Reinforcing Willingness to Buy and to Pay Due to Consumer Affinity towards a Foreign Country

Yohan Bernard
University of Franche-Comté, France

Sarra Zarrouk-Karoui
University of Bourgogne, France

[Abstract] In a tense economic environment where consumers are encouraged to favor local rather than imported products, multinational companies (MNEs) need leverage to enhance their offer regarding local products. This research suggests a consideration of consumer affinity towards a foreign country as a means to reinforce both willingness to buy (WTB) and willingness to pay (WTP). An experiment was conducted with 170 French consumers (non-students). Respondents were asked about their WTB and their WTP for products for which the country of origin varied in a within-subject design based on 1) the level of the respondent's sense of affinity towards the product's country of origin and 2) the image of the country of origin for the product category in question. In addition, the sources of affinity feeling to a foreign country were explored. Results indicate that consumer affinity towards a foreign country has a positive effect on consumer WTB and WTP. This effect is complementary to the well- known country of origin effect. Three main factors influence consumer affinity toward a foreign country in a positive manner: a consumer's 1) personal experience with the country (to have visited it, to have friends there, etc.), 2) a positive evaluation of its natural landscapes, and 3) an appreciation of its culture (history, values, etc.) Implications for MNEs are detailed to inspire their marketing strategy.

[Keywords] consumer affinity, international marketing, country-image, willingness to pay

Introduction

Many multinational companies (MNEs) try to promote the country of origin of some of their products. For example, they use strategies such as maintaining a local brand (e.g. General Motors sells its products under the local brand Vauxhall in England) or alluding to a foreign country (e.g. the American brand Haagen-Dazs evokes northern Europe): in France, media advertising of the automobile brand Opel (a German brand bought by General Motors) puts forward its German origin to benefit from the image of robustness and performance associated with German industrial production. By associating their brand to a country of origin, MNEs hope to benefit from positive cognitive stereotypes associated with that country in the minds of consumers. The marketing literature discusses the country of origin effect (COO) (Bilkey & Nes, 1982; Ahmed & D'Astous, 1999).

However, beyond the country of origin image of a product, which seems essentially cognitive in nature (Ahmed & D'Astous, 1999), it seems that the country of origin of a product could also trigger affective reactions in consumers (Oberecker et al., 2008; Verlegh, 2007). Consumer affinity for a product's country of origin could also have an effect on a consumer's willingness to buy and to pay for that product (Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011). So, the MNEs practice of associating a product with a country of origin could be justified from the point of view of the behavior of the consumers, by cognitive mechanisms (country-image), as well as affective ones (feeling of affinity).

The role of affect in considering a product's country of origin has been known for a long time, but essentially from a negative point of view: evaluating negative affects and the way they can incite consumers to prefer local products instead of imported ones. Consumer ethnocentrism (Shimp & Sharma, 1987; Nguyen et al., 2008) and animosity (Klein et al., 1998; Riefler & Diamantopoulos, 2007; Hoffmann et al., 2011) provides examples of the negative affect that could be developed towards foreign products. These negative feelings are amplified in an economic crisis context. Thus, a French consumer would

prefer to buy a French product, or if that's impossible, a product from another European country (Portugal, for example) instead of an Asian one.

In the face of the risk of increasing negative feelings towards foreign countries, it is necessary to deepen knowledge about positive feelings of consumers towards foreign countries and their impact on behavior. The current research pursues three goals: 1) to ensure that consumer feelings of affinity towards a foreign country reinforce willingness to buy and willingness to pay for products from that country, 2) to understand the possible interactions between country image (cognitive) and feeling of affinity (affective) and 3) to identify the source of the feeling of affinity. The interest of this work is to provide MNEs with additional leverage to stimulate their sales and neutralize the negative effects of consumers' ethnocentrism.

Therefore, this research is focused on the concept of consumer affinity towards a foreign country. The interest of the affinity concept is two-fold. From a theoretical point of view, it allows one to highlight the role of positive affect towards a foreign country in consumer choices. From a managerial point of view, it allows MNEs to face the nationalistic insularity of Western consumers if its effects on consumer behavior can be demonstrated. This work follows and deepens work done by Oberecker and other colleagues on affinity (Oberecker et al., 2008; Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011) by replicating their research in a French context.

It is important, at first, to recall (thanks to a review of the literature on consumer behavior) the basis of the affinity concept and to return to its definition in the case of a foreign country. After that, hypotheses will be proposed to approach the relationship between affinity for a country and willingness to buy (WTB) and willingness to pay (WTP). The methodology and results of a survey will be presented to test proposed hypotheses and to study potential sources of the feeling of affinity towards a foreign country. Finally, a discussion will allow highlighting the managerial implications for MNEs, as well as the limits and directions for additional research.

Conceptual Background and Hypotheses

The globalization phenomenon brings an increasing opportunity for individuals to come into contact with countries beyond their own through travel, the discovery of cultural products from other countries, internet exchanges, etc. These exposures may generate some sympathy for a foreign country (such as a country in which someone spent a year of study), or a certain attachment. People from different national backgrounds then feel closer (Swifts, 1999). The concept of affinity toward a foreign country proposed by Oberecker and colleagues (Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011; Oberecker et al., 2008), can take these positive feelings (1.1.) and their potential effects on consumer behavior (1.2.) into account.

The Concept of Affinity towards a Foreign Country

The marketing literature has long considered affect in the relationship of consumers to a brand (Keller, 2012). In the case where the object is not a brand but, rather, a particular country, taking emotional aspects into account has focused so far mainly on the downside with the concept of animosity towards a foreign country (Klein et al., 1998; Riefler & Diamantopoulos, 2007; Hoffmann et al., 2011). For example, a Chinese consumer may feel animosity towards Japan, which will reduce the probability that he/she buys a Japanese brand. Concepts evoking positive affect are globalizing and affect all foreign countries in general, as is the case with xenophilia (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989) and internationalism (Perlmutter, 1954).

Facing the increasingly important role played by the country of origin of a product in international marketing strategies, it was necessary to propose a concept for identifying the positive affect of a consumer toward a particular foreign country. Oberecker et al. (2008) and Wongtada et al. (2012) filled this gap by proposing the concept of consumer affinity. This concept was based on the research of Russell (1980) and Bowlby (1979). According to the emotional attachment theory (Bowlby, 1979), individuals need to be linked to other people but can also be attached to various objects (brands, countries, etc.). Attachment is an emotional bond, more or less intense, between a person and a target object. These

emotional bonds with a specific referent (a foreign country in the case of affinity) affect how a person interacts with that object. In addition, Russels (1980) has established that effect can be represented using a graphic model based on both pleasure-displeasure (horizontally) and activation-apathy (vertically) dimensions.

So Oberecker, Riefler, and Diamantopoulos (2011) conceptualize affinity according to two dimensions: (1) emotions that capture low positive affect translated by the term "sympathy" and (2) emotions that capture high positive affect translated by "attachment." Oberecker et al. (2008, page 26) define the concept of consumer affinity towards a foreign country as "a feeling of liking, sympathy, and even attachment toward a specific foreign country that has become an in-group as a result of the consumer's direct personal experience and/or normative exposure and that positively affects the consumer's decision making associated with products and services originating from the affinity country." Because affinity refers to positive feelings towards a specific referent (the affinity country) and results in specific actions in consumer behavior, affinity translates specific, positive emotions towards a country instead of moods or a general affect.

The feeling of affinity towards a foreign country should not be confused with the affective dimension of attitude towards a country (Jaffe and Nebenzahl, 2006; Moon & Jain, 2002). Indeed, this dimension can have a negative connotation (a consumer may hate a foreign country, which refers to the concept of animosity), while attachment can translate only a positive effect. To draw an analogy with the concept of brand loyalty, it would be wrong to assume that this attachment is identical to the affective dimension of attitude toward the brand. Instead, Thomson et al. (2005) consider attachment as a clearly distinct construct of satisfaction, involvement and brand attitude. Affinity toward a foreign country should not be confused with identifying with the country in question. One can feel sympathy for Germany without feeling German.

Affinity is also conceptually different from the specific construct of micro-country image that translates all the consumers' perceptions about products originating from a particular country (Roth & Romeo, 1992). If we consider that the country image is all the beliefs and descriptive information a person has about a country (Martin & Eroglu, 1993), then affinity is clearly different. Other authors conceptualize country image as a multidimensional construct (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009) with cognitive, emotional and conative dimensions (Brijs et al., 2006). However, most studies have addressed only the cognitive dimension (e.g. Lee & Lee, 2011; Hamzaoui & Raciti, 2011; Lin & Chen, 2006). As for the emotional dimension, it requires an emotional response not to the country, but to the inhabitants of the country in question (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009), which clearly distinguishes it from the concept of affinity.

In short, affinity to a foreign country is a particular combination (containing both sympathy and attachment) that allows us to understand a specific affect, to varying degrees, oriented towards a country (and not a particular brand), of which the potentially diverse sources (not limited solely to the perception of inhabitants of foreign countries) allow concrete applications at the product level.

Research Hypotheses

According to the emotional attachment theory (Bowlby, 1979), emotions towards a specific referent affect the way a person interacts with an object. In line with this approach, Verlegh (2007) has shown that consumers can deliberately buy products from a specific country in order to develop close links with the "admired" country. In the same vein, Oberecker and Diamantopoulos (2011) have shown that affinity affects willingness to buy products from the affinity country in a positive way. In a cumulative logic (and by proposing methodological improvement for its testing), the following hypothesis is formulated:

H1: Consumer affinity towards a country has a positive effect on his/her willingness to buy (WTB) products from that country.

If affinity has a positive effect on willingness to buy, it is possible that it also implies the willingness to pay more for a product from the affinity country. In fact, as the affective links towards a brand justify a

premium price (Keller, 2012), it is possible that consumers would be ready to pay more for a product coming from a country with which they maintain sympathy or even attachment. The link between attachment and willingness to pay is also well established in the literature (Thomson et al., 2005).

H2: Consumer affinity towards a country has a positive effect on the willingness to pay (WTP) for products from that country.

The literature considers classically the effects of the country of origin on consumer behavior through the country-image effect (Bilkey & Nes, 1982; Ahmed & d'Astous, 1999). Indeed, favorable perceptions of a country lead to favorable inferences on the product's attributes and favorable evaluations in consequences (Maheswaran, 1994). Besides, the same country can be considered as performant for certain products (like cars for Germany) and less performant for other products (like perfumes) (Roth & Romeo, 1992). So, it is important to take categories of products into account when we try to understand country of origin effects.

Oberecker and Daimantopoulos (2011) have shown that affinity and the country-image perception can be complementary in their influence on the behavior evaluated. Nevertheless, they didn't link the affinity country to specific product categories. We can suppose that the country-image of a category of products can interact with the affinity feeling; thus we can see the interest of the following hypotheses which consider the country-image of a category of products as a moderator in the relation between affinity and willingness to buy or willingness to pay.

H3: The country-image of the category plays a moderator role in the relation between affinity and WTB

H4: The country-image of the category plays a moderator role in the relation between affinity and WTP

Methods

To test these hypotheses and explore the possible sources of the affinity feeling, a survey was performed using a face-to-face administration of a questionnaire for a convenience sample of 179 French consumers. The respondents were between 18 and 85 years of age (the average age was 34), 53% were women, and 39% were students. The interviewers were students in marketing. The survey was based on a model of repeated measures where respondents were asked about their willingness to buy (WTB) and their willingness to pay (WTP) for six products (dependant variables). These products were identified according to two countries and three product categories freely chosen by the respondents. This paper replicates partially the Oberecker and Diamantopoulos (2011) research by refining the methodology. Indeed, we are not measuring general WTP and WTB, but precise measures for specified products.

Data Collection and Measurements

In order to study the affinity feeling effects and the country-image of a product category, we need to identify countries and categories that vary according to these two criteria. For this purpose, as a first step, respondents had to indicate two countries and three product categories. To start, respondents had to cite their "favorite" country (affinity country, AC), which means a country towards which they feel a strong affinity feeling (for example, Germany). If they thought about many countries, the interviewer asked them to tell only the one they prefer. Then they were asked to think about a country towards which they had neither positive nor negative feelings (neutral country, NC, for example, Switzerland). For the 179 respondents, 171 had given an AC. All those who gave an AC had also been able to give a NC. Finally, they were asked to name three product categories:

- A product category for which their AC has better products than the other countries (positive image of AC for this category of product), such as cars, in Europe, cars from Germany have a positive image.
- A product category for which their NC has better products than the other countries (positive image of the NC), such as chocolate, in Europe, chocolate from Switzerland has a positive image.

- A category of product for which neither one of the two countries has a particular advantage; they are not positive or negative (neutral image for both countries for this category of products), such as blue jeans.

In a second step, we measured different variables for the two countries chosen: the affinity feeling of the respondent towards each country (measure presented in the following paragraph), a general image of each country (according to the scale of Roth and Romeo (1992) with 4 items of a Likert scale, $_{AC}$ = .79; $_{NC}$ = .89), the country-image of the three categories of products given related to the two countries (so we have six measures of Likert items on a seven-point scale: (The [Products] from the [Country] are good products). We also asked respondents about the potential sources of the affinity feeling towards their AC (Likert items on a 7 point-scale; for more details, see the section on affinity sources). Third, we asked respondents about buying the three kinds of products they named previously, according to their origin (AC vs. NC) for a total of six products. For each one, we measured intention to buy ("Next time I'll need or I'll want to buy a [Product], the probability that I'll buy a [Product] from the [AC] is: on a differential semantic scale of 7 points from "very weak" to "very high"") and the WTP (please indicate the maximum price that you would accept to pay in euros to buy this product in France).

The choice of type of WTP measure is always difficult because there is no completely satisfying measure (Le Gall-Ely, 2009, p. 103). Direct measures comparable to ours have been used for research on links between affect and WTP (e.g. Thomson, et al., 2005). At least, even if biased, these measures allow us to estimate dependable demand curves (Miller et al., 2011). Finally, we established the socio-demographic profile of the respondent: sex, age, educational level, and SPC.

Measure of the Affinity Feeling
The measurement scale of the feeling of affinity of Oberecker and Diamantopoulos (2011) was used. This scale consists of 7 items: "I feel a pleasant feeling towards this country," "I like this country," "I have a feeling of sympathy towards this country," "I'm captivated by this country," "I love this country," "I feel attached to this country," and "This country inspires me" (7 point items). This measure was used for both countries (AC and NC).

A principal component analysis revealed a one-dimensional structure (all the communalities are superior to .5; all the loadings are superior to .7; the explained variance is approximately 69%; α = .92). The authors of the measure are in favor of a two-dimensional construct –sympathy facet (the first three items), attachment facet (the next 4 items) – but the actual measures in this study were not able to confirm it. Because we also measured country-image of the AC and the NC, it was interesting to study the correlations between these variables and the specific country affinity feeling: $Corr_{imageAC / affinityAC}$ = -.02; $Corr_{imageNC / affinityNC}$ = .18). We can see that these correlations are too weak and insignificant (at a threshold of 1%), which highlights the distinction between the two concepts. This result reinforces the discriminant validity of the affinity feeling measure towards a country, which cannot be confused with the image the consumer has.

Results

Principles of Data Analysis and Manipulation Check
Results are obtained thanks to repeated measures analysis of variance. The dependant variable is successively willingness to buy (WTB) and willingness to pay (WTP). Two factors are manipulated in a within-subjects design: the country of origin of the product (AC vs. NC) and the country-image of the category of the product for the country of origin (positive image vs. neutral image). Concretely, intentions to buy and willingness to pay integrated into a repeated measure model concern the following products:

- The product for which the AC has a positive country-image, from the AC (like a car from Germany)
- The product for which the NC has a positive country-image, from the NC (like a chocolate from Switzerland)

- The neutral product (neither of the two countries (AC or NC) has a positive country-image) from the AC (like blue jeans from Germany)
- The neutral product (neither of the two countries (AC or NC) has a positive country-image) from the NC (like blue jeans from Switzerland)

First of all, we must be sure that the AC has a stronger affinity feeling than the NC ($Feelaffinity_{AC}$ = 4.84 > $Feelaffinity_{NC}$ = 1.65; t = 23.197; p < .001). We also verify that the three categories of product named by the respondents have the country-images expected: the product for which the AC has a positive country-image is evaluated more positively when coming from the AC than if it was from the NC (6.18 > 2.92; t = 20.57; p < .001); the product for which the NC has a positive country-image is evaluated more positively when coming from the NC than if it was from the AC (5.90 > 3.50; t = 12.60; p < .001); there is no significant difference (at a threshold of 1%) for the neutral product, from the AC (3.84) or from the NC (3.53) (t = 2.56; p = .011).

The Effects on Willingness to Buy (WTB)

To analyze the effects of consumer affinity towards a country on the willingness to buy products from that country, the dependant variable from the repeated measures model was willingness to buy with the feeling of affinity and the country-image of the category of product as factors. Graphic results are presented in Figure 1a.

The most important principal effect is that of the country-image of the category (F = 313.114; p < .001). The principal effect of the affinity feeling towards the country of origin is also significant, but less important than the other (F = 7.039; p = .009). This last result supports hypothesis H1. Graphically, we see that the slope of the two lines is positive, although relatively weak (affinity feeling effect on the willingness to buy), whereas the gap between the two lines is important (country-image effect of the category). The moderate level of the relation between the affinity feeling towards the country of origin of the product and the willingness to buy is probably explained by the chosen design: the three products named by the respondents were chosen according to their country-image (in relation with the two countries retained). By construction, the country-image effect of the category of product is logically very pregnant. In this context, having shown the existence of an affinity feeling for the country of origin reinforces the relevancy of this variable.
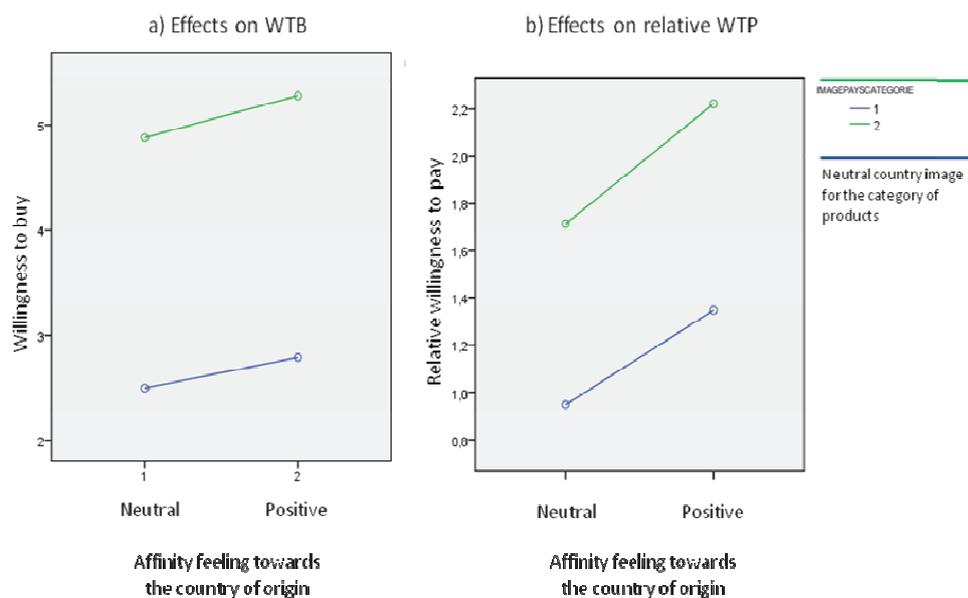

Figure 1. Effects of affinity and of country-image on WTB and WTP

t should be noted that there is no interaction effect between the country-image of the category of products and the affinity feeling (F = .251; p = .617). Graphically, the two lines are nearly parallel. This result rejects the H3 hypothesis: the country-image of the category of products doesn't seem to moderate the relation between the affinity feeling and the willingness to buy. The effects of the affinity feeling and the country-image of the category on willingness to buy are, to the contrary, additional.

The Effects on the Willingness to Pay (WTP)
Work on willingness to pay necessitates proceeding to data retreatment for two principal reasons. On one hand, as the respondents were free to choose categories of products, declared willingness to pay (nominal prices in euros) could be very different according to products chosen (from a few euros to several thousand like the case of a tablet of chocolate vs. a car). So, it is not suitable to retain nominal prices as a dependant variable because within-subjects variance would be artificially very high. On the other hand, all the respondents haven't necessarily provided a price for all the products because certain products simply don't exist (for example, Swiss blue jeans).

The retreatments operated are of two types. First, we retain the relative willingness to pay (the price of a product from a country / price of the same product from another country). This procedure allows the evaluation of the *relative* gap between willingness to pay for a similar product if the only variable is its origin. Then, the sampling used to test H2 and H4 was reduced to respondents that had indicated a non-aberrant price for all the products (a relative price is considered aberrant if superior to 5 or inferior to .2 to maintain 80% of the responses and to avoid skewing results due to extreme answers). The sampling was fixed at 97 subjects. We note, however, that the fact of not having given a price or having given an aberrant price is correlated to a very low willingness to pay (in general because the product doesn't exist, for example, Swiss blue jeans).

To analyse the affinity effects on willingness to pay for products from the affinity country, the dependant variable of the repeated measure variance analysis was the relative WTP with the affinity feeling and the country-image of the category as factors. Graphic results are presented in Figure 1b. We note that there are two principal highly significant effects on the WTP: affinity feeling (F = 16.965; p < .001) and country image of the category (F = 81.845; p < .001). These data support H2. However, H4 isn't corroborated by data because there is no interaction effect between affinity feeling and country-image of the category of products (F = .439; p = .509). The effects of affinity feeling and country-image of the category on WTP are then additional.

Sources of Affinity Feeling
One of the goals of this research is to identify affinity feeling determinants towards a foreign country. Principal determinants in the literature (Oberecker et al., 2008) have been tested in an exploratory perspective. The following factorial analysis reveals 4 types of possible antecedents (explained variance 76%): 1) consumer's personal experience with the country (to have visited it, to have friends there,..), 2) the positive evaluation of the natural landscapes, 3) country culture (its history, values, ..), and 4) quality of life.

Table 1
Factorial Analysis on the Affinity Feeling Sources

	Personal experience	Beauty of nature	Culture	Quality of life
I'm passionate about the history of this country			.83	
I appreciate the culture of this country			.74	
I feel close to the values of this country			.75	
I'm touched by the beauty of the natural sites of this country		.92		
This country is full of magnificent landscapes		.95		
I know a lot of people living there	.90			
I have friends living there	.87			
I have visited this country often	.75			
It's good to live there				.77
I like the lifestyle of its inhabitants				.88
Cronbach's alpha	*.81*	*.92*	*.71*	*.65*
Correlation with the affinity feeling (all significants, p < 0,001)	*.325*	*.435*	*.467*	*.329*
Correlation with the country-image (non significant at a threshold of 1%)	*.122*	*-.162*	*.155*	*.161*

In fact, these 4 antecedents are significantly very strongly correlated to the affinity feeling (correlations presented in the second to last line of Table 1). We also observe that not one of the antecedents of the affinity feeling is correlated to the country-image (to a risk threshold of 1%, as shown in the last line of Table 1), which reinforces the interest of distinguishing the two concepts clearly. Nevertheless, a multiple linear regression of the affinity feeling on the 4 potential determinants (R^2 adjusted = .378; F = 26.471; p < .001) reveals that only the perceived beauty of nature (β = .33; t = 4.961 p < .001), personal experiences (β = .265; t = 4.196 p < .001), and culture (β = .281; t = 4.195 p < .001) are affinity feeling drivers; quality of life is not significant (β = .095; t = 1.430 ; p = .155).

Discussion and Conclusion

Synthesis of Findings
The findings of this research provide answers to the three questions that were posed in the introduction. First, this research has shown that consumer affinity towards a country could, in fact, reinforce his/her intention to buy products from that country (WTB) and the price he/she is willing to pay (WTP). This result confirms and furthers Oberecker and Diamantopoulos' (2011) conclusions. But we have to note that the effect is relatively moderate for WTB and less important than that of the country-image of the category of products. The effect of the affinity feeling on WTB and WTP were found to be added to the effect of the country image of the category. So, there is no interaction between these cognitive (country-image of the category of products) and affective (affinity towards a country) variables, but rather they are complimentary. That means, for example, that if a consumer associates a brand to a country that has positive stereotypes, the MNE can reinforce the WTP of the consumer and can also enhance it if this country is appreciated by that consumer.

Furthermore, this research provides evidence of three distinct sources of feeling of affinity towards a foreign country: a consumer's 1) personal experience with the country (to have visited it, to have friends there,…), 2) positive evaluation of the natural landscapes, and 3) knowledge of the country's culture (its history, values, …).

Managerial Implications

To push company sales abroad, leveraging of the country-image is the most efficient (WTB effect). It has to be used each time the product can benefit from positive stereotypes of its country of origin. However, because the affinity effect on the WTP is very significant, this feeling can be employed as a criterion of segmentation so as to develop an affinity offer at a higher price. These two effects, country-image product category and feeling of affinity, are two effective levers to counteract consumer ethnocentrism or, rather, some consumers. Finally, three sources of feelings of affinity have been identified: the perceived beauty of natural sites in the country, the consumer's personal experience with the country (to have friends there and/or to have visited it), and the relationship of the consumer with the culture of the country (appreciation of its values, history, etc.) What can be deduced for the marketing strategy of MNEs, particularly for brand management? How can these results be used to combat ethnocentrism in consumers and avoid a preference for local products to the detriment of international trade?

The MNE has a particular interest to associate its brand to a foreign country that plays the role of country of origin if the following three conditions are met: 1) it is possible to associate the brand to a country while being credible from the point of view of consumers. Much of course depends on the credibility of the efforts undertaken by the company, particularly in terms of communication. 2) There must be positive stereotypes of the country of origin in the target country or countries compared to the product category (positive image of the country-product category), or at least there should be no negative stereotypes. A marketing study can identify these stereotypes easily. 3) An attractive segment in the target country or countries, based on the feeling of affinity towards the country, should be identifiable. When these three conditions are met, the brand is more likely to be preferred and can offer higher prices in the context of "affinity" offers targeted to a specific segment.

Take for example, a MNE wishing to sell a food brand in France, highlighting a Mexican origin. First, it should ensure that there are positive stereotypes about Mexican food in France (which is the case for some products, such as tortillas). It should then assess the size of the consumer segment in France with a sense of affinity towards Mexico. The scale of the affinity sense (7 items) used in this research can be used in a quantitative study. Depending on the desired target market size and revenue to be achieved, the segment will be deemed usable or not. The company can strengthen the sense of affinity for Mexico and increase the size of this segment, communicating about the beauty of Mexican natural sites and the attractiveness of Mexican culture (its history, values, etc.) It should subsequently ensure that the targeted consumers can identify the products of this company as Mexican products. The company should then evoke Mexico in the name of the brand (the connotations of a brand name may be more evocative than an indication of source country), and the shape and colors for packaging (warm colors that evoke the South), Hispanic sounds (brand name, advertising, etc.), and, of course, for the ingredients used.

Theoretical Implications

This research advances knowledge in international marketing. It fits into the logic of the theory of emotional attachment of Bowlby (1979) as the attachment to the affinity country affects both the interactions between the individual and the country. It also confirms the positive link between a strong attachment (to a brand or a country or a country-brand) and willingness to pay more for products of this brand / country.

This research reinforced the validity of the concept of sense of affinity on two levels: 1) the cumulative validity because the link between affinity and purchase intent was replicated in a French context, 2) discriminant validity because it was shown that this concept was clearly distinct from that of country image. This last result may seem surprising, however, in view of the relationship between emotional state and cognitive evaluation (Schwarz, 2000). Moreover, one of the results could be interpreted in this way: the study has indeed shown a correlation, though weak and barely significant ($p = 0.011$), between the image of the country of the neutral product originating from the AC and image of the country of the neutral product originating from the NC. At a threshold of 5%, it could be argued that this correlation is significant, implying that a product is better evaluated when it is from the AC (compared to the same product from NC), even though neither of the two countries has a positive image for the

production of such products. This situation underlines the need for further research on the relationship between emotional states related to foreign countries and evaluation of products that come from those countries.

From a methodological point of view, this work represents a step forward because it is based on a more realistic design than those used in previous studies (Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011; Oberecker et al., 2008); not only were real countries integrated, but also existing products and country images specific to those products (and not a holistic version of the country image). However, this work has its limitations. Besides the usual limits of intra-subject designs, the sources of the feeling of affinity have only begun to be explored and require further investigation. The nature of the concept and its measurement should be studied more precisely to demonstrate the cross-cultural validity. Moreover, the ethnicity of the respondents was not taken into consideration, which could explain the affinity feeling of a migrant population towards the country of origin. Finally, we must remember that it is increasingly difficult to determine the country of origin of a product: a product can be designed in one country, its components produced in others, and its assembly performed elsewhere (Chao, 1993). Therefore, is it the affinity for the country of design (Hamzaoui & Merunka, 2006), for the country brand (Prendergast, 2010) or for the country of production that will have an effect on consumers?

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