

# Identifying Current Themes and Important Future Research Directions in the Field of Consumer Animosity

## ABSTRACT

Ongoing social and geopolitical tensions at regional and international levels fuel consumer animosity toward foreign brands. To accommodate changing sentiments and behaviour, marketing approaches and strategies need to be reimagined which require a structured understanding of the evidence about consumer animosity that has been accumulated in the literature to date. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to provide an overview of consumer animosity and associated determinants and consequences. A total of 142 papers were systematically reviewed and analysed using a thematic analysis approach. The analysis resulted in ten groups of predicting factors and consequences of military, economic, political, social/cultural, and religious animosity. The provided analysis advances the current body of knowledge by providing a comprehensive classification of the determinants and consequences of different types of animosity and offering future research suggestions.

**Keywords:** Consumer animosity; Systematic literature review; International marketing; Consumer behaviour

## INTRODUCTION

The consumer animosity concept was introduced in international marketing over two decades ago and has been a subject of interest ever since (Riefler and Diamantopoulos, 2007; Antonetti and Manika, 2021). It refers to antipathy stemming from various ongoing events (Klein et al., 1998), which may be grounded on disputes over geographical territory (e.g. Israel and Palestine), economic and political disagreements (e.g. trade war between China and the USA), and religious beliefs (e.g. the perception of halal products by non-Muslim consumers in India) (Riefler and Diamantopoulos, 2007; Tao et al., 2022; Zdravkovic et al., 2021; Latif et al., 2019). Regional and international tensions create negative attitudes toward non-local brands and undermine the perception of their products and services (Antonetti and Manika, 2021). Consumers' negative cognitive and emotional reactions may have far-reaching damaging consequences for international brands. For example, one of the largest crises that has shaken the global market recently is the Ukrainian-Russian conflict. The conflict has been followed by foreign brands curtailing their operations in the Russian market, boycotts of Russian products in countries beyond the conflict territories, and consumers putting pressure on brands that remain silent about their stance on the conflict (Statista, 2022; Majendie, 2022).

Research posits that consumer animosity is a multi-dimensional construct, each dimension reflecting hostile reactions associated with different causal events (i.e. social, economic, political, religious, military, historic and contemporary animosity) (Riefler and Diamantopoulos, 2007; Lee and Lee, 2013). It is argued that each type of animosity has a different set of predictors, and affective and cognitive implications (Lee and Lee, 2013) that need systematising. However, extant literature lacks a comprehensive overview of the current body of knowledge that would make it possible to put forward directions for future research. Researchers have provided a detailed account of the development of the research stream, the relation between animosity and ethnocentrism, and animosity measurement issues (Riefler and Diamantopoulos, 2007; Farah and Mehdi, 2021). Still, the predictors of animosity, and its implications for brands have not been systematically reviewed. Responding to that, the objective of this paper is to provide an overview of different types of animosity and their

associated determinants and consequences. The contribution of this paper to the literature lies in i) the development of a comprehensive classification of the determinants and consequences of animosity rooted in social, religious, economic, political and military tensions, which has not been organised to date, and ii) the provision of future research suggestions to advance knowledge on each type of animosity.

The following section of the paper details the adopted methodology, section 3 then presents the typology of animosity. Sections 4 and 5 provide the findings of the analysis of the determinants and consequences of animosity. Section 6 draws similarities and distinctions between different types of animosity in terms of their associated predictors and outcomes. Finally, section 7 concludes the paper and provides directions for future research.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This review systematically synthesises the animosity literature from a consumers' perspective following the methodology developed by Tranfield et al. (2003). A review protocol was developed, which included three stages, namely, planning, conducting, and reporting findings (Marikyan et al., 2019).

### **Planning**

The planning stage of the systematic review involved the input of three reviewers to shape the objectives of the study through the preliminary scanning of the literature. The involvement of reviewers with expertise in the field helped grasp a deeper understanding of the selected topic and reveal novel themes (Xiao and Watson, 2019). The preliminary literature search demonstrated mixed findings about the direct antecedents, facilitating conditions, and the consequences of animosity, which warranted the need to systematically synthesise the published body of knowledge. The next steps were the development of the review protocol, which included the identification of search terms, paper exclusion and inclusion criteria, and an analysis method.

### **Conducting**

Scopus, EBSCO and Web of Science databases were used to extract documents. To ensure the comprehensiveness and the reliability of the review findings (Xiao and Watson, 2019), we started a literature search from a broad keyword – i.e. “animosity”. The use of a single keyword resulted in many irrelevant documents. Therefore, the search output was narrowed down by using the term “consumer animosity” and “animosity” coupled with marketing-related terms, such as “marketing”, “brand”, and “consumer behaviour”. The keywords were extracted from empirical studies and reviews on consumer animosity (e.g., (Riefler and Diamantopoulos, 2007; Farah and Mehdi, 2021). The selection of the aforementioned terms was justified by the objective of this review to analyse available research on the subject to draw the difference between the antecedents and consequences of different types of consumer animosity. Then, advanced search filtering options were used to limit papers to those which are downloadable and published in the English language. The publication format was limited to “articles”, “articles in press” and “reviews” available in “multidisciplinary”, “art and humanities”, “social science”, “business, management and accounting”, “decision science”, and “psychology”

sections. There were no restrictions on the publication period. The process resulted in the extraction of 191 documents. Three reviewers appraised the downloaded literature based on abstracts, titles and keywords (Xiao and Watson, 2019) and scored all documents based on relevance (no = 0 / yes = 1). 127 papers scored 3, which meant that they were unilaterally considered to be relevant for the review. To ensure that important articles were not omitted, backward and forward search tactics were employed (Webster and Watson, 2002; Marikyan et al., 2019). A backward search tactic involves scanning the reference lists of the downloaded articles, while a forward search tactic entails perusal among articles citing the paper (Webster and Watson, 2002). This approach resulted in the inclusion of 15 additional papers. As a result, the final scope of the documents consisted of 142 papers. The final set of papers was analysed using a thematic analysis approach, which has been widely adopted in prior research to analyse qualitative data (Marikyan et al., 2019). Since papers seldom mentioned the type of animosity being examined, the methodology sections of the reviewed documents were screened to categorise the papers based on their focus on military, economic, political, inter-group/cultural, and religious conflicts. The categorisation was non-exclusive because some international tensions are rooted in several causes, e.g., both political and economic.

## **Reporting**

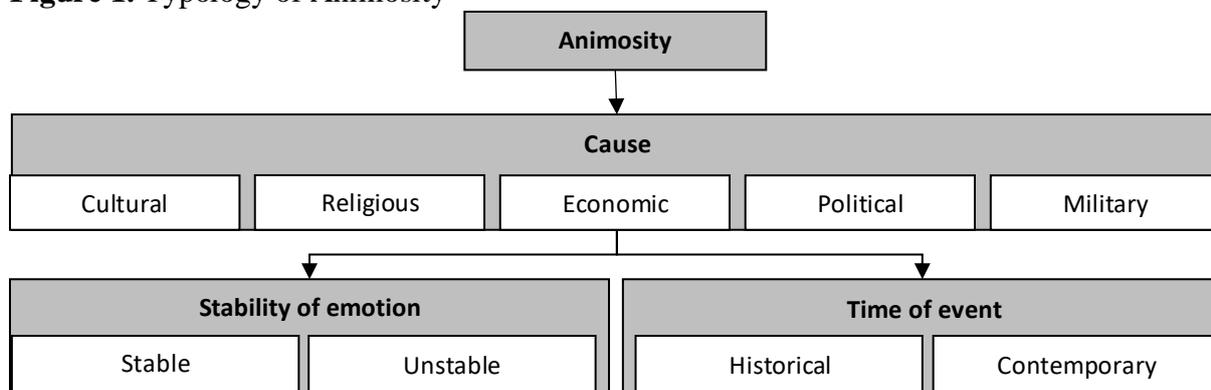
The reporting of findings was implemented in three steps. The first step included the presentation of descriptive statistics, namely, frequency analysis of the publication period, the research methods employed by the reviewed documents, and keywords used by the selected documents. In the period 1998-2002 just 11 articles were published, in 2003-2007 12 articles were published, in 2008-2012 22 articles were published, in 2013-2017 42 articles were published, and in the most recent period of 2018-2022 55 articles were published, demonstrating increasing interest in the field. In terms of research method employed by the reviewed papers, most of the papers (107 studies) use survey methods through questionnaires. The second most used method is experiments (14 studies), followed by interviews (11 studies). Very few studies employ ethnography (1 study) or case study research methods (3 studies). Considering key words, the top five frequently employed keywords are animosity (88 studies), country of origin (57 studies), consumer behaviour (31 studies), consumer animosity (42 studies), and culture (35 studies). The second step was reporting the themes identified in the literature to address the objective of the review. The typology of animosity based on the cause of tension, the stability of animosity feelings, and the time of the event triggering animosity are presented in section 3. Then the determinants and consequences of each type of animosity are identified, and factors with similar patterns and shared meaning are grouped into wider categories in sections 4–6.

## **ANIMOSITY TYPOLOGY**

Animosity is defined as “*the remnants of antipathy related to previous or ongoing military, political, or economic events*” (Klein et al., 1998: 90). It is an important concept in marketing because consumers might refrain from purchasing products not because of the objective evaluation of its attributes but because of the country from which it originates. Animosity feelings toward the country of origin or a group of people can be differentiated by the cause creating tension, the stability of animosity emotion, and the time when the tension takes place (Fig. 1).

Cause-based animosity could be due to economic (China – US trade war), political (e.g., Syria civil war), religious (e.g., antisemitic movements), cultural/inter-group (e.g., debate over abortion rights), or military (e.g., Ukraine – Russia war) reasons. Economic, political, religious, cultural, and military events stimulating animosity could be in the past but have lingering (historical) negative emotions among people or could be contemporary. For example, Jewish consumers might refrain from purchasing German products due to the Holocaust (Klein et al., 1998). In addition, all types of animosity can be categorised based on the stability of emotion (Lee and Lee, 2013; Lee et al., 2017). Stable animosity is defined as “*the general antagonistic emotions accumulated over years because of historical events such as previous economic or military hostilities between countries*” (Ang et al., 2004). For example, the conflict between Ukraine and Russia that started in 2014 but has escalated recently is likely to be associated with stable animosity. Unstable animosity is triggered by occasional clashes between countries without severe and continuous tension, such as the border dispute between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

**Figure 1.** Typology of Animosity



### DETERMINANTS OF CONSUMER ANIMOSITY

The antecedents of consumer animosity fall under five groups of factors, namely *social identification and values, external forces, political principles, culture, and socio-demographic variables* (Huang et al., 2015; Tao et al., 2022; Bahaee and Pisani, 2009). *Social identification and values* embrace factors such as social and global identity, universal and authoritarian values, and religiosity. Social identity concerns the feeling of being an integral part of a social group. For example, identification with a nation, which is preconditioned by the perception of an external threat, raises antagonistic and discriminatory feelings toward the social group consumers do not belong to (Carvalho et al., 2019). In contrast, global identity – a shopper’s enthusiasm to engage and integrate with people across the globe – increases the favourability and acceptance of brands affiliated with different religions and ethnicities (Raman and Aashish, 2021). Authoritarianism and universalism are individual values that can explain national identification and animosity predispositions (Zdravkovic et al., 2021; Shoham and Gavish, 2016). In military conflicts, such values can explain individuals’ stance on a conflict between economically and militarily stronger vs weaker countries. Authoritarianists show the tendency to submit to the dominant country, while universalists have a tendency to empathise with the party bearing higher losses (Shoham and Gavish, 2016). Finally, religiosity refers to the degree of devotion to religion and compliance with a religious doctrine. When it comes to the tension

between groups with different religious beliefs, individuals' religiosity enhances animosity towards foreign products (Tao et al., 2022).

*External forces* embrace economic instability, socio-economic discrimination, economic competition, social influence, government – public relations, and external control (Huang et al., 2010; Yeunjae and Myoung-Gi, 2022). Economic instability is associated with the feeling of being discriminated against and the unfairness of one's own conditions in life (Huang et al., 2015). It triggers antagonistic feelings incurred from inter-group relations (Huang et al., 2015) as well as international relations which may have been tainted by past war conflicts (Huang et al., 2010). Instability may be attributed to the factors inherent in the local market. In contrast, perceived economic competition between a local and a foreign market (e.g. South Korea and Taiwan) concerns the belief that an economically challenging situation may be attributed to the superior position of the rival country (Khan et al., 2019). The greater the attribution of blame and control towards the party in a conflict, the greater is animosity towards that party (Leong et al., 2008). Under the pressure of social influence, animosity towards brands can be an act of demonstration of conformity to established norms in society to attain social acceptance. The influence of social groups can play a role in emergent disputes over international trade agreements or historically complex relations, such as between Japan and South Korea (Yeunjae and Myoung-Gi, 2022; Huang et al., 2010).

*Political principles* including ethnocentrism, patriotism, traditionalism, dogmatism, and internationalism are largely pervasive when it comes to predicting hostile attitudes towards a country irrespective of the nature of the cause triggering those attitudes. Both patriotism and ethnocentrism reflect individuals' love for one's own country or social group. For the latter concept though, commitment takes a more radical form, such as the belief in the superiority of one's nation compared to others (Tao et al., 2022). Typically, the higher ethnocentrism and patriotism, the stronger the feeling of animosity towards another party (Yeunjae and Myoung-Gi, 2022; Tian and Pasadeos, 2012). Dogmatic people are conservative and more prone to animosity grounded on the discrepancy in religious beliefs (Shoham et al., 2006). Traditionalists are more reluctant to international cooperation and are inclined to develop negative attitudes towards adversary countries (Tian and Pasadeos, 2012). Hence, the understanding of the degree to which this political principle is inherent to consumers can help predict public sentiments and behaviour in economic, political and military disputes (Tian and Pasadeos, 2012). Contrary to traditionalism is the principle of internationalism, which encourages cooperation between countries in economic and political affairs, as well as tolerance of diverse ethnic and religious groups (Tian and Pasadeos, 2012; Shoham et al., 2006). Therefore, a high degree of internationalism is negatively correlated with animosity feelings (Tian and Pasadeos, 2012).

*Cultural differences* are measured across the dimensions, such as collectivism (strong integration into collective society), uncertainty avoidance (tendency to avert risks), masculinity (masculine vs feminine social values), and power distance (inequality in power, social and economic status). Animosity tends to be stronger among nations with collectivist, masculine and risk-averse cultures, and weaker for nations with high power distance (Latif et al., 2019).

*Socio-demographic variables*, such as age, income, gender, education and travel experience, have been examined as direct predictors and moderators explaining variance in the perception of animosity among consumers (Bahae and Pisani, 2009; Han et al., 2020; Gineikiene and Diamantopoulos, 2017). When it comes to between-country disagreements on trade and military status, consumers with middle/higher income, higher education status, and foreign

travel experience do not tend to feel animosity and diminish the quality of the products of foreign brands (Bahae and Pisani, 2009; Gineikiene and Diamantopoulos, 2017). As far as age is concerned, prior research shows that for consumers in Asia, age is inversely correlated with animosity (Han et al., 2020; Harmeling et al., 2015). This may be due to animosity being attributed to historic events that are not salient for younger people. However, the study on American consumers towards Vietnamese brands showed non-significant variance in anger across generations (Little et al., 2009). Similarly, the effect of gender on the perception of animosity was not consistent (Harmeling et al., 2015). This signals the need to re-examine the role of age and gender by controlling for the effects of other conditional or situational variables, such as the strength of propaganda against the opposing country.

## CONSEQUENCES OF ANIMOSITY

The literature provides evidence about five types of consequences of consumer animosity reflecting individuals' *perceptions and attitudes, behavioural responses, emotions, psychological responses, and norms and principles*. When it comes to consumers' *perceptions and attitudes*, the widely researched outcomes include reduced product and brand quality evaluation, value, overall attitude, and image perceptions. Those have been examined as common responses to animosity irrespective of the cause of tension between social groups or nations (Huang et al., 2010; Abdul-Latif and Abdul-Talib, 2020; Harmeling et al., 2015). The strength of the effect of animosity though is conditional on a number of factors, including product involvement, the stability of animosity feelings, and nostalgic memories associated with the country of origin (Gineikiene and Diamantopoulos, 2017). Less examined consequences of animosity are media preference and reputation. Researchers found that individuals' out-group antipathy and intolerance rooted in big discrepancies in culture and economic development undermine the perception of foreign company reputation (Jiménez and San-Martin, 2016). Also, heightened social animosity between regions of the same country dictates consumers' preferences for regional media to ensure congruence between one's own views and the local media agenda (Huang et al., 2015). These findings can be applied to the wider context to explain domestic country bias and resistance to accepting positive information about foreign nations.

The examined *behavioural responses* to animosity include purchase intention, product avoidance, negative word of mouth (NWOM), customer-brand engagement, switching intention, and boycott behaviour. Literature shows that decreased willingness to buy a product of a foreign brand, product avoidance, and NWOM are the outcomes of emotional arousal resulting from social, religious, economic, political, and military tensions (Huang et al., 2010; Abdul-Latif and Abdul-Talib, 2020; Tao et al., 2022). However, the negative effect of animosity can be moderated in several ways, such as by regulating threat emotions (e.g. fear), extreme negative emotions (e.g. disgust) (Antonetti et al., 2019), and anticipated regret (Khan et al., 2019), as well as underlining the product importance and necessity (Bahae and Pisani, 2009). Animosity may induce more proactive and aggressive behaviour too. For example, it can lead to the intention to switch to a competitor due to negative associations of a brand with a country-oppressor or a political rival (Kim and Li, 2020). Animosity originating from religious, political, or military disputes can also trigger boycott participation (Suhud and Allan, 2021). However, the negative implication of animosity for boycott behaviour varies across countries and regions and depends on the level of ethnocentrism that consumers hold against foreign nations (Palihawadana et al., 2016).

*Emotional responses* embrace fear, anger, disgust, regret, empathy, and situational animosity, which were predominantly examined as mediating variables between animosity and behavioural responses (Harmeling et al., 2015; Khan et al., 2019; Antonetti et al., 2019). Fear and anger have been confirmed as affective states mediating product evaluation and behavioural intention in various international crisis situations (Harmeling et al., 2015; Antonetti et al., 2019). Less attention has been paid towards the role of extreme emotions, such as disgust, which was examined primarily in the context of military conflicts (Antonetti et al., 2019). The arousal of fear, anger, and disgust decreases product quality judgement and leads to NWOM and product avoidance (Harmeling et al., 2015). Anticipated regret was found to mediate the impact of economic animosity on customers' reluctance to purchase foreign goods (Khan et al., 2019). For example, for Taiwanese consumers who hold hostile attitudes towards South Korean companies, anticipated regret works as a regulating psychological mechanism preventing them from buying South Korean products (Khan et al., 2019). While negative emotions facilitate consumers' reactions in countries involved in international tensions, empathy plays a role in decision-making among consumers not directly related to those tensions. For example, individuals may feel compassionate and empathetic towards Palestinians in the Israeli-Palestinian war, thus they may try to avoid Israeli products. In such cases, empathy mediates the relationship between the awareness of the animosity case and product avoidance (Halimi et al., 2017).

Resistance to positive information, risk, and trust fall under the *psychological state* group of consequences. Resistance to positive information indicates the predisposition of a consumer towards information that conforms to the beliefs causing animosity. That means that enmity towards a product country-of-origin will most likely lead to resistance to information that may weaken a negative attitude towards the country (Kock et al., 2019). Trust and risk factors were tested mainly in situations of consumers' cultural, religious, and war-based antipathy Jiménez and San-Martin, 2016). Such an effect can also be mediated by the perception of a country's reputation (Jiménez and San-Martin, 2016). In addition, when it comes to the re-emergence of war conflicts, deep-rooted enmity toward one country associated with past events can trigger situation-specific animosity. Such a state undermines cognitive and affective evaluations involved in purchasing decisions (Leong et al., 2008).

The last group of consequences concern *personal norms* and ethnocentric *political principles*. While ethnocentrism has been predominantly examined as an antecedent of animosity (Tian and Pasadeos, 2012; Yeunjae and Myoung-Gi, 2022), it was also confirmed that it follows animosity arousal (Belbağ, 2021). When the relationship between animosity and purchase decision-making is mediated by ethnocentric thoughts, reluctance to purchase a product is higher (Belbağ, 2021). Similarly, when personal norms contradict the political direction of the services' country of origin, consumers have stronger switching intentions following animosity arousal (Kim and Li, 2020).

## **AN INTEGRATED CLASSIFICATION OF THE DETERMINANTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF CONSUMER ANIMOSITY**

Table 1 presents the results of the analysis of the determinants and consequences of social, religious, economic, political and war animosity. Although there is convergence in determinants, each type of animosity has a set of variables discriminating it from others. Social animosity is primarily predetermined by socio-economic conditions, such as socio-economic discrimination and instability. Religious animosity is predicted by individuals' religiosity, dogmatism, and global identity. Economic animosity is a result of multiple variables reflecting

external forces, political principles, socio-demographic variables, and culture. Not surprisingly, for political animosity, political principles play the most important role. War animosity differs from other types by the effect of universalism and authoritarianism.

As far as the consequences are concerned, perceptions and attitudes, some behavioural responses and emotions, such as fear and anger, are common in the literature across all contexts. Also, there are divergent factors associated with each type of animosity. Specifically, social animosity results in resistance to positive information and local media preference. Economic animosity leads to regret and a bad reputation. Political animosity triggers the evaluation of norms and principles. War animosity is associated with distinctive emotions, namely, situational animosity and empathy.

**Table 1.** Overview of the factors associated with social, religious, economic, political and war animosity

	Theme	Factor	Animosity type				
			<i>Social/ cultural</i>	<i>Religious</i>	<i>Economic</i>	<i>Political</i>	<i>War</i>
<b>Factors impacting animosity</b>	<b>Social identification and values</b>	National identity	X	X			
		Global identity		X			
		Universalism					X
		Authoritarianism					X
		Religiosity		X			
	<b>External forces</b>	Economic instability	X				X
		Social/economic discrimination	X				
		Social influence			X		X
		Government – public relations			X		X
		Economic competition			X		X
		External control					X
		<b>Political principles</b>	Ethnocentrism	X	X	X	X
	Patriotism				X	X	X
	Traditionalism				X	X	X
	Dogmatism			X			
	Internationalism			X	X	X	X
	<b>Culture</b>	Collectivism vs Individualism			X		
		Uncertainty avoidance			X		
		Masculinity vs Femininity			X		
		Power distance			X		
<b>Socio-demographic variables</b>	Age			X	X	X	
	Education			X		X	
	Gender			X	X	X	
	Income			X		X	
	Travel Experience			X		X	
<b>Consequences of animosity</b>	<b>Perceptions and attitudes</b>	Quality judgement	X	X	X	X	X
		Perceived value				X	
	Attitude	X	X	X	X	X	
	Perceived image	X	X	X	X	X	
	Media preference	X					
	Reputation			X			

<b>Behavioural response</b>	Intention to buy	X	X	X	X	X
	Product avoidance	X	X	X	X	X
	Negative WOM	X	X	X	X	X
	Switching intention				X	X
	Boycott behaviour / intention		X		X	X
	Engagement			X	X	
<b>Emotion</b>	Fear		X	X	X	X
	Anger		X	X	X	X
	Disgust					
	Regret			X		
	Empathy					X
<b>Psychological state</b>	Resistance to positive information	X				
	Risk		X			X
	Trust		X			X
	Situational animosity					X
<b>Norms and principles</b>	Ethnocentrism	X			X	X
	Personal norm				X	

## CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS

To address the gap in the current literature (Riefler and Diamantopoulos, 2007; Farah and Mehdi, 2021), this paper uses a systematic methodology to analyse published research and provide a comprehensive overview of different types of animosity, and their associated determinants and consequences. The analysis enables appraisal of future research directions.

With the predominant focus being on economic and war animosity, social animosity is a largely neglected area so far. Future research needs to examine the determinants of enmity that make sense in the scenario of inter-group relations, such as social influence, as well as the role of emotions mediating the implication of animosity for consumer behaviour. Although war animosity has been the most prolific research stream to date, contradictory findings about the moderating role of socio-demographic variables, such as age and gender (Han et al., 2020; Harmeling et al., 2015; Little et al., 2009), require further research. Scholars need to examine boundary conditions, such as the difference in culture, ideology, and social norms, to explain the inconsistency in variance in animosity perceptions by different generations.

To allow for a more nuanced understanding of the conditions and implications of various animosity states, scholars need to widen the heterogeneity of variables. Potential variables could be the factors of political environment (e.g., media freedom), emotions beyond fear and anger (e.g., shame, guilt, sadness), and individual norms. Those variables may underpin consumers' biases in country-of-origin perceptions. Limited evidence is available about the relationship between the awareness of the animosity situation and emotional responses (Halimi et al., 2017). That means that the attitudes of consumers indirectly related to international conflicts are still under-researched, although the concept is important given the wider repercussions of military conflicts for global politics and the economy. Therefore, understanding the antecedents and outcomes of animosity awareness needs investigating. Lastly, little is known about the moderating effect of the stability of different animosity states

on product judgement. Hence, future research needs to explore how the stability of the feeling of enmity is related to social, economic, religious, political, and war animosity.

Consumers' negative cognitive and emotional reactions can have far-reaching damaging consequences for international brands. Therefore, in an increasingly unstable world further research into the antecedents and consequences of consumer animosity is vitally important for marketing practitioners.

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