their early twenties, also reported their non-concern about the conflict and that they would not mind buying Israeli product if they were convenient. However, these three respondents would not buy Israeli products if Israel was occupying Lebanon.

5.3 Theme: Varying Intensity of Animosity with Multiple Targets

In regard to multi-target responses, respondents reported different reactions to the USA's political actions compared to Israel's actions. They generally described it as somehow 'second order' or an 'indirect' political rival as the conflict is directly against Israel which is occupying the land, while America is supporting it. Such discrepancy was reflected on WTB. Respondents who buy from McDonald's, a US company/brand, for instance, indicated their definite refusal to buy from a brand if it was 100% Israeli owned, as it is the case with Max Brenner. This is at the macro level.

The consumer may also distinguish between the citizens of a nation (micro level), especially when alternatives are hardly available. Palestinian respondents who lived in the West Bank stated their WTB Israeli products in the absence of alternatives. When they were questioned about the settlements' products, they informed that they would avoid them and buy the non-settlements Israeli products, justifying that all of them are enemies but settlers are more direct in their enmity than Israelis who live outside the West Bank. This is triangulated with reports from Palestinian merchants in the West Bank who stated that they have no problem with Israeli products as far as they are not produced in the settlements (Al-Bayader, 2012).

This is also the case with the USA. A respondent distinguished between the American political administration and American general citizens. Some subsequent respondents agreed with that; however they emphasized their preference to stay away from American products for two reasons: American citizens are indirectly supporting Israel through paying taxes to their government which is then supporting Israel using their taxes. Also respondents argued that American companies such as Coke and McDonald's are directly involved in supporting Israel, and thus their involvement in the conflict is similar to their government.

5.4 Theme: Countries' Friendliness/Supportiveness Compared to Animosity as a Motive

As countries and nations may be at political conflict against each other which works as a motivator to boycott each other, they may also be politically supportive of each other or possibly at a neutral position which may work as a motivator to buy from each other. Respondents reported:

'It is preferred that you buy the Japanese over the American …because it is not doing anything wrong to the Palestinians'.

'There was a lady selling Turkish cleaning agents. I bought from her all types. She was convincing me that these are very good products. I said to her: "sister, I am going to buy the products however they are just because I like what happened in Turkey [in relation to the attack against the flotilla (Neiuwhof, 2010). I am supporting the Turkish government". Therefore, the intention is not whether it is good quality or not, you may for example go to Bunnings(an Australian household hardware chain) and buy bigger bottles in large quantities with professional quality and are more economical. I am happy to pay $10 or $20 extra but I know that the benefit is going to go there (Turkey)'.

Other respondents reported the favorable political stance of countries such as Venezuela and Bolivia which severed relations with Israel (IMFA, n.d.). Some respondents also commented that European countries are 'more merciful' than the USA, while they believed that Asian countries and Canada are politically better than the European countries since, according to their knowledge, these nations were not directly involved in supporting Israel in its practices against the Arabs.

5.6 Theme: POLR Continuum

Respondents' reports reveal that they have different perceptions towards products' COOs' (and their citizens') political actions. While both Israel and the US are viewed politically unfavorably, the level of animosity is not constant. This extends to the micro level of the one country/nation when the consumer has no other choice. On the other hand, the favorable supportiveness of countries, such as Turkey and some South American countries, is also considered by the political consumer. Hence, the effects of these actions constitute a POLR continuum which range from the extreme of intense animosity which negatively influence consumer WTB to the extreme of friendliness between nations which positively influence consumer WTB, as depicted in Figure 1.
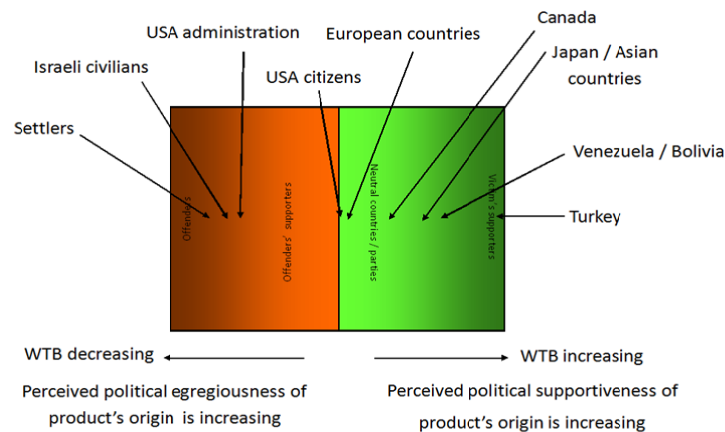

Figure 1. The political relations continuum

5.7 Theme: POLRs' Interaction with Other Product Attributes

Respondents highlighted the significance of the availability of satisfactory alternative products in order to be able to participate in the boycott. When they were questioned about their preference between American and

alternative products, they generally conditioned their preference for alternative products to their price and quality.

'I have tried the Arabic chocolate in order to quit chocolates made by American companies. But it is no way! I cannot quit chocolate made by Mars and Cadbury and switch to the Arabic one. Its quality does not reach the acceptable level'.

But when they were asked to compare between alternatives and Israeli products, they gave their definite refusal to buy Israeli products, which shows how the varying level of animosity affects consumers' decision.

A Lebanese respondent who is financially disadvantaged reported that he buys Israeli olives which are illegally available in Lebanon because 'it is cheaper than the Lebanese olives and tastes good'. However, he would not buy it if the Lebanese and Israeli olives had the same price. Also, he would not buy it if Israel was occupying Lebanon. Therefore, as the egregiousness of the country increases (affected by consumer's involvement), animosity sentiments increase and thus respondents reported greater willingness to make trade-offs (as it is the case for Israeli products compared to American products). Boycotters of Israel reported willingness to pay double the amount or even more for the non-Israeli alternative, but not for American products.

5.8 Theme: Effects of POLR on the Consumer

Respondents highlighted two reasons for refusing to buy from the political opponent: self-honor/dignity, and moral obligations. Respondents, particularly Palestinians, refuse to buy from Israel as a way to defend their honor:

'…it would not be possible to buy from someone who drove you out from your home. It is humiliating'.

'it is self-honor'.

Other respondents informed:

'…The one of us has principles and morals that must adhere to. You cannot give up your morals for the sake of a bar of chocolate or soft drink'.

As the animosity sentiments increase towards the product's origin, the deficit in these needs increases until it reaches the unacceptable level (Israel), with extra emphasis on settlers' products.

'you would be a traitor if you bought Israeli dates', For American products, it is better not to buy, but will not lead to a definite loss of these values 'I feel guilty to buy American products…I would not call myself a traitor if I bought American products…', the same respondent commented.

Buying the political friend's product help the consumer adhere to those values:

'I am buying my dignity'.

'… I feel self-contentment [when not buying Israeli products]…'.

5.9 Theme: Prioritized Consumer Needs

Fulfillment of consumer needs is sought from products through their attributes. The political consumer endeavors to maximize benefits by buying products which can fulfill all needs, including self-honor and moral obligations. If this is not achievable, trade-offs have to be made depending on consumer's prioritized needs. Respondents reported different priorities. For some, self-honor (through abstaining from Israeli products) is in-discussible, for others personal wellbeing comes first, and for others, financial security has a priority over moral obligations.

Consumers would need to buy the enemy's product to fulfill their needs under two conditions: when the alternatives are absolutely absent from the market as it is the case with the Palestinians in the West bank, or when some of the alternative's product attributes are unsatisfactory for the consumer compared to the political opponent's, and fulfill essential needs. The situation becomes more difficult when talking about necessary products like medicine:

'Participation in the boycott is dependent on the product. I have no problem boycotting Coke; it is just a drink, but I have a problem boycotting a medicine which is very important for my health…'.

A computer specialist respondent commented that he has no option but to use computer chips made by the American manufacturers like Intel, as alternatives are almost inexistent. Abstaining from use these computer components may lead to quitting his job. When given the hypothetical scenario that such companies were all Israeli, he thought for a while then replied:

'I would have to quit, [thinking] perhaps I would try to minimize the use of these products by possibly changing

my career'.

5.10 Demographics and Psychographics

While this study was not intended to compare respondents' reports to their demographics and psychographics, it was noticed that demographic variables, except income, were not significant predictors of consumer decision making in this context. Boycotters of Israeli products come from different age groups, sexes, and educational background. In relation to income, two respondents, a male in his 60s and a female in her 30s, reported their need to buy cheaper Israeli products which they would not do if they had higher income.

Psychographics may be better predictors for consumer decision making in this context than demographics, in particular those who identified themselves as patriotic and religious. These findings, however, need further empirical evidence in future research.

5.11 Cognitive and Affective Evaluations

Product judgment did not appear to be cognitively affected by animosity sentiments. Respondents reported that they are satisfied with the quality of products of American and Israeli origin. This is further supported by Al-Bayader's (2012) report which states that Palestinian consumers buy non-settlements Israeli products due to their good quality. However, animosity sentiments affect consumer higher-order needs (equivalent to affective evaluation) which will be discussed in the next section.

6. Theoretical Implications and Research Contribution

The contribution of this paper is summarized in the model depicted in Figure 2. It is hypothesized that the political consumer decision making is influenced by three variables: political relations between the consumer and product's origin, product judgment based on product various attributes which political relations are part of, and consumer prioritized needs.
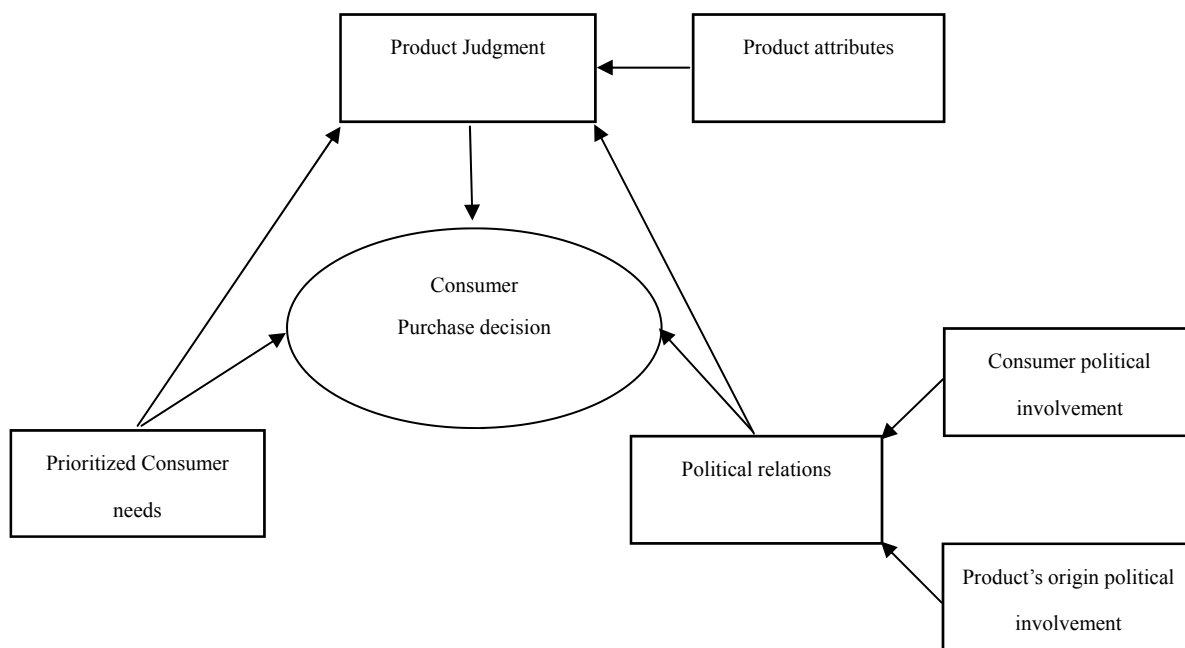

Figure 2. The political relations model of foreign product purchase

6.1 Political Relations

This research expands on the general animosity literature by introducing the 'political relations' (POLR) construct as a conceptually broader alternative to animosity in the context of international marketing. POLR is not a discrete state of either animosity or no-animosity, but it is rather a continuum ranging from the extreme of animosity/hostility, gradually moving to the other extreme of friendliness/supportiveness between nations.

These different levels of POLR may give answers to the main research questions (how and why consumers have

different reactions to the numerous parties involved in the multi-target Middle-East political conflict). The POLR are shaped by the interaction between the product's origin and its consumers. The consumer assesses the nature of the product's origin involvement in the political issue according to her or his level of involvement in this political issue. The more egregious the actions of the product's origin, and the greater the level of involvement of the consumer is in the political issue, the greater level of hostility will exist between the two parties, and the more likely the consumer will reject this product (as it is the case for Israel) and switch to the product of another origin perceived to be more politically supportive to the consumer.

The animosity level fades away through the two ends: the marketer's end and the consumer's end (denoting level of both sides' involvement). Animosity feeling weakens when the product's origin is indirectly involved in the conflict through supporting the main country at conflict (as it is the case for the US). On the consumer's end, the animosity feeling also weakens if the consumer is not directly affected by the offenses of the company and/or its companies, as it is the case for some Lebanese respondents who are not directly interacting with the Israelis confronting the Palestinians.

Such finding's applicability may stretch to other animosity contexts. Contemporary Chinese consumers, for instance, do buy Japanese products despite the historical animosity between the two parties, as the contemporary Japanese citizens may not be perceived as directly responsible for the massacre which took place decades ago in Nanjing. Hypothetically, however, the Chinese consumers would definitely refuse to conduct any business relations with those Japanese who were directly involved in the massacre. Hence, as both parties' involvement in the political issue weakens, this hostility relaxes until it reaches the level of irrelevance to the consumer.

Product's origin involvement level is equivalent to Leong's et al (2008) external attribution and external control which refer to the extent that external entities are responsible for the occurrence of an event that had negative consequences on the consumer and the power to modify the course of events respectively. Product's origin involvement factor discussed in this research expands on this by suggesting that such responsibility is multi-level which includes negative as well as positive consequences and can generate different consumer reactions according to the nature of the product's origin involvement (responsibility) in the political issue.

6.2 Product's Attributes (Product Judgment) and Consumer Prioritized Needs

The variation in the POLR levels discussed earlier resembles in its effects on the consumer other product attributes. Consumer purchase decision may be influenced, for instance, by the level of the quality of the product; the higher the quality of the product would potentially lead to greater motivation to purchase the product, and vice-versa. The same rule applies to the 'quality' of the POLR. Political consumers feel motivated to buy products from a political ally. Equally, this motivation to purchase the product may fade away as the quality of these POLR deteriorate, until it reaches a certain level at which the consumer will reject the product from the political offender. This is the difference between American and Israeli products as perceived by the Arab consumer. The United States' support for Israel is not appreciated by respondents, and it is considered somehow as a second order offender, so they prefer not to buy (rather than definitely reject) American products, while Israel, which they believe it is occupying their land and persecuting the Palestinians, is a definite offender and all its products must be rejected, except when there is an urgent need for it in the absolute absence of alternatives like a medicine.

The POLR of the product's brand or its COO as an extrinsic product attribute affects the political consumer's high-order self-esteem (self-honor) and self-actualization (moral obligations) needs (Maslow, 1987), which is the equivalence of affective evaluation of the enemy's product as discussed by Leong et al (2008) with further elaboration on the underlying reasons for such evaluation. Respondents would feel humiliated to turn to the offender who drove them out of their homes and buy a product from this offender, especially if the product is an unnecessary one. They would also consider it as immoral to make such a purchase; some respondents would consider themselves as traitors if they bought something from offender, so they feel the need to preserve their dignity and adhere to their moral principles by switching to alternatives. These findings are also in line with Kozinets and Handelman's (1998) and Boström et al's (2005) which state that political consumers consider non-economic benefits when buying a product.

With such high-order needs in place and considering other product attributes which serve other lower-order needs, POLR interact with other attributes as other product attributes interact with each other according to consumer prioritized needs as discussed in Maslow's hierarchy. It is less likely that the consumer would be concerned about self-esteem before satisfying his biological-physiological needs (eating and drinking), and those who are financially disadvantaged may put more emphasis on price (financial security) over moral obligations met through purchasing a political ally's product. Hence, willingness to accept or reject a product

from a political rival is dependent on trade-offs that the consumer is willing to make, which in turn, are dependent on consumers' prioritized needs.

Political consumer decision making affected by prioritized needs is, to certain extent, analogous to Maher and Mady's (2010) PAE and NAE factors influencing WTB. As the consumer has positive and negative anticipations about alternative products, this model also discusses consumer purchase decision among alternatives according to the expected benefits and costs delivered by each product's attributes, with the two additions of including POLR as a product attribute, and tying these attributes to consumer needs.

The variance in the three constructs discussed in the provided model (political relations, product attributes/brand judgment, and consumer prioritized needs) leave little space for consistent reaction toward parties involved in a particular political issue. It potentially explains the difference between feeling reluctant to buy and definitely refusing to buy a product from the aggressor country (Nijssen & Douglas, 2004) or company. Definite refusal can be a product of a more direct involvement of both parties (the marketer and the consumer) in the political conflict, availability of alternative products which have aggregately satisfactory attributes, and higher priority given to consumer needs connected to brand's political actions over other product attributes. On the other hand, reluctance to buy (not a definite refusal) is a product of variation in these factors.

7. Managerial Implications

The political relations continuum suggests that international marketers would have an enhanced opportunity to sell their products in countries with which they have friendly POLR. In this particular case study, there is extra emphasis on South American, Asian, and Canadian marketers in the Arab countries. Their POLR can be considered as friendly and supportive in light of the Arab-Israeli political conflict. As an extrinsic product attribute, POLR can add non-material value to the product (through satisfying self-esteem and self-actualization) which will potentially attract the consumer.

Such opportunity to be exploited may demand explicit reference to these actions in promotions, as practiced with other product attributes. Companies can use 'political positioning' through which they position their product as 'politically safe'. This can be achieved by associating companies' (and their COOs') favorable POLR with the political consumers' needs: moral obligations and self-honor feelings. By purchasing the 'politically safe' products, political consumers will have self-contentment and guilt-free feelings.

As brand positioning refers to the "perceived fit between a product and the needs of the target, relative to competitive product offerings" (Reed, 2010), for this positioning to be successfully implemented, the consumer must feel a deficit in these needs when buying the politically unsafe alternatives. This may be achieved by creating greater attachment between the consumer and the political cause. Also this positioning can be achieved by highlighting the competitors' COOs' unfavorable involvement in the conflict. This latter approach may be practical when hostility between nations is heightened and clear (as it is the case between Arab nations and Israel). However, it may not be easy to apply when hostility between nations is blurry, as it is the case between Arab nations and the USA and between China and Japan, since the current Japanese citizens and companies, for instance, are not responsible for what their ancestors have committed against the Chinese. It may even be illegal and/or potentially cause disputes at company-company, company-government, and government-government levels.

When applicable, politically favorable companies can display in their promotions messages such as: 'part of our profits is used to support the oppressed', 'protect your dignity and buy our products, do not buy from those who are occupying your land', 'free yourself from guilt and buy our products, not the products of the [politically offending] nation/company', 'our buses are not used to transport the prisoners to the prisons of the [offending nation]. Governments and other organizations have also a role to play in this regard. Through the media, they need to highlight the favorable political relations with their trading nations.

Politically favorable marketers, however, should heed to the fact that moral obligations and self-honor are not the only needs that the consumer endeavors to fulfill when purchasing a product. Other product attributes such as price and quality which potentially fulfill more prioritized consumer needs also play an important role in consumer's decision. Hence, marketers who want to successfully exploit the advantage of their favorable political relations must deliver to their consumers a product that reach consumers' minimal expectations according to these prioritized needs.

On the other hand, marketers from politically unfavorable nations need to eliminate this deficit in the consumer when buying their products by lowering or eliminating consumer animosity feelings by distancing themselves from what their government or citizens are doing, as suggested by Knudsen et al (2008). Research findings

reveal that consumers do distinguish between the citizens of the political rival nations, especially when there is a necessity for the product. Participating in philanthropic activities or cause-related marketing which support those involved in the political conflict can also move their position towards the green zone in the POLR continuum and enhance their brand in the market, according to Knudsen et al.

Distancing the consumer from the cause may be another option, possibly by promoting the idea that their nationals are at fault; however such approach may not be convincing for the consumer. Alternatively, they can focus on those consumers who already give less priority to the political cause (as there are varying levels of involvement even within the same nation) and greater priority to other needs which their product attributes can serve.

They can also proactively induce the consumer to give higher priority to needs that other attributes serve, such as financial security and enjoyment created by the consumption/use of the product (e.g. luxury car and sweet taste of food), and so forth.

8. Conclusion, Limitations, and Further Research

This explorative research introduces the POLR construct and the POLR continuum which resembles other product attributes through their effects on the consumer and interaction with other product attributes and trade-offs made based on consumer prioritized needs. These findings are conceptual and give general marketing directions, which need to be followed by further empirical research in order to help in making marketing decisions.

The POLR continuum reveals that political consumers distinguish between the citizens of the one nation, especially when satisfactory alternatives are hardly existent. Hence, studies on the animosity construct (or POLR) need to be extended to the micro-level (organizations/companies/communities) in future studies, which may provide greater precision about consumer's WTB.

Future studies can also expand on the findings of this research by conducting conjoint analysis which can examine the interaction between product attributes and product's COO's/brand's POLR with the consumers' nation/reference group, and consumer willingness to make trade-offs. This will potentially help companies adjust their products' attributes' levels in order to attract more consumers. These studies include comparing product attributes (including POLR) against consumers' prioritized needs, demographic and psychographic variables (for instance, their religious commitment) and consumer involvement level in the political conflict which may help in segmentation.

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